

CUBA

BIRDS AND ENDEMIC OF CUBA



Bee Hummingbird
(Arturo Kirkconnell)

Wednesday March 28th – Saturday April 7th 2012

Leader: Arturo Kirkconnell and a guide from Birdwatching Breaks

Group size: 8

Birds: 160-175

Cuba is the largest of the Caribbean islands and supports a wide range of habitat. In common with other islands of the Greater Antilles, Cuba has a large number of endemics (twenty-two) and a greater number of near-endemics. Our tour starts in Havana and visits the woodland of La Guira and the extensive swamps of the Zapata peninsula, the area giving its name to Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow and the almost mythical Zapata Rail. We also visit Bermeja where the world's smallest bird, the tiny Bee Hummingbird may be found. We shall explore the lush forests of western and south central Cuba whilst the arid coastal scrub, dense jungle and mangrove fringed freshwater pools of the Cuban Cays present a great contrast

to the rest of the country. We have an excellent chance of seeing virtually all the Cuban endemics combined with migrants from North America.

The tour is being led by Arturo Kirkconnell who is regarded as the best birdwatching guide residing in Cuba today.

Day 1: Fly to Havana where arrival is later in the day. Transfer to a hotel in the atmospheric Old Quarter of La Havana.

Day 2: Before leaving Havana, it is worth birding along the seafront for Brown Pelican, Laughing Gull and Royal Terns. Shorebirds are particularly numerous and include Least, Western and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Killdeer and Spotted Sandpiper. La Guira National Park is our main birding location with its steep limestone hills and forest habitats changing from semi-evergreen to pines at the peaks. Olive-capped Warbler occurs in these pine woodlands with Western Spindalis, and Red-legged Honeycreepers, preferring flowering trees. We should also encounter Cuban Trogon, Cuban Tody, Yellow-headed Warbler and Cuban Grassquit. Night at San Diego de los Banos.

Day 3: After breakfast we visit Cueva de los Portas, an important area holding Cuban Solitaire and Scaly-naped Pigeon. Travel to the Zapata Peninsula for a three-night stay at Playa Larga. En route we may see Cuban Crow, Cuban Emerald, Cuban Blackbird, Yellow-throated Warbler, Greater Antillean Oriole, Grey Kingbird, and West Indian Woodpecker, plus White-collared Swift in the coastal foothills.

Day 4: Today we visit Bermeja, home to



Cuban Green Woodpecker (Arturo Kirkconnell)

a high percentage of Cuba's endemic birds. We should see Cuban Tody flycatching from low bushes. Above us in the higher trees we may find the tiny Bee Hummingbird. In the middle story Cuban Trogons sit quietly, allowing prolonged views. A leisurely walk along the woodland rides may produce Ruddy, Grey-headed and Blue-headed Quail Doves. The woods are also home to Bare-legged Owls and, in the more open areas, the rare endemic Fernandina's Flicker. Wintering North American warblers should be in evidence

and include Black-throated Blue, Black and White, Magnolia and Palm Warblers, American Redstart and Northern Parula. Other common species include Zenaida and White-winged Doves, Common Ground Dove, Loggerhead Kingbird, Shiny Cowbird, Greater Antillean Oriole and Yellow-faced Grassquit. Dry limestone woodland is a major feature of the park attracting Yellow-headed Warbler, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Crescent-eyed Peewee, Cuban Bullfinch, Cuban Parrot, Cuban Green Woodpecker and Red-

legged Thrush. If we are fortunate we may see Gundlach's Hawk as it hunts through the treetops. Open agricultural areas are often surrounded by dense secondary growth where we can look for Cuban Grassquit and the bizarre Great Lizard Cuckoo.

Day 5: La Turba is our first destination today, home to two of the scarcest Cuba endemics: Zapata Wren and Zapata Sparrow. The reeds support Red-shouldered Blackbird and, overhead, Northern Harriers and Snail Kites quarter the area looking for prey. We also have a good chance of finding King, Clapper and Spotted Rails and Yellow-breasted Crane. Return to Playa Larga for lunch and then a visit to La Salina for the endemic Cuban Black Hawk which can easily be found in the mangrove woodlands. We stop at suitable wetland areas for shorebirds including Least Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Willet, Spotted Sandpiper and Killdeer. Sandy beaches lure wintering Semipalmated Plovers and, on occasions, the endangered Piping Plover. Herons also feature with Tricoloured, Green, Great Blue, and Little Blue and Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Reddish, Snowy and Great Egrets. Freshwater pools are home to Pied-billed Grebe and Blue-winged Teal and the rare West Indian Whistling Duck. In the evening we make a special effort for Cuban Nightjar, and Stygian Owl.

Day 6: Today we travel to the old city of Camaguay for a two-night stay. Agricultural fields attract the Cuban race of Eastern Meadowlark and the area around Camaguay is home to Cuban Parakeet.

Day 7: Birding in Najasa an area of rock outcrops, palm groves and open forest



Cuban Tody (Arturo Kirkconnell)

where we should find Cuban and Cuban Palm Crows, Plain Pigeon, Cuban Pygmy Owl and Giant Kingbird. Other species we may encounter include Masked Duck, Limpkin, West Indian Woodpecker, Cuban Parrot, Northern Crested Caracara and, possibly, the scarce Cuban Grassquit.

Day 8: After breakfast we head north to Cayo Coco on the Cuban Cays, a string of low-lying islands linked to the mainland by a causeway. Here we find a number of species not found elsewhere in Cuba: Cuban Gnatcatcher, Bahama Mockingbird, and Thick-billed Vireo. Two nights at Sol Cayo Coco.

Day 9: A visit to Cayo Paredon Grande with our target species being Thick-billed Vireo and Cuban Gnatcatcher and Oriente Warbler. In other areas we seek the shy Key West Quail Dove whilst over the sea

Magnificent Frigatebird, Laughing Gull and Osprey occur. We should also locate American Flamingo, Double-crested and Neotropical Cormorants, Roseate Spoonbill, Clapper Rail, Caspian Tern, Yellow (Golden) Warbler, Black-necked Stilt, Short-billed Dowitcher and Willet.

Day 10: Revisit Cayo Paredon Grande and return for lunch at the hotel. In the afternoon, we depart to the resort of La Granjita in Santa Clara where we spend the night.

Day 11: We spend the morning driving to Havana, watching the roadsides for birds and arriving in time for lunch at a restaurant. In the afternoon we can visit Old Havana to buy gifts at the local crafts market or listen to Cuban music in the numerous old squares. Fly to London arriving on the following morning.

Ground Price: £2250

*Air Fare: £700

Total Tour Price: £2950

Tour Price Havana/Havana: £2250

Single room: £180

Deposit: £300

*please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights on pages 5 and 71

This tour is fully inclusive of flights, accommodation, meals, transport, park entrance fees and permits, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature. Visa to enter Cuba

Accommodation in tourist resorts and hotels with en-suite facilities and air-conditioning. Meals are a mixture of Cuban and Spanish based cuisine. Picnic lunches are provided where necessary.

Transport is by a small bus or minibus. Short walks during the tour on forest trails, tracks and on beaches.