



Field Guides Tour Report

Jamaica 2015

Mar 3, 2015 to Mar 8, 2015
Eric Hynes with Dwayne Swaby

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



This pair of endemic Black-billed Parrots put on a real show for us in gorgeous light. (Photo by guide Eric Hynes)

It was a pleasure to lead the first run of our revised Jamaica tour after its prolonged absence from our schedule. Collectively we swept the 27 endemic species, with some individuals missing a few. We also encountered a number of the endemic subspecies and regional specialties to boot. Green Castle Estate (GCE) was our home base for this tour, and we enjoyed a refreshing pool, delicious local food, helpful staff, and more than half the endemics right on the property.

Our first full day birding was spent right on the grounds of the 1650-acre estate. After three different walks, we finished the day with almost half the endemics already tallied. The cooperative and elegant Red-billed Streamertails were certainly a highlight. Jamaican Woodpecker, Jamaican Tody, and a nest-building Jamaican Becard were standouts as well.

Hardwar Gap in the famous Blue Mountains was our destination on day two. We wound our way up for some higher-elevation habitat. Shortly after getting off the bus, we started picking up new species one after the other. A dramatic Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo was trumped by a rare Jamaican Blackbird. Ring-tailed Pigeon proved easier than when I scouted the tour last year, and Jamaican Pewee, Rufous-tailed Flycatcher, and Arrowhead Warbler all performed nicely. The hot porridge was a welcome reward for our early efforts. After refueling ourselves, we concentrated on Blue Mountain Vireo and eventually met with success. A descent and steep return at Woodside gave us good looks at Greater Antillean Bullfinch, Orangequit, White-chinned Thrush, and Jamaican Vireo. Another descending stroll from Hardwar Gap rounded out a rewarding field trip and scored a lifer for Dwayne: Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

The most endemic-rich region of the island is the John Crow Mountains, so we headed there on day three. A Barn Owl held its fencepost perch long enough for us all to get point-blank views as we exited GCE predawn -- getting our trip off to a great start. Both Black-billed and Yellow-billed parrots were joined by Olive-throated Parakeets, White-crowned Pigeons, Ring-tailed Pigeons, and Jamaican Crows at our breakfast stop at the base of Ecclesdown Road. While walking up we spotted the Black-billed subspecies of Streamertail, White-eyed Thrush, Ruddy Quail-Dove, and our best look at Black-billed Parrot. A foraging Jamaican Blackbird barely above our heads trumped the fine look we had the day before. After our productive morning, we headed down to Boston Bay and enjoyed their famous Jamaican jerk for lunch. Stops at the mouth of the Swift and the Wag Water rivers padded our list with herons and shorebirds.

Day four we ventured up to Vinery to try and clean up a few species. Vehicle and memory limitations resulted in more hiking than any of us expected, but finally getting our eyes on the "Mountain Witch" or Crested Quail-Dove made the long hike worth it. Good looks at White-eyed Thrush and

Jamaican Tody along the way helped pass the strides. We wrapped up our field breakfast just as the rain started to fall. A yummy soup awaited us back GCE, followed by a trip to the reservoir, where new species included regional specialties like Caribbean Coot and West Indian Whistling-Duck. A roosting Northern Potoo helped cap the day.

Our final day started with a full breakfast at GCE and heartfelt goodbyes to Miss Elaine and her wonderful staff. While making our way back west to Montego Bay, we stopped several times to add Northern Shoveler, Barn Swallow, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Greater Yellowlegs to our trip list.

On behalf of Dwayne Swaby, our outstanding local guide, and the rest of the Field Guides staff, I would like to thank you once again for joining me in Jamaica. I hope you had as much fun as I did. Your grace and understanding about a few hiccups on this maiden voyage were greatly appreciated. I hope to see all of you in the field somewhere else in the not too distant future.

Sincerely,

Eric

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

WEST INDIAN WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna arborea*) – It may not sport flashy colors but there is no denying this species is a striking duck.

The only one of this hard to come by species we saw perched on the log in the reservoir at Green Castle Estate (GCE).

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Four drakes and a hen were on the reservoir at GCE.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – More than a dozen were on the reservoir at GCE.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – One drake was close to the road near Montego Bay.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – Seventeen hens and two drakes were mostly sleeping in the back of the reservoir at GCE.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – The drakes of this species in breeding plumage fall somewhere between comical and beautiful.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LEAST GREBE (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Our best look was in one of the small roadside wetlands when we were almost back to Montego Bay.

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – The stripe-headed juvenile being fed by an adult at the GCE reservoir was particularly cute.

Fregatidae (Frigatebirds)

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata magnificens*) – These rakish pirates of the bird world soared effortlessly along the coast. We even watched one pluck a fish off the surface at the mouth of the Swift River.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – We saw a few along the northern coast as we travelled between Montego Bay and GCE.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Just one standing along the far shore at the mouth of the Wag Water River in Annotto Bay

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – A daily sighting but never in large numbers

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – Good looks at the mouth of the Swift River

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – Some gorgeous adult birds

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – This is another species we only encountered at the mouth of the Wag Water River in Annotto Bay.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Numerous in places

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – There were a couple of these guys at the mouth of the Swift River.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – An immature bird flew across the river as we stood on the bridge.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – A few birds in the wetlands as we approached Montego Bay.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – "John Crow" was overhead all the time. Remember that funky leucistic bird above Ecclesdown Road?

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – We had two sightings (same individual?) of a bird soaring overhead at GCE our first morning.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

RED-TAILED HAWK (JAMAICENSIS) (*Buteo jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – The birds we were seeing are the resident nominate race.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

PURPLE GALLINULE (*Porphyrio martinicus*) – Just one adult at GCE reservoir

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – Every patch of appropriate habitat, no matter how small, seemed to hold a few of these rails.

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – Numerous in a few locations

CARIBBEAN COOT (*Fulica caribaea*) – We spotted two of these uncommon regional specialties at GCE reservoir with their more extensive white frontal shields.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – We encountered these bizarrely proportioned but elegant shorebirds in a few locations.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Three in the distance on the beach at Annotto Bay

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Two in the distance on the beach at Annotto Bay

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – A pair seemed to be reliable at the entrance gate to GCE.

Jacanidae (Jacanas)

NORTHERN JACANA (*Jacana spinosa violacea*) – These lily walkers already had well developed chicks.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – The shorebird we came across most frequently

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – We had good looks peering through the fence at the lagoon on the way back to Montego Bay.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – These guys greatly outnumbered the Greaters

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – Several sightings along the northern coastline

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – A flock of ten of these tiny peeps was working the muddy edge of the pond at the entrance to GCE.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*) – Great looks along the northern coastline

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Yep [I]

WHITE-CROWNED PIGEON (*Patagioenas leucocephala*) – Jamaica is a great place to see this species

RING-TAILED PIGEON (*Patagioenas caribaea*) – We had lots of great looks at this large pigeon, perched and in flight. [E]

COMMON GROUND-DOVE (*Columbina passerina jamaicensis*) – The dove zapped by a shrink ray

CRESTED QUAIL-DOVE (*Geotrygon versicolor*) – The "Mountain Witch" bewitched some of us. This species, like other quail-doves, has a well-earned reputation for being tough to see. We heard it most days but it wasn't until our last morning in the field that we finally got looks at a close bird briefly before it melted back into the forest. [E]

RUDDY QUAIL-DOVE (*Geotrygon montana*) – We heard several and flushed a few off the roads

CARIBBEAN DOVE (*Leptotila jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – This is another Columbidae we heard that is tough to get out in the open. Several birds flushed off trails as we walked and we had an "almost make you duck" flyby on the walk to the Northern Potoo roost.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Fairly common

ZENAIDA DOVE (*Zenaida aurita*) – Conspicuous

MOURNING DOVE (CARIBBEAN) (*Zenaida macroura macroura*) – We saw several in flight as we were leaving Montego Bay and returning to Montego Bay

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

MANGROVE CUCKOO (*Coccyzus minor*) – Down in the "12 Acre Curve" at GCE, we had a very cooperative individual come in and hold a perch.

CHESTNUT-BELLIED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus pluvialis*) – This bird is impressive on so many levels: size, sound, plumage... we had great looks up in the Blue Mountains. [E]

JAMAICAN LIZARD-CUCKOO (*Coccyzus vetula*) – This species was late to get on the list but ended up with several good looks, starting with the calling bird that got us all running off the patio at dinner time. [E]

SMOOTH-BILLED ANI (*Crotophaga ani*) – Seen as singles and in small flocks

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

BARN OWL (AMERICAN) (*Tyto alba furcata*) – Our first bird was too close for bins on the fence post as we headed out early one morning. We ended up seeing three more that morning before the sun got up.

Strigidae (Owls)

JAMAICAN OWL (*Pseudoscops grammicus*) – The "reliable" roost wasn't so reliable the day we visited it. We enjoyed lots of calling at night and had a few flyovers but that perched in the open look eluded us this year. [E]

Nyctibiidae (Potoos)

NORTHERN POTOO (CARIBBEAN) (*Nyctibius jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – For those who chose to take the walk up the hill after the reservoir, we savored a great look at a roosting bird. We heard lots of calling around the estate house and when everyone went to bed, one perched atop the utility pole adjacent to the cottage.

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-COLLARED SWIFT (*Streptoprocne zonaris pallidifrons*) – These dramatic swifts cruised over the estate morning and evening.

ANTILLEAN PALM-SWIFT (*Tachornis phoenicobia phoenicobia*) – This sports car of a swift had us doing pirouettes under the royal palm in downtown Annotto Bay.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

JAMAICAN MANGO (*Anthracothorax mango*) – This large, dark hummingbird is really quite striking when you get it in the right light. [E]

VERVAIN HUMMINGBIRD (*Mellisuga minima minima*) – Tiny, tiny, tiny but able to belt out a pretty loud song

STREAMERTAIL (RED-BILLED) (*Trochilus polytmus polytmus*) – A spectacular hummingbird we were able to really savor on the grounds of GCE. The humming sound of those elaborate tail plumes in flight was distinctive. [E]

STREAMERTAIL (BLACK-BILLED) (*Trochilus polytmus scitulus*) – Only east of the Rio Grande River, this dark-billed subspecies has an extremely isolated range and is a strong candidate for a future split. [E]

Todidae (Todies)

JAMAICAN TODY (*Todus todus*) – The emerald sprite of the island; Vinery was a particularly good place to get close views. [E]

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – Most of our looks were birds on wires as we crossed bridges but we studied one in the scope that Peter spotted on a log out on the beach.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

JAMAICAN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes radiolatus*) – This large *Melanerpes* is widespread on the island and almost always seen in pairs. [E]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – The resident subspecies that occur in Jamaica are not well-documented at this point but likely involve dominicensis and sparverius and possibly hybrids of the two.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – We had one scream in front of the windshield in Annotto Bay and another zipped over the pool back at GCE one afternoon

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – An adult held a commanding perch on a small island just off the coast on our morning drive to the John Crow Mountains.

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)

BLACK-BILLED PARROT (*Amazona agilis*) – The endemic parrot with the more limited range, we saw it extremely well several times on Ecclesdown Road. [E]

YELLOW-BILLED PARROT (*Amazona collaria*) – Small, noisy flocks flew in front of us in excellent light as we enjoyed our field breakfast in the John Crow Mountains. [E]

OLIVE-THROATED PARAKEET (JAMAICAN) (*Eupsittula nana nana*) – We saw this birds in pairs or small flocks in a number of locations but our best looks were just off the patio at GCE.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

JAMAICAN ELAENIA (*Myiopagis cotta*) – A very responsive individual popped up in front of us in the Blue Mountains. [E]

JAMAICAN PEWEE (*Contopus pallidus*) – We were hearing them for awhile before we finally had one perch in the open up at Hardwar Gap. [E]

SAD FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus barbirostris*) – The endemic flycatcher species we encountered most often [E]

RUFOUS-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus validus*) – Our first pair at Hardwar Gap foraged remarkably close to us for quite a while. [E]

STOLID FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus stolidus stolidus*) – We had a very responsive bird on our afternoon walk that first day at GCE but it moved on as quickly as it came in. Another singing individual was spotted thrashing a large insect below the dam at the reservoir.

GRAY KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus dominicensis*) – Our great look at the entrance gate to GCE was probably one of the first individuals to return to Jamaica to breed. Curiously, they migrate off Jamaica outside the breeding season but not so over on Puerto Rico.

LOGGERHEAD KINGBIRD (LOGGERHEAD) (*Tyrannus caudifasciatