

ORNITHOLIDAYS' TOUR TO CUBA
Endemic Birds & Winter Visitors

01-14 March 2008



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A Personal Diary

Saturday 01 March

After a blustery night our party assembled at Heathrow's Terminal 2 for the short hop across to Paris where we were due to connect with the non-stop Air France flight to Havana. Ahead lay the prospect of some warm Caribbean sunshine, but that had to be put on hold for a day when the plane went 'technical' shortly before we were due to board. So, unexpectedly, the bird list for Day One began with Carrion Crow, Starling, Magpie, Wood Pigeon and House Sparrow, all of which we could probably have seen from the comfort of our own homes!

Air France staff allocated hotel rooms for us in one of the large hotels within the airport environs and they kept us well supplied with refreshments. The dining room opened for a buffet dinner at 7pm and after the meal and chatting over the table, we headed for bed in anticipation of an early start tomorrow.

Sunday 02 March

We returned to the airport after breakfast and when the Air France desks reopened to issue the new boarding passes we were well placed in the queue. We departed at 10.35am and headed north-west towards Labrador, passing just to the north of the Scillies and across south-west Ireland before beginning our Atlantic crossing. Later we passed New York to starboard and Chesapeake Bay to port as we flew down the eastern seaboard of the United States.

By the time we landed at Havana Airport it was 3pm and true to form the formalities of immigration, luggage collection and money changing took precisely two hours. It was great to discover that Erik, from last year's tour, as our Cuban guide. Before long we were loaded aboard a Ford Clubwagon minibus and heading west towards our first hotel at Soroa. The roads were comparatively empty, so we made good time, reaching our destination before dark. Erik explained that a cold front had just passed through giving some unseasonably unsettled weather with heavy rain during the 'dry' season.

A few birds such as Cattle Egret, Turkey Vulture and Mourning Dove were seen on the way and as we disembarked at reception, Great Antillean Grackles were gathering to fly to roost. A pair of West Indian Woodpeckers put on a good show in trees nearby and when Helen went for a stroll, after we had been shown to our chalets in the spacious grounds, she was rewarded with the white-breasted form of American Kestrel. Peter and Sandra shared their veranda with a large grey tree frog that must have been colour blind as the red brick wall offered no camouflage protection at all!

We assembled at the bar before the buffet dinner and then were more than happy to turn in early.

Monday 03 March

Hot and sunny. 30°C

Having lost a day we had to maximise our one whole day in western Cuba, so considering the best options for seeing some of the less plentiful endemics on offer, we chose to forego the visit to La Guira National Park and concentrate on the Viñales area, which was still some two hours drive away. So unusually for the first morning in a new country, there was no pre-breakfast birding, although we did manage Cuban Blackbirds feeding in a bottlebrush tree near the dining area.

Once on the road at about 7.15am we headed for Viñales, noting numbers of herons and egrets at some fishponds on the way, to be checked on our return. We stopped on the hard shoulder of the motorway and noted four species in the area that we were not to see on the evening stop – White Ibis, Tricolored

and Great Blue Herons and a small flock of Brown Pelicans. On reaching the picturesque town of Viñales, with its colonnaded main street, we collected Julio, a local guide, and set off to the nearby national park of the same name.

Viñales National Park is a spectacular area of forested limestone monoliths with a patchwork of farms and fields across the valley between them. Julio took us to an unassuming track that led towards a small farm that reared free-range pigs and grew a variety of vegetables. Before long we heard Cuban Vireo and Cuban Solitaire and were seeing a steady succession of new birds as Turkey Vultures sailed across the skies searching for their next meal. Soon we were enjoying good views of the delightful Cuban Tody and both Olive-capped and Yellow-headed Warblers. Nearby a Cuban Solitaire sat at almost eyelevel for us to enjoy and away in the distance a Blue-headed Quail-Dove called, but then decided to go silent. We found Yellow-faced Grassquit, but not the sought-after Cuban species. A Tawny-shouldered Blackbird was our last addition before we returned to the bus, although at rest its tawny shoulder was more of a cream smudge until it flew.

Our next stop was on farmland that bordered woodland near an area of caverns where vast numbers of bats roost. Today we were too early for the bats, of course, and as we were staying so far from here, we would be unable to see them this evening. The highlights of the area were the immaculate Cuban Trogons, whose call Julio could imitate to perfection, so we were able to enjoy stunning views. Cuban Pewees hawked insects from a fence separating the forest from fields that grew pineapples and bananas. We also had good views of La Sagra's Flycatcher and Loggerhead Kingbird, but although Cuban Grassquit was heard and seen by Julio, we missed out. A pair of West Indian Woodpeckers was nesting in a disused telegraph pole by the track.

Much of the afternoon session was spent in another seemingly unassuming area that bordered forest and this time Peter and Sandra were lucky to see the grassquit towards the end of our session. I can't understand why this species proved so difficult this time - perhaps it was the breeze, stiff at times and the heat when the breeze wasn't blowing! However there were plenty of other birds to enjoy. Pink-flowered bushes attracted a party of Red-legged Honeycreepers; bringing memories of Asa Wright on Trinidad back to many of us. The male Western Spindalis with his humbug head pattern was stunning. We also had particularly good views of Cuban Emerald, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Bullfinch and Cuban Vireo and came across some wintering North American species - Black-and-white Warbler, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Vireo and Red-tailed Hawk.

We had achieved all we came for and more, so reluctantly we began the journey home, dropping Julio off in Viñales with our grateful thanks and then stopping on the on-ramp of the motorway to have marvellous views of a meadowlark. For some years there has been talk of this becoming split from Eastern Meadowlarks elsewhere and surprisingly being renamedCuban Meadowlark.

The fishponds seen earlier met our expectations - Great and Snowy Egrets, Little Blue Herons, Glossy Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Snail Kites, Black-necked Stilts, Greater Yellowlegs, Least and Spotted Sandpipers and Caspian Terns.

On reaching our hotel, we had an hour to freshen up and relax before dinner and completed the tour's first checklist afterwards.

Tuesday, 04 March

Low cloud or mist at Soroa, becoming brighter during the morning and hot and sunny along the south coast. 32°C

During the wee small hours Alison heard a Stygian Owl from her chalet, but for the rest of us birding began before breakfast with superb views of a pair of American Kestrels in the large spreading tree on the slopes above the swimming pool. The male was a white-breasted morph and his mate, a rufous-breasted one. After a while she invited him over and before long they mated. Down by the reception area the West Indian Woodpecker must have been a drummer in a heavy metal band in a past life - he started his repertoire on top of a street lamp and then for the grand finale he beat out his rhythm on the tin roof of a nest box placed in a nearby tree - the amplification was amazing!

