

ITINERARY
PUERTO RICO
March 17-23, 2019



*The diminutive Puerto Rican Tody might be the cutest of the endemics we'll see on the island.
Photograph by guide Tom Johnson.*

We include here information for those interested in the 2019 Field Guides Puerto Rico tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a reference list
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

****Note – In late September, 2017, Hurricane Maria (close on the heels of Hurricane Irma) devastated the island of Puerto Rico. We cancelled our 2018 departure of this tour, but feel that we can successfully operate our tour there in 2019 after consulting with our lodging providers and local sources of birding knowledge. While montane forest habitats will look very different than they did in spring 2017, we are optimistic about being able to find the fantastic suite of endemic birds that calls Puerto Rico home. One potential exception is the Puerto Rican Parrot – as of summer 2018, access to the parrot site at Rio Abajo is restricted. We will work on an access strategy but as of now, we can't guarantee that we'll be able to look for the parrot on our 2019 tour.****

Puerto Rico, easternmost and smallest of the Greater Antilles, is an exciting birding destination that harbors seventeen species of birds found nowhere else. Additionally, this US-associated Commonwealth features fine facilities and a good road system, making birding in Puerto Rico—from montane rainforests and elfin woods to mangrove swamps and dry coastal scrub—a comfortable and rewarding experience. We'll begin in the north and west of the island during our relocation from San Juan toward the Southwest, stopping at selected sites in the Rio Abajo State Forest and "haystack hills" of karst limestone for native landbirds, at cliffs and promontories for seabirds, and at wetlands for waterbirds. Along this route, we're likely to see over half of the island's endemic species right off the bat, including Puerto Rican Flycatcher, Adelaide's Warbler, Puerto Rican Lizard-Cuckoo, and Puerto Rican Bullfinch. If conditions and access circumstances allow, we will look for the very rare Puerto Rican Parrot at Rio Abajo – a successful, ongoing reintroduction effort has resulted in the species nesting in the wild there.



The Yellow-shouldered Blackbird was once common on Puerto Rico, but in recent decades, the population has dropped dramatically. Nest parasitism by the Shiny Cowbird has reduced numbers of the blackbird to the point that the blackbirds are now endangered. We'll look for these attractive birds near La Parguera.
Photograph by guide Tom Johnson.

Puerto Rican birding is a delight, an easy introduction to the Greater Antillean avifauna—and a must for anyone who loves island birding anywhere.

About the Physical Requirements & Pace: This tour's objective will be to drink in the island's habitats and endemic bird species at a pace suited to almost any birder, whether just beginning or advanced. Because many of Puerto Rico's endemic birds are local in their distribution, we will set our priorities according to the habitat and location of the day. Participants should be prepared to walk (or stroll, really) up to two miles per day. The walking will be mostly roadside but we will at times traverse some uneven terrain; it will be possible to take it easy and to remain with the vehicle or at our lodgings if a given walk seems too strenuous. As with most of our tours, we will travel by van(s) and boarding will require some knee strength and moderate mobility. In general we will try to see as great a variety of birds and wildlife as time permits, though we generally do not seek out localized "exotic" species, such as escaped Estrildids and parrots that now breed in the wild in Puerto Rico. The tour is designed to make travel time as pleasant as possible, though there will be several days on which we spend some time in the vehicle.

If you are uncertain whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with one of the guides.

In a charming, relaxed southwestern corner of the island, the Guánica State Forest should produce nice looks at Puerto Rican Emerald, Caribbean Elaenia, Puerto Rican Tody, and Mangrove Cuckoo; here too, we'll spend an evening here listening for the uncommon and local Puerto Rican Nightjar. An afternoon visit to Susúa State Forest might result in views of normally skittish Ruddy Quail-Dove and Key West Quail-Dove. Around our coastal lodgings in La Parguera, we'll hope to see the endangered Yellow-shouldered Blackbird, Antillean Mango, Puerto Rican Spindalis, and roosting Yellow-crowned Night-Herons. The highlands of Maricao State Forest host the recently (1972) described Elfin-woods Warbler, as well as many other specialties: Antillean Euphonia, Puerto Rican Tanager, Green Mango, Puerto Rican Oriole, Puerto Rican Vireo, the scarce Lesser Antillean Pewee, and the *venator* subspecies of Sharp-shinned Hawk. Outings to Cabo Rojo and Laguna Cartagena will help round out our experiences with Caribbean waterbirds and wintering shorebirds.

For the last stage of the tour, we will relocate to Casa Cubuy, an ecolodge in Puerto Rico's eastern mountains on the edge of El Yunque National Forest, the only tropical rainforest in the US National Forest system. From here, we'll make a day trip to Humacao and Fajardo to search for Green-throated Carib, Antillean Crested Hummingbird, West Indian Whistling-Duck, White-cheeked Pintail, and Caribbean Coot in the marshes and impoundments there. We'll also visit a coastal harbor to look for seabirds, possibly including Brown Boobies and terns.

About the Birding Areas



Guánica Forest Reserve: Puerto Rico's growing population has cleared most of the subtropical dry coastal forest in Puerto Rico for farming and other interests. One of the last remaining patches of this threatened habitat is protected in this reserve, which is listed as a World Biosphere Reserve. It is home to many of Puerto Rico's endemic bird species, the most elusive of which is the rare and local Puerto Rican Nightjar.

Rio Abajo State Forest – This reserve, south of Arecibo, offers us a chance of finding the Puerto Rican Parrot, one of the Caribbean's rarest birds and an ongoing conservation success story. Depending on access circumstances (**access is currently restricted in summer 2018**), we might be able to walk in to an area of the forest surrounding the core of the parrot's reintroduction, where released birds have been breeding successfully in the wild for several years now. Our 2014-17 tours met with success in finding parrots in this area. We will also look for Puerto Rican Screech-Owls, Puerto Rican Vireo, Ruddy Quail-Dove, and other specialty birds while exploring Rio Abajo.

Maricao Forest Reserve and highlands: The cool mountains of western Puerto Rico near the town of Maricao host several often-difficult endemic species, among them the Elfín-woods Warbler, which was described to science in 1972. This small forest reserve boasts some of the best wet mountain forest and cloudforest habitat in Puerto Rico. Maricao has a good set of trails for seeking out the warbler, as well as Green Mango, Puerto Rican Spindalis, the unique Puerto Rican Tanager, and the endemic lizard-cuckoo, tody, and vireo. It also gives us our best chance to catch up to the rare endemic subspecies of Sharp-shinned Hawk.

El Yunque National Forest: One of the largest remaining tracts of native forest in Puerto Rico, this area in the northeast of the island is home to some of the island's least-known landbirds such as the Puerto Rican Screech-Owl. A fine system of roads and trails bisects the forest and gives access to both tall, wet Caribbean rainforest on the lower slopes of this mountainous region and to the restricted elfin forest of the higher ridges. Rain is abundant in this part of the island, and we'll be flexible in our plans to take into account the weather conditions.

The Southwestern Coast—The southwestern corner of Puerto Rico is now mostly pasture and farmland, with the immediate coastal area dominated by extensive mangrove wetlands. The latter habitat is threatened with development and is a stronghold of the endangered Yellow-shouldered Blackbird, which has been imperiled by Shiny Cowbird brood parasitism. We will organize outings to a few of the nearby refuges, such as Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge and Laguna Cartagena Wildlife Refuge, which host numerous wading birds, waterfowl, shorebirds and some introduced species such as Venezuelan Troupial.

Humacao wetlands—This small refuge has a nice variety of habitats, including freshwater, brackish, and saltwater ponds and lagoons. Though known for some years as a good site for the shy, endangered West Indian Whistling-Duck and the Caribbean Coot, the refuge's diked impoundments are variable in their quality from week to week, and we have seen the whistling-ducks here only rarely. We'll stop by and see what birds are around, which should include wintering waterfowl, warblers, and Green-throated Carib, localized on the island. We also may have the opportunity to visit wetlands elsewhere on the island.

Itinerary for Puerto Rico



The Puerto Rican Spindalis was recently recognized as a full species; it is one of four Spindalis species that were split from the former Stripe-headed Tanager. Photograph by guide Tom Johnson.

Day 1, Sun, 17 Mar. Arrival at San Juan’s International Airport. Upon arrival, please take a taxi to the **Courtyard by Marriott** (about \$15 with tip). We will meet in front of the hotel desk in the lobby at 5:00 p.m. to go to dinner and discuss the plans for the next day. For those interested in sightseeing and shopping in Old San Juan, we recommend arriving a day or more ahead of the group and perhaps taking accommodations in Old San Juan; the forts and their environs are very interesting historically. Night in San Juan.

Day 2, Mon, 18 Mar. Rio Abajo to La Parguera. We’ll make an early morning’s drive out to a breakfast site, Rio Abajo Forest Reserve, where we’ll enjoy our first studies of Puerto Rico’s endemic avifauna. As noted above, access to this area may be limited, but as of summer 2018, we are hoping to be able to visit the area. Rio Abajo hosts the Vivaldi Aviary, where captive breeding efforts for the Critically Endangered Puerto Rican Parrot are underway. After success in finding the parrots on our 2014, 2015, and 2016 tours, we are optimistic about our chances of sighting this rare species if we are able to enter the reserve. After breakfast, we might relocate to Cambalache Forest Reserve for great looks at Puerto Rican Tody and Puerto Rican Lizard-Cuckoo, two of the most charismatic endemics on the island. A keen eye should be focused on the ground here, as well, for the elusive Key West Quail-Dove. Our afternoon will be spent commuting across the island. We hope to take in one or more ocean overlooks for seabirds (terns, Magnificent Frigatebird, maybe a Brown Booby, and White-tailed Tropicbirds). The day ends in the southwest corner of the island where the endangered Yellow-shouldered Blackbird can sometimes be found right on the grounds of our hotel. Night in La Parguera at Parador Villa Parguera.

Day 3, Tue, 19 Mar. Laguna Cartagena and Guánica Biosphere Reserve. After breakfast at the hotel, we’ll target numerous wetland species at Laguna Cartagena National Wildlife Refuge, including rarely seen waterfowl such as Masked Duck and West Indian Whistling-Duck. The walk into the wetland overlook should yield Mangrove Cuckoo, the endemic Adelaide’s Warbler, and migrant wood warblers. Smooth-billed Ani, Yellow-faced Grassquit, and introduced species like waxbills and munias often crowd the entrance road.

After lunch, we’ll likely have a free afternoon, though we might use this time to help track down better views of endemic species. After dinner, we will head to the dry forest of nearby hills for a shot at the Puerto Rican Nightjar. Night in La Parguera at Parador Villa Parguera.

Day 4, Wed, 20 Mar. Maricao Forest Reserve and Susúa Forest Reserve. We will rise early and drive up to the cool wet slopes at Maricao Forest Reserve where our primary targets will be the endemic and isolated Elfin-woods Warbler and other endemics like Puerto Rican Tanager, Puerto Rican Oriole, and the endemic subspecies of Sharp-shinned Hawk. Our search might also yield Green Mango, Puerto Rican Vireo, Antillean Euphonia, Loggerhead Kingbird, Lesser

Antillean “Puerto Rican” Pewee, and maybe a migrant warbler or two as well. In the afternoon, we will undertake a vigil in the shade at Susúa Forest Reserve. Patience may be rewarded at this site with looks at Ruddy and Key West quail-doves in the late afternoon as they forage along the edge of the picnic area. Night in La Parguera at Parador Villa Parguera.

Day 5, Thu, 21 Mar. Cabo Rojo to El Yunque. We'll concentrate on shorebirds and seabirds at the Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge this morning, our last in the southwest corner of the island. The mudflats at Cabo Rojo should be covered with hundreds of Stilt Sandpipers and Semipalmated Sandpipers. We will pick through the Black-necked Stilts, Wilson's Plovers, and a mix of peeps for more unusual species. White-tailed Tropicbirds and Brown Boobies can sometimes be found at close range along the cliffs near the lighthouse. Our afternoon drive to El Yunque in the northeast will be punctuated by a detour for the range-restricted Plain Pigeon. Night in El Yunque National Forest at the Casa Cubuy Eco-lodge.

Day 6, Fri, 22 Mar. Humacao Wetlands and Fajardo. The Humacao Nature reserve can be teeming with waterbirds. We will be scanning for grebes, ducks, coots, herons, and bitterns. When we turn our attention from the water to the forest, we expect to get good looks at Green-throated Carib and Puerto Rican Flycatcher. From Humacao, we'll head north to Fajardo for some coastal birding; scanning the ocean is likely to produce Brown Booby, several terns, and Magnificent Frigatebird. The flowering trees and shrubs at our lunch spot draw the diminutive Antillean Crested Hummingbird. We will work our way back up to Casa Cubuy for an afternoon walk in El Yunque. Night in El Yunque National Forest at the Casa Cubuy Eco-lodge.

Day 7, Sat, 23 Mar. Departures. After a good breakfast, we'll make the drive trip to the San Juan International Airport and our flights home. **Make sure to plan your flights for *after 12 noon!***

About Your Guides

Tom Johnson grew up watching birds in central Pennsylvania. Interested in science and the outdoors from a young age, he became involved in a variety of field projects throughout his school years, including banding migrant landbirds and conducting point counts for the 2nd Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas. He was fortunate to pursue undergraduate studies in biology at Cornell University, where he became even more excited to learn about systematics and migration while surrounded by the amazing ornithologists and birders of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Since graduating from college, Tom has spent much of his time studying seabirds off the east coast of North America while conducting line transect surveys from NOAA ships between Nova Scotia and the Bahamas. When he's not otherwise occupied, he loves to devote time to wandering, taking photos, and searching for vagrants and hybrid birds.

Tom has long been interested in sharing his enthusiasm for exploring bird identification, distribution, and migration dynamics; he is a regional editor for *North American Birds* magazine and writes a regular column on identification for *Birding* magazine. Perhaps most of all, he loves sharing his passion for the natural world with others out in the field, and he's excited to have the opportunity to do this while leading for Field Guides.

A **second guide** will be added as tour size warrants.

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/guides> for John's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

“Tom Johnson has an amazing knowledge of birds and the natural world. His enthusiasm and professionalism comes through so much. He kept us on schedule -yet allowed for some great diversions that showed up. Field Guides is so fortunate to have him guiding.”
L.T., *Arizona Nightbirds & More*

Financial Information

FEE: \$2575 from San Juan

DEPOSIT: \$250 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: November 17, 2018

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$450

LIMIT: 14

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Caroline Lewis. Caroline will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

DOCUMENTS: US citizens need only a government issued photo ID to travel to Puerto Rico. If you are not a US citizen, please check with the US consulate nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: **Please arrive in San Juan on March 17th in time for dinner at 5:00pm. You can depart after 12pm on March 23.** Field Guides is a full service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees. **Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.**

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The **tour fee** is \$2575 for one person in double occupancy from San Juan. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 6, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 7, all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Puerto Rico, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, phone calls, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$450. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$250** per person. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by November 17, 2018. We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour fees (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive from us a brochure regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, 24-hour accident protection, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance when making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights), pre-existing conditions are covered. The CSA brochure includes a contact number; you may also purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/travelinsurance.html> and clicking the link to CSA. Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Field Guides Incorporated accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

4/12/17 DDG; 4/18peg