Today we headed towards the fabled Zapata Swamps close to the south coast and the Bay of Pigs, where Cuban forces defeated an invasion by exiles in April 1961. Before reaching the outskirts of Havana we stopped at a café near a lake that had been productive last year. Today a fresh breeze had made most of the anticipated wildfowl seek shelter in a bay across the far side, but nevertheless we soon added a female Ring-necked Duck and some distant Pied-billed Grebes. Jane spotted a tern flying around after we had seen one or two Caspians and thought that it had an orange, not a red bill. She was right for it turned out to be a Royal Tern, a species more usually associated with saltwater.

The journey beyond Havana took us by miles of sugar cane fields and the largest citrus orchard in the country - it too stretched for miles. On the way to the Zapata area we passed hundreds of Turkey Vultures, but apart from the occasional egrets and Mourning Doves, there seemed to be few birds around the monoculture areas. By the time we reached the hotel at Playa Girón it was lunchtime, so we ate before going along to our rooms for an hour's siesta.

The afternoon's birding began at La Boca, a crocodile farm popular with package tourists, but for us it was the ponds and surrounding trees and bushes outside the perimeter that was of interest. Last year there were Northern Jacanas on the water lily covered ponds, but surprisingly they were absent today. Green Herons and Purple Gallinules haunted the banks and a pair of Belted Kingfishers flew around noisily. In the Royal Palms near the car park a pair of Cuban Crows fed on the fruits hanging from the crowns of the stately trees. Wandering around we came across three species of woodpecker – resident West Indian and Cuban Green and a wintering Yellow-bellied Sapsucker from North America. Continuing the North American theme were the wood-warblers, for during our visit we came across a number of birds that had over-wintered as opposed to early migrants – Cape May, Palm and Yellow-throated Warblers, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Parula and American Redstart. Our session at La Boca ended with telescope views of a distant Osprey, a Cuban Emerald on her nest woven to an outside light fitting, good views of a flock of Tawny-shouldered Blackbirds and, finally, a solitary Grey Kingbird.

On the way back towards Playa Larga we stopped at a roadside wetland in the hope of seeing yet another endemic, Red-shouldered Blackbird, but it was a bit of a long shot and this, one of the more rare endemics, failed to appear. Instead, we had excellent views of Northern Jacana and Purple Gallinules, a variety of herons and egrets that included Tricolored Heron and an immature Black-crowned Night-Heron. A drake Blue-winged Teal flew around and amongst in open areas and Palm Warblers and a Common Yellowthroat searched for insects. A pity they weren't attracted to the mossies that found us!

As we rounded the Bay of Pigs beyond Playa Larga, the road was littered with the remains of migrating Land Crabs that had been returning from egg laying in the sea back to the surrounding scrub and pond-margins. René avoided many as well as he could, but it appeared that other vehicles were not as considerate judging by the numbers of Turkey Vultures still feeding even at this late hour. It was almost dark by the time we returned to our hotel and an hour later we were sitting down to a buffet dinner, which was followed by the checklist in the dining room.

Wednesday, 05 March

Hot and sunny throughout. 33°C

After breakfast this morning we drove along to Playa Larga, pausing for a few minutes en route to photograph some of the land crabs that were still returning from the sea. The carnage seemed pretty bad in places, but judging by the speed with which they could scamper sideways across the road and the relative lack of traffic, I'm sure the great majority crossed unscathed.

In Playa Larga we added Estray to our complement of leaders. He was our local guide for the area last year as well. The plan this morning was to visit the nearby salinas, where shallow lagoons had formed amongst limestone outcrops and where mangroves were the dominant vegetation.

It was a great place for herons and in addition to those species we had seen already, we particularly enjoyed the ballet-like fishing style of the numerous Reddish Egrets. One of the first we saw was a grey immature, but many of the others were either the red-and-grey form or the white form, which added another complication to the confusion of white herons and egrets to be found in the Caribbean basin. There were

several White Ibis and Roseate Spoonbill, with some of the latter coming into the rich breeding plumage that gives the species its name. We saw several deep salmon-coloured Caribbean Flamingos in the distance, but only one was close enough to give reasonable views – sadly it had a badly damaged wing, so its flying days were over.

There was a good scattering of shorebirds, although the numbers were low, perhaps due to low water levels across the whole area. Greater Yellowlegs were the commonest, but with singles scattered all over the place. We also recorded Black-necked Stilt, Semipalmated Plover, Killdeer, Black-bellied (Grey) Plover, Least Sandpiper and Short-billed Dowitchers. Caspian was the only tern seen, so we failed to see the hoped-for Black Skimmers, another casualty of the low water levels apparently. The only other waterbirds were single Red-breasted Merganser and American Coot.

In the 'olden days' Turkey Vultures would have been the commonest raptor, but as they and the other New World Vultures are now considered to be more closely related to storks than birds of prey, the honours for the commonest raptor was shared between Osprey and the recently split Cuban Black Hawk. The latter was formerly considered to have been a race of Common Black Hawk and appears in the field guide as such. The only other raptor was a lone Crested Caracara. Other species included Great Lizard Cuckoo, Belted Kingfisher, and Cuban Green Woodpecker.

We returned to Playa Girón for lunch and then had a two-and-half hour siesta!

At 4pm, we left for a most rewarding visit to the nearby Bermeja Reserve, where Orlando joined us, one of the forestry rangers. As soon as we disembarked we were called across to a row of flowering saplings where a male Cuban Emerald and a male Bee Hummingbird were nectaring, but the emerald was constantly chasing off the diminutive Bee Hummingbird. The iridescent magenta forehead and bib of the Bee flashed in the sunshine as it dashed away. There was also a pair of Fernandina's Flicker nearby, but it was not until our return just before sunset that we had a worthwhile view of this endemic woodpecker.

While we were still enjoying the hummingbirds, Orlando called us across to the adjacent forest where he had heard Blue-headed Quail-Dove and there around the first corner of the track were four birds waddling along. They were some 100 metres or more away, so it was a telescope job of an elusive and localised endemic. Soon after a Gray-headed Quail-Dove was also heard, but we plan another visit to the area one morning to try to see the other quail-doves of the area. Good birds appeared all the time in this woodland that seemed to be mainly secondary growth, which would perhaps have been forest were it not for the almost annual succession of hurricanes that sweep through the region.

Cuban Parakeets flew overhead noisily and we were to enjoy reasonable views of a small party feeding in the canopy before they headed to roost. When we reached a more open area, a pair of Cuban or Rose-throated Parrots flew over. This species is a near endemic for it also occurs on Grand Cayman, where I've seen it on the Jamaica & Grand Cayman tour. Next in line was an obliging Cuban Pygmy Owl that watched us with its large yellow eyes for a while before heading away amongst the trees. Other species included Cuban Trogon, Cuban Tody, West Indian Woodpecker and Loggerhead Kingbird we had seen earlier in the tour at Viñales.

As the sun set, we returned to the hotel, doing the checklist after dinner and no doubt to reflect on what had been another excellent day's birding.

Thursday, 06 March

Hot and sunny again. 32°C

This morning we made an early start for our first visit to the Zapata Swamp, which lies to the west of the Bay of Pigs, quite a drive from Playa Girón, but at least the roads are quiet!

Having turned off the main road we took a tree-lined track that ran along a bank beside a drainage channel with a wilderness of sawgrass interspersed with clumps of mangroves and other bushes beyond. Estray and Erik used playback to lure a Zapata Wren into the open without success, although we could hear it clearly. In

the trees along the track we found American Redstarts, Yellow-headed Warblers and Northern Parula. The ubiquitous Palm Warbler was everywhere and closer to the water we saw Common Yellowthroats.

As the sun rose we reached the end of the driveable track at the remains of some demolished buildings. We walked on from there, but there was still no sign of two of our three target birds – the wren and the sparrow. However we soon had really good views of a pair of Red-shouldered Blackbirds – perhaps one of the harder Cuban endemics to see after the wren and the near-mythical Zapata Rail. Along the track we admired a number of butterflies including White Peacock and a beautiful moth that looked rose pink in flight, but at rest the upper wings were white covered with black and red speckles. We came on a fishing camp, where two Cubans were working with a Japanese man on an introduced catfish. They caught the fish and appeared just to be collecting small bits from the spine. The local Turkey Vultures no doubt benefited from the remains of the fishes.

There were more warblers along the track including a smart male Prairie – the first of the trip. As we returned to the minibus, we caught up with two Indigo Buntings that had been seen briefly earlier. So with bird activity quietening down as the temperature soared we returned to the hotel in time for late elevenses!

With the soaring temperatures, a longer than usual siesta was appreciated as we didn't go out again until 4.30pm. We drove for about 20 minutes or so to a raised stretch of road that crossed a beautiful wetland, known as Zapata Oriente – Eastern Zapata. A vista of green swamp and blue pools dotted with islands of bushes dominated by small groups of palms greeted us. Immediately we saw the first Limpkins, the relative of cranes that live in such habitats from Florida south to Argentina. We probably saw 20 or so during our visit. There were many white egrets and the blue herons – Great and Little Blues and Tricolored. It was a good place for raptors with up to five Ospreys in view at once on one occasion, with one sharing a bare tree with a large adult female Peregrine Falcon. There were also Snail Kites and a couple of Crested Caracaras, whilst the Northern Harrier seen in the distance was another first for the tour. Amongst the smaller wetland species, Northern Jacanas and Belted Kingfisher were the most obvious. Shortly before we left a Great Lizard Cuckoo at last gave worthwhile views.

As the sunset we headed back towards Playa Girón, stopping at Bermeja to feed the mossies and to wait patiently for the appearance of a Great Antillean Nightjar. Right on time it flew in, calling, to land on the verge about 20 metres from where we stood. Some of the party even saw the white on the tail as it flew!

By the time we returned to the hotel it was time for dinner, where the all-inclusive bar facilities were appreciated as we assembled before the meal.

Friday, 07 March

Hot, but with increasing cloud and a fresh onshore wind. Passing showers in afternoon. 30°C

A stiff onshore breeze greeted us this morning, which was no doubt why we saw three different Magnificent Frigatebirds soaring over the hotel complex – an immature, a female and then an adult male. Passing offshore was at least one Royal Tern.

We returned to Bermeja after breakfast in the hope of seeing at least one of the other quail-doves. Jane, who was feeling a bit off colour decided to have a morning relaxing, and with the steady walk along the complex of forest trails it was probably a good idea. Orlando and Estray led the way, but it was Alison who drew our attention to a photogenic Cuban Pygmy Owl perched on a horizontal branch in full view. We had another owl in mind as well, but the Bare-legged Owl, nesting in the shattered crown of a dead tree, needed a little encouragement from Orlando who gently started to scratch the trunk. Suddenly a small bright-eyed, quizzical face peered over the top of the tree and stared straight down at us. Its attention span was less than ours, for after a couple of minutes, at the most, it retreated back down into the trunk. On the other hand I'm sure we would have enjoyed watching it for much longer! Orlando explained that he knows of many nests of this and other species within the reserve and he always visits different sites with successive groups.

It proved to be an excellent morning for our other quarry species – quail-doves. We began with a Gray-headed waddling along ahead of us, and then came two single Key West Quail-doves. Finally, Estray flushed a Ruddy Quail-dove from the path ahead and it very obligingly perched on a branch some 20-30

metres from the path. It just sat there as we struggled to see it through the mass of leaves and branches, but thanks to the scopes, we did. There can't be many people that see three species of quail-dove in just about an hour, just as there can't be many tours that produce four different species of this elusive forest floor dweller. There were other birds in the forest including Cuban Trogon, Cuban Tody and Fernandina's Flicker – the last bird of the walk and another species peering from its nest hole. The lack of warblers and flycatchers was put down to the breezy conditions.

Siesta followed lunch during which Peter and Sandra enjoyed a swim and a Belted Kingfisher sat on the concrete parapet of the breakwater, but unfortunately there appeared to be nothing at sea except for masses of white horses.

At 4pm, we headed out birding again and bearing in mind the wind and the lack of small bird birding this morning we returned to the wetland that was so good yesterday. Of course it was different today – windy. Limpkins, herons and egrets fished in the shelter of bushes, so were therefore less obvious than yesterday, but an endless succession of Turkey Vultures sailed over the area. An immature Peregrine Falcon caused consternation when it buzzed a flock of American Coot and later we saw the female from yesterday perched in the same tree as before. There were no Ospreys today, only one or two Snail Kites, and a couple of distant Crested Caracaras. Had a clapped out Chevrolet not come along at the critical moment we would have seen the King Rail that Estray and Erik found, but the old banger spooked it. We did, however, settle for second best when about five minutes later a Sora came out on to the same patch of mud.

Faced with the prospect of a very early start tomorrow we returned to the hotel before sunset and for a change we had dinner in another restaurant in the resort complex. This was fine dining Cuban style with nicely presented food and linen napkins – our best eating experience since we arrived!

As we walked back to our bungalows, I saw a flying shorebird struggling to make headway into the wind. Out of nowhere, a large predator swooped towards it missing by barely a foot. The shorebird disappeared into the blackness over the sea. The predator settled into the crown of a rounded tree behind the bungalows and flew off in the direction of the main dining room as we approached. Peter's suggestion of a Short-eared Owl might not be a million miles out, but in the absence of any further sightings, it can only be bird sp.!

Saturday, 08 March

Overcast with heavy rain at times in the morning, becoming brighter, although still overcast, as wind increased again in afternoon. 28°C

Leaving at 4.30am seemed an ungodly hour, but it was necessary if we were to drive across to the western part of the Zapata Swamp for our morning boat trip. En route we stopped for a caffeine fix (no tea bags for Jane alas) and to eat the rolls provided by the hotel for our breakfast.

As dawn broke, the old adage of "*Red sky in the morning etc.*" rang alarm bells, but there was little or no wind and once we had turned off the main highway and out across the swamp, birding was more important. We started well for three (or was it five?) Zapata Sparrows showed very well and a pair of black and yellow Greater Antillean Orioles flew over. The Black-cowled Oriole of the field guides has been split and the form in the Caribbean becoming Greater Antillean, whilst those in Central America have retained the name Black-cowled.

By the time we reached the boat dock, the sunrise was looking decidedly angry, but we set off in the hope of finding the elusive Zapata Wren along the well-vegetated channel. Dead trees, no doubt victims of hurricanes, provided nest holes for Cuban Green Woodpeckers and whenever we stopped to try for the wren using playback, we saw Common Yellowthroats. Two Black-crowned Night-Herons flew off and a steady succession of Great Blue Herons flew as we approached. Heavy black clouds were building from the west and eventually the time came to turn back. From my memory of the area last year, we would have been entering a more tree-lined section of river that would have been less suitable for the wren. Erik and Estray were surprised not to have had a response, as this had been the spot in the past.

Back on dry land and with rain inevitable we decided to begin walking along the track out of the area while it was still dry and thankfully René was shadowing us for we had barely gone 300-400 yards when the first

spots arrived. It was a damp drive back to the highway and by the time we reached a service stop it was beginning to ease. The coffee was most welcome, but alas still no tea bags! There's a lesson for any tea drinkers on the next tour!

By around 11am we were back at La Boca and it was dry, so some birding around the pools beckoned, but with the drier conditions came the wind. We managed reasonable views of Cape May Warbler in a bottlebrush tree, but otherwise the only other wood-warbler was a Northern Waterthrush teetering along the edge of one of the pools. Peter found a couple of greenish orioles that turned out to be Great Antillean, feeding in another bottlebrush with Tawny-shouldered Blackbirds and amongst the water lilies we had good views of two Northern Jacanas. Woodpeckers showed well with at least three Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers in the area. Perhaps the highlight was a pair of confiding Cuban Parrots that looked particularly colourful in spite of the overcast conditions.

By the time we returned to Playa Girón it was almost time for a drink before lunch and then a siesta. Afterwards we returned Bermeja again. Two requests had been made – one for Bee Hummingbird and the other to try to photograph the old rural houses of that area, so that was what we did. Cuban Emerald showed first along the sandy lane lined with flowering trees and we saw not one, but two male Bee Hummingbirds, one of which gave splendid views through the scope. I hope the poor little fellow had taken seasick pills as his perch was being tossed around in the wind.

Inevitably Cuba is going to change in the coming years, but for the time being at least pony and trap is still a common form of transport in areas like this and there are still a large number of wooden houses, although lack of maintenance added to the buildings' character. The photographers found some ideal subjects on the outskirts of the village and some villagers willing to be photographed. One gentleman was not happy with us peering into his back yard, but when we pointed out that we were watching a pair of anting Fernandina's Flickers, found by Alison and Jane, he was very pleased to let us take pictures and to point out that they nested in the wood across the road. Sandra fetched Peter's camera and lens so we could take some images for him as well, for he had taken a hike along the road birding.

Dinner this evening was in another of the hotel's restaurants.

Sunday, 09 March

A fine start, but soon became overcast with rain at times. Fine and clear again in late afternoon. 23°C

We left Playa Girón just after 8am, taking Estray, his wife and little daughter with us to the main east-west highway, where they live. En route we saw a flock of Glossy Ibis and herons as we passed wetlands near La Boca.

Once on the main road we turned east, passing mile after mile of sugar cane production and countless Turkey Vultures and Cattle Egrets. There were just three or four good birds seen along the way. A male Northern Harrier over some rough grassland, martins – Cuban or Purple, and swifts. Only for the swifts did we stop and can you imagine stopping on the hard shoulder of a motorway in the UK for 20 minutes or so with telescopes set up? From the bus I saw a party of swifts quite low near the road as we passed through an area of craggy hills and thought from their jizz that they were the large White-collared Swift. We stopped, disembarked and started scanning. When swifts did appear close enough to see if they had white collars, they turned out to be American Black Swifts. Then we started seeing other swifts in a swirling mass of 80+ scything the air with sickle shaped wings and eventually when some of these came close enough we could see their white collars. Therefore, it was a case of two for the price of one and apparently neither had been recorded on one of the previous Ornitholidays tours to Cuba!

We took lunch at a roadside restaurant, with everyone commenting on the immaculate cleanliness of the restrooms that were liberally decorated with hibiscus flowers from the garden!

During the day's drive Erik gave us several sessions describing the economic and social aspects of life in Cuba. Interestingly he considered that there would be changes coming, but he hopes, slowly. If Cuba can absorb changes without external interference from their neighbour to the north, the rite of passage may not be too disruptive. Time will tell, so enjoy the journey back in time while you can.

The only other serious birding of the day was at a large lake a kilometre or two south of the main road some 20 kilometres to the east of Florida, near a buffalo farm and down a road signed Finca San Diego. It was first visited on last year's tour and again provided a leg-stretch and welcome relief from the long drive. There were well over 100 Ring-necked Ducks on the lake, and amongst them, we found three female Lesser Scaup. Along the margins were American Coot and Blue-winged Teal, the latter looking very smart in the afternoon sunlight, but these were perhaps eclipsed by the strength of the colour shown by a Purple Gallinule on the shore. The water's-edge also had Common Moorhens, Killdeer and Spotted Sandpipers. This year the lake only attracted a single Osprey, but two or three Belted Kingfishers and shortly before we left two Black-necked Stilts flew in. All the time swallows hawked insects – Barn, Northern Rough-winged and Tree. Also seen were Crested Caracara, Palm Warbler and Cuban Meadowlark.

It was sunset by the time we reached the busy tourist hotel on the outskirts of Camagüey, where it appeared that the rooms had recently been refurbished. We were lucky to get a table in the dining room for a short while after we had settled down to the buffet meal people were queuing at the door for theirs!

Monday, 10 March

Hot and sunny, with a light refreshing breeze. 36°C

After breakfast we drove north from Camagüey to La Belen, about an hour's drive away, although little of note was seen on the way. Our destination was the *finca* in the Reserva Sierra de Corriño. While Erik found our local guides we watched a West Indian Woodpecker on posts in a paddock area. Before long we were called over to the other side of the stables where a Giant Kingbird had been seen earlier in the morning. A burst of playback and it appeared, showing us its massive bill as it responded to the invisible intruder. Not only were we able to see this rare endemic well, but we could also compare it with the similar Loggerhead Kingbird in the same tree. The first of our four target birds.

Our next two appeared within minutes of one another soon after, but initially Cuban Palm Crow and Plain Pigeon were only fly-bys. The former was separated from the much more plentiful and more vocal Cuban Crow on call, the Palm Crow giving a more nasal and trumpet-like call. It is also in fact a slightly small species with, we thought, a shallower wing beat.

We set out on foot to explore the surrounding area. Before long we were watching Cuban Parakeets, a pair of mating Cuban Pygmy Owls and were being shown a flock of West Indian Whistling Ducks perched along a stout branch of a spreading tree near the small pond at the bottom of the hill below the farm. There were Green Herons there as well and in the surrounding trees several of the day's North American wood-warblers were seen. The tally for the day included Northern Parula, Cape May, Palm, Black-throated Blue and Black-and-white Warblers as well as the widespread American Redstart. Nearby Erik did very well to find us a perched Plain Pigeon in the telescope.

Another target bird was Gundlach's Hawk, named after the 19th century Cuban ornithologist. We were taken to the area where last year we saw a bird on its nest. Things seem to be running late this year for the current nest still had the builders in and they must have been having a break, for although we waited for half an hour or more, there was no sign of this elusive species. We added Cuban Green and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker to the day's woodpecker list. A number of trees seen today showed the telltale rows of neatly drilled sapsucker holes in the bark, for sapsuckers really do suck sap. The open woodland fairly close to the pond was home to a Limpkin, but we only had glimpses while we were in the area. Before we returned to the farm for lunch we drove in the bus to a more open area nearby for good views of another pair of Cuban Palm Crows.

Amazingly the morning had passed quickly and we retreated to the farm for a refreshing cold beer and lunch at 1pm. An hour-long siesta followed before we returned to the fray to try and see the elusive Cuban Grassquit, but it was only heard. There was plenty to keep us busy, however. Good views of Cuban Trogon, La Sagra's Flycatcher and Western Spindalis. Several Plain Pigeons flew over as well as some that looked dark. The solution to that one was revealed when again Erik excelled himself with the scope and lined up a very smart Scaly-naped Pigeon for us to admire! I spotted a distant circling Gundlach's Hawk through some palms, which some of the ladies saw, but not all the group unfortunately and we ended up with excellent views of a Louisiana Waterthrush beside a small stream. Days at La Belen are always rewarding, but this one was perhaps better than most!

By the time we returned to Camagüey it was dark. When we met up for dinner an hour later we found such a queue that we were able to do some of the checklist before we had a table!

Tuesday, 11 March

Hot and sunny with a refreshing breeze at Cayo Coca. 30°C

This morning we transferred to our hotel on Cayo Coca, with little to be seen en route birdwise. For any sugar cane buffs there are acres and acres to appreciate! At Moron we turned north towards the causeway that links the Cayos to the Cuba. René pays a toll and we left the Cuba of the Cubans to enter a world that is barred to the average Cuban, for beyond the barrier is a world built for the package tourist, a world of affluent hotels and everything a European or Canadian holiday maker would expect.

We stopped along the causeway to see Red-breasted Mergansers close in and a mixed fishing flock of seabirds, for in addition to Brown Pelicans, Magnificent Frigatebirds and Royal Terns; we find Laughing and American Herring Gulls and three Sandwich Terns. On reaching the Krystal Lagoon Resort we find the three rooms are already available, and while we have lunch the other two are finished, bar the towels, which is no problem. There are a few birds around while we are seeing to the rooms - Cuban Green Woodpecker and Yellow-throated Warblers are always colourful characters and after lunch Peter and I find an immature Cuban Black Hawk perched on the roof of our accommodation.

After siesta we head to Cuevas del Javali – Cave of the Wild Boar; not only is it a good birding area, but it is also one of Cuba's premier mosquito locations! Around the car park area we found Red-legged Thrush, Cuban Bullfinch, Cape May and Black-throated Green Warbler, the latter being an addition to our lists. A very confiding Cuban Pewee was much appreciated by the photographers as was a very confiding Zapata Sparrow, when eventually Erik found one. The birds here are of a different subspecies from those we saw at Zapata. However the star bird and the one that was particularly endearing was an Oriente Warbler. During our visit we came across three pairs of this localised endemic.

A walk through the woods led us to a small pool which was particularly good for insectivorous birds such as flycatchers and warblers. Eventually with birds like Black-throated Blue Warbler and further sightings of some of the species we had already seen, we retreated to the car park, where we had excellent views of White-crowned Pigeon.

Once again we were spoilt for choice at the dinning room's buffet, before returning to the bedrooms where, away from the noise of the bands, we did the checklist.

Wednesday, 12 March

Hot and sunny with some cloud. 30°C

Birding began before breakfast outside our first floor bedrooms, which gave us height to overlook the surrounding bushes where a Tricolored Heron had spent the night. Warblers were busy feeding and pishing brought in a number of species – Black-and-white, Cape May, Palm, Prairie, Yellow-throated and a Chestnut-sided, the first of the tour.

After breakfast we were raring to go, but with a flat battery the minibus wasn't! We were impressed with the efficiency and speed with which Erik organised one of the local taxi minibuses to put us back on track, and it was tracks we were going to be on this morning to reach a remote lighthouse at Cayo Paradon Grande. On the way we stopped at the broken bridge, where past Ornitholidays' groups have seen a Lesser Black-backed Gull and true to form there it was loafing around with an immature American Herring Gull and a number of Laughing Gulls and Royal Terns. This year we had it fly over a couple of times and we could clearly see the yellow feet and the black wing tips standing out from the dark grey wings and back, thus eliminating Kelp Gull, which has occurred as a vagrant in Texas.

Further on we had excellent views of resident Yellow Warblers on the edge of mangroves and also a pair of soaring Cuban Black Hawks, just two of many hawks seen during the morning. On reaching the lighthouse we set off on foot with a Cape May Warbler proving that it wasn't just Cuban Emeralds that found the orange flowers of Agaves attractive. The two hoped for birds here were the endemic Cuban Gnatcatcher and

Thick-billed Vireo, a species that is also found on a few other Caribbean islands. It was the vireo that showed first, giving good views in the trackside bushes as it furtively eyed Erik's Walkman. Before long we were having even better views of a curious Cuban Gnatcatcher. No wonder there was a pair of gnatcatchers or two in the area for there were mossies around as well!

We were back for lunch at the hotel and during the siesta period I gave some of the party a demonstration of digital file management on the laptop. We returned to the fray at 3pm with the additional help of Paulino, a local bird-guide. We drove some distance to Cayo Guillermo, where we eventually found a pair of Bahama Mockingbirds in a sandy area dominated with low palms and bushes. On the way stops had been made to enjoy good views of Limpkin and Merlin.

As we retraced our steps we spent a while stopped by the roadside viewing shallow lagoons that were dotted with Black-necked Stilts, Blue-winged Teal and Northern Shoveler. Lesser Yellowlegs and Least Sandpipers joined a few Short-billed Dowitchers. Five Caribbean Flamingos added a splash of colour and when I set up the 'scope for people to see them better I noticed a Clapper Rail preening beside them on the edge of the mangroves – the luck of birding! A little further on we crossed a bridge where a number of gulls, terns and Short-billed Dowitchers had gathered. Amongst them were a couple of Red Knot and two Ring-billed Gulls, whilst on the roadside verge a small party of Ruddy Turnstones fed on fish scraps left behind by fishermen.

The beach at El Baga Reserve was our last birding and as the sunset we were fortunate to have the tide in our favour for it gave us close views of more dowitchers and a Willet. Further away were Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers and Ruddy Turnstone, who were joined by two additions – Sanderling and Piping Plover. So, flushed with success, or was it the pink sunset, we returned to the hotel.

Thursday, 13 March

Hot and mainly sunny. 28°C

Fewer birds were seen from the balcony outside the bedrooms this morning than yesterday, which was probably just as well as we were due to load the bus and return to Havana at 8am. Peter was rather anxious, as he had realised that he had left his mobile phone in José's bus yesterday afternoon. We needed to reach the transportation centre as soon as possible to see if it was there, but our departure was a little later than anticipated as René disappeared without trace for 15 minutes or so.

Fortunately the transportation centre was on our route to the causeway. We were just about to turn into the centre, when José pulled out in front of us, so we gave chase and about a mile down the road he stopped and Peter not only found his phone, but also Jane's sun screen lotion too - that was a bit of luck!

Our journey to Havana took about seven hours, being punctuated with coffee or ice cream stops at service stations en route, so it was about mid-afternoon when we arrived in the old part of the city and began an hour-long exploration of tree-lined squares and streets. The ambience created by the slanting afternoon sunshine and the old colonial era buildings that were in need of renovation, was still there. Cameras clicked, or whatever digital cameras do, as we threaded our way through narrow streets amongst uniformed school children or passing elderly people sitting on front door steps and chatting to one another. A flamboyantly dressed fortune-teller didn't appear to have moved far in the last 12 months, suggesting perhaps she hadn't made her own fortune. There seemed to be a few more tourists around the squares and the cathedral than last year, but old Havana still retained the mystique of a bygone era, irretrievable in the 21st century Western World that we would be returning to in just a few hours. Only the younger generation of Cubans wore modern clothing, but without the compulsory accessories that adorn or amuse youngsters back home – iPods and mobile phones!

Our last meal on Cuban soil was at a well-known chicken restaurant, just off the avenue that is home to most of the embassies. We were glad to have had a decent dinner, when faced with the fare offered by Air France later in the evening and René was glad we couldn't manage the huge portions as he left with a large doggy box under his arm.

We checked in at the airport for our flight and our Boeing 747-400 took off only a little behind schedule.

Friday, 14 March

After a good Atlantic crossing we landed at Charles de Gaulle Airport just over eight hours later on a chilly grey morning. Getting across to the other terminal for the London flight was reasonably painless, although there were times when we wondered if the bus driver knew the way! A delay in departing and then waiting for our gate at Heathrow, meant that farewells took place at the baggage carousel a little later than anticipated prior to the last legs of our journeys home.

Acknowledgments Thank you all for coming on a memorable trip to Cuba. Will subsequent groups see the same Cuba as we did, for surely the future will bring changes, some for the better and others not so beneficial? It was a very good- humoured group, but being small meant that we did better for seeing some of the more reclusive forest species, such as the quail-doves – four species no less! Thanks to Erik for his birding skills, ensuring that the tour went smoothly, hiring a taxi-bus at the critical moment and for explaining Cuba to us, from a resident's viewpoint. Does our education system produce 98% literacy and would our NHS be the equal of Cuba's? Perhaps not. We were also fortunate to have the services of four very good local guides – Julio (Viñales), Estray and Orlando (Zapata area) and Paulino (Cayo Coca). René did a splendid job at the wheel of our aging minibus, which although giving us an anxious moment or two over the last couple of days, saw us, though to the end. And thanks to Nigel for keeping the faith and letting a very select group enjoy the Cuba of old before it was too late!

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April 2008

Itinerary and Weather

- 01 March London Heathrow to Paris. Technical problems with onward aircraft. Overnight in hotel at Charles de Gaulle airport.
- 02 March Mid-morning departure for Cuba. On arrival transfer to hotel at Soroa, arriving before dark
- 03 March Day excursion to Viñales National Park.
Hot and sunny. 30°C
- 04 March Transfer to Playa Girón. p.m. visit to La Boca.
Low cloud or mist at Soroa, becoming brighter during the morning and hot at sunny along the south coast. 32°C
- 05 March Morning visit to La Salinas, afternoon to Bermeja Reserve.
Hot and sunny throughout. 33°C
- 06 March Morning to Zapata Swamp. p.m. to Zapata Oriente
Hot and sunny again. 32°C
- 07 March Morning visit to Bermeja Reserve, p.m. return to Zapata Oriente.
Overcast with heavy rain at times a.m., becoming brighter, although still overcast, as wind increased again p.m. 28°C
- 08 March Morning to Zapata Swamp and boat trip. p.m. to Bermeja area.
Fine start, but soon became overcast with rain at times. Clear again in late afternoon. 23°C
- 09 March Day transfer to Camagüey. Late afternoon birding at Finca del San Diego nr. Florida.
Fine early and late. Overcast with rain at times during the day. 23°F
- 10 March Day excursion to La Belen.
Very hot and sunny. 36°C
- 11 March Morning transfer to Cayo Coca. p.m. visit to Cuevas del Javali.
Hot and sunny with a refreshing breeze at Cayo Coca. 30°C
- 12 March Morning visit to Cayo Paradon Grande, p.m. to Playa Guillermo area and El Baga beach.
Hot and sunny with some cloud. 30°C
- 13 March Day transfer to Havana, with city visit in late afternoon followed by dinner and transfer to airport for overnight flight to Paris.
Generally hot and sunny. 27°C
- 14 March Morning arrival in Paris, early afternoon connection to London

CHECKLIST OF SPECIES SEEN DURING THE TOUR

No of days recorded

1+ 2h means seen on 1 day
and heard on 2 others.

Max: 12 days

Location

V = Viñales
Z = Zapata Peninsula
B = Camagüey, La Belen
C = Cayo Coco
H = Havana
> = to or from a location

Abundance Scale

(max for any one day)

1 = 1 - 4
2 = 5 - 9
3 = 10 - 99
4 = 100 - 999
5 = 1,000 +
h = heard only

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Location				Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME	
Least Grebe	1			B		1	<i>Tachybaptus dominicus</i>	
Pied-billed Grebe	2			B	>H	2	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	
Brown Pelican	5	V	Z		C	3	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	
Double-crested Cormorant	4		Z		C	3	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	
Neotropic Cormorant	5		Z	B	C	2	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>	
Magnificent Frigatebird	4		Z		C	4	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>	
Great Blue Heron	9	V	Z	B	C	>H	3	<i>Ardea herodias</i>
Great Egret	12	V	Z	B	C	>H	3	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Snowy Egret	11	V	Z	B	C	>H	3	<i>Egretta thula</i>
Little Blue Heron	8	V	Z	B	C		3	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>
Tricolored Heron	8	V	Z	B	C		3	<i>Egretta tricolour</i>
Reddish Egret	3		Z		C		3	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>
Cattle Egret	12	V	Z	B	C	>H	5	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Green Heron	9	V	Z	B	C		3	<i>Butorides virescens</i>
Black-crowned Night-Heron	4		Z				1	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	1				C		1	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>
White Ibis	3	V	Z		C		3	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>
Glossy Ibis	2	V	Z				3	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Roseate Spoonbill	4	V	Z		C		2	<i>Ajaia ajaja</i>
Turkey Vulture ¹	12	V	Z	B	C	>H	5	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
Caribbean Flamingo	2		Z		C		2	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>
West Indian Whistling-Duck	1			B			3	<i>Dendrocygna arborea</i>
Blue-winged Teal	3		Z	B	C		3	<i>Anas discors</i>
Northern Shoveler	1				C		3	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Ring-necked Duck	2			B		>H	4	<i>Aythya collaris</i>
Lesser Scaup	1			B			1	<i>Aythya affinis</i>
Red-breasted Merganser	4		Z		C		3	<i>Mergus serrator</i>
Osprey	5		Z	B	C		2	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Snail Kite	3	V	Z				3	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>
Northern Harrier	2		Z	>B			1	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
Gundlach's Hawk	1			B			1	<i>Accipiter gundlachi</i>
Cuban Black Hawk²			Z		C			<i>Buteogallus gundlachii</i>
Red-tailed Hawk	4	V	Z	B			1	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>
Crested Caracara	6		Z	B			1	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>
American Kestrel	12	V	Z	B		>H	3	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
Merlin	1				C		1	<i>Falco columbarius</i>
Peregrine Falcon	2		Z				1	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Helmeted Guineafowl (<i>Introduced</i>)	1			B			3	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
Clapper Rail	1				C		1	<i>Rallus longirostris</i>
Sora	1		Z				1	<i>Porzana carolina</i>
(American) Purple Gallinule	3		Z	B			3	<i>Porphyrolaema martinica</i>
Common Moorhen	5		Z	B			2	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
American Coot	5		Z	B		>H	3	<i>Fulica americana</i>
Limpkin	5		Z	B	C		3	<i>Aramus guarauna</i>

Black-bellied (Grey) Plover	2		Z		C		3	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	
Semipalmated Plover	2		Z		C		3	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	
Killdeer	7	V	Z	B	C		3	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	
Piping Plover	1				C		1	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>	
Black-necked Stilt	4	V	Z	B	C		3	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	
Northern Jacana	7		Z	B	>C		3	<i>Jacana spinosa</i>	
Greater Yellowlegs	2	V	Z				3	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	
Lesser Yellowlegs	1				C		2	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	
Willet	1				C		1	<i>Catoptrophorus semipalmatus</i>	
Spotted Sandpiper	2	V		B			1	<i>Actitis macularia</i>	
Ruddy Turnstone	2		Z		C		3	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	
Red Knot	1				C		1	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	
Sanderling	1				C		3	<i>Calidris alba</i>	
Least Sandpiper	3	V	Z		C		2	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	
Short-billed Dowitcher	2		Z		C		3	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>	
Laughing Gull	3				C		4	<i>Larus atricilla</i>	
Ring-billed Gull	1				C		1	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	
American Herring Gull	3				C		1	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1				C		1	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	
Caspian Tern	3	V	Z			>H	3	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	
Royal Tern	5				C	>H	3	<i>Sterna maxima</i>	
Sandwich Tern	1				C		1	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	
Rock (Feral) Dove (<i>Introduced</i>)	8		Z	>B	C	>H	3	<i>Columba livia</i>	
Scaly-naped Pigeon	1			B			2	<i>Patagioenas squamosa</i>	
White-crowned Pigeon	2				C		2	<i>Patagioenas leucocephala</i>	
Plain Pigeon	1			B			2	<i>Patagioenas inornata</i>	
Eurasian Collared Dove ³	1					H	2	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	
White-winged Dove	5	V	Z		C		1	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>	
Mourning Dove	12	V	Z	B	>C	>H	3	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	
Common Ground Dove	11	V	Z		>C	>H	3	<i>Columbina passerina</i>	
Key West Quail-Dove	1		Z				1	<i>Geotrygon chrysia</i>	
Gray-headed Quail-Dove	1	1h	Z				1	<i>Geotrygon caniceps</i>	
Ruddy Quail-Dove	1		Z				1	<i>Geotrygon montana</i>	
Blue-headed Quail-Dove	1		Z				1	<i>Geotrygon cyanocephala</i>	
Cuban Parakeet	2		Z	B			3	<i>Aratinga euops</i>	
Cuban Parrot	4		Z	B			3	<i>Amazona leucocephala</i>	
Great Lizard-Cuckoo	6	2h	V	Z	B	C	1	<i>Saurothera merlini</i>	
Smooth-billed Ani	12		V	Z	B	C	>H	3	<i>Crotophaga ani</i>
Bare-legged Owl	1		Z				1	<i>Gymnoglaux lawrencii</i>	
Cuban Pygmy-Owl	4		Z	B			1	<i>Glaucidium siju</i>	
Stygian Owl	-	1h	V				h	<i>Asio stygius</i>	
American Black Swift	1				.>B		3	<i>Cypseloides niger</i>	
White-collared Swift	1				.>B		3	<i>Streptoprocne zonaris</i>	
Antillean Palm Swift	3		V	Z		>H	1	<i>Tachornis phoenicobia</i>	
Cuban Emerald	11		V	Z	B	C	2	<i>Chlorostilbon ricordii</i>	
Bee Hummingbird	2			Z			1	<i>Mellisuga helenae</i>	
Cuban Trogon	4		V	Z	B		2	<i>Priotelus temnurus</i>	
Cuban Tody	5	1h	V	Z	B	C	1	<i>Todus multicolor</i>	
Belted Kingfisher	8			Z	B	C	3	<i>Ceryle alcyon</i>	
West Indian Woodpecker	8		V	Z	B	C	3	<i>Melanerpes superciliaris</i>	
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	3			Z	B		1	<i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>	
Cuban Green Woodpecker	7		V	Z	B	C	1	<i>Xiphidiopicus percussus</i>	
Fernandina's Flicker	3			Z			1	<i>Colaptes fernandinae</i>	
Cuban Pewee	4		V	Z		C	2	<i>Contopus caribaeus</i>	
La Sagra's Flycatcher	3		V		B	C	1	<i>Myiarchus sagrae</i>	
Gray Kingbird	1			Z			1	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>	
Loggerhead Kingbird	10		V	Z	B	C	2	<i>Tyrannus caudifasciatus</i>	

Giant Kingbird	1			B		1	<i>Tyrannus cubensis</i>	
Thick-billed Vireo	1				C	1	<i>Vireo crassirostris</i>	
Cuban Vireo	2	V			C	1	<i>Vireo gundlachii</i>	
Yellow-throated Vireo	2	V				1	<i>Vireo flavifrons</i>	
Cuban Palm Crow ⁴	1			B		2	<i>Corvus minutus</i>	
Cuban Crow	5		Z	B		>H	4	<i>Corvus nasicus</i>
Purple/Caribbean Martin	2	V		B		1	<i>Progne subis/cryptoleuca</i>	
Tree Swallow	7	V	Z	B	C	3	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	
Northern Rough-Winged Swallow	1			B		3	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	
Cave Swallow	1					>H	1	<i>Petrochelidon fulva</i>
Barn Swallow	2			B	C	3	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
Zapata Wren	-	1h	Z			h	<i>Ferminia cerverai</i>	
Cuban Gnatcatcher	1				C	1	<i>Polioptila lembeyei</i>	
Cuban Solitaire	1	V				1	<i>Myadestes elisabeth</i>	
Red-legged Thrush	10	V	Z	B	C	2	<i>Turdus plumbeus</i>	
Gray Catbird	4	1h	V	Z		1	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	
Northern Mockingbird	11	V	Z	B	C	3	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	
Bahama Mockingbird	1				C	1	<i>Mimus gundlachii</i>	
Northern Parula	5	V	Z	B	C	1	<i>Parula americana</i>	
Yellow Warbler	1				C	1	<i>Dendroica petechia</i>	
Chestnut-sided Warbler	1				C	1	<i>Dendroica pensylvanica</i>	
Cape May Warbler	5		Z	B	C	1	<i>Dendroica tigrina</i>	
Black-throated Blue Warbler	3			B	C	2	<i>Dendroica caerulescens</i>	
Black-throated Green Warbler	1				C	1	<i>Dendroica virens</i>	
Yellow-throated Warbler	5		Z	B	C	1	<i>Dendroica dominica</i>	
Olive-capped Warbler	1	V				1	<i>Dendroica pityophila</i>	
Prairie Warbler	3		Z		C	1	<i>Dendroica discolor</i>	
Palm Warbler	10	V	Z	B	C	3	<i>Dendroica palmarum</i>	
Black-and-white Warbler	4	V		B	C	1	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>	
American Redstart	5		Z	B	C	2	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>	
Ovenbird	2		Z		C	1	<i>Seiurus aurocapillus</i>	
Northern Waterthrush	1		Z			1	<i>Seiurus noveboracensis</i>	
Louisiana Waterthrush	1			B		1	<i>Seiurus motacilla</i>	
Common Yellowthroat	5		Z		C	2	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	
Yellow-headed Warbler	3	V	Z			2	<i>Teretistris fernandinae</i>	
Oriente Warbler	2				C	2	<i>Teretistris fornsi</i>	
Red-legged Honeycreeper	1	V				2	<i>Cyanerpes cyaneus</i>	
Western Spindalis ⁵	4	V		B	C	2	<i>Spindalis zena</i>	
Cuban Bullfinch	3	V			C	1	<i>Melopyrrha nigra</i>	
Cuban Grassquit	1	1h	V	B		1	<i>Tiaris canora</i>	
Yellow-faced Grassquit	4	V	Z	B	C	2	<i>Tiaris olivaceus</i>	
Zapata Sparrow	2		Z		C	2	<i>Torreornis inexpectata</i>	
Indigo Bunting	2	V	Z			1	<i>Passerina cyanea</i>	
Red-shouldered Blackbird	1		Z			2	<i>Agelaius assimilis</i>	
Tawny-shouldered Blackbird	7	V	Z	B		3	<i>Agelaius humeralis</i>	
Cuban (Eastern) Meadowlark ⁶	2	V		B		1	<i>Sturnella (magna) hippocrepis</i>	
Cuban Blackbird	3	V		B		3	<i>Dives atrovioleacea</i>	
Greater Antillean Grackle	12	V	Z	B	C	>H	4	<i>Quiscalus niger</i>
Shiny Cowbird	3	V	Z	B		3	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>	
Greater Antillean Oriole	2		Z		C	2	<i>Icterus dominicensis</i>	
House Sparrow (Introduced)	7		Z	B	C	>H	2	<i>Passer domesticus</i>

Notes:

- 1 Turkey Vulture – DNA shows New World vultures to be more closely related to Storks than Birds of Prey as previously assumed
- 2 Cuban Black Hawk was previously considered to be a race of Common Black Hawk

- 3 Eurasian Collared Dove was introduced to Bahamas and has since spread to Cuba and across North America on its own accord
- 4 Cuban Palm Crow was formerly a race of Palm Crow that also occurred in Hispaniola, but the two races are now considered to be separate species
- 5 Western Spindalis was formerly Stripe-headed Tanager until that was split into four species – Hispaniolan, Jamaican, Puerto Rican and Western
- 6 Cuban Meadowlark was previously considered to be a race of Eastern Meadowlark. A further species may also be involved around the Guantanamo area

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Bat sps

Anole lizard sps

Gecko sps

Cuban curly-tail or Shore Puppy Lizard *Leiocephalus carinatus*

Cuban Tree Frog *Osteopilus septentrionalis*

INVERTEBRATES

Land Crab

Hermit Crab

White Peacock

Gulf Fritillary

West Indian Buckeye

Julia

Sulphur sp

Swallowtail sp

Grass Yellow sp

Zebra-wing

This list represents those species seen by party members of this tour.



Great Lizard-Cuckoo



Cuban Green Woodpecker



Common Yellowthroat



Cuban Tody



Rose-throated Parrots



American Kestrel



Cuban Emerald



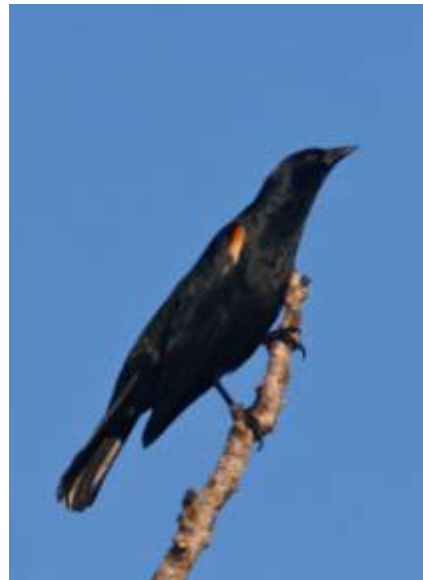
Cuban Black Hawk



Land Crab



Western Spindalis



Tawny-shouldered Blackbird



Bicycles

**Front cover: Cuban Meadowlark
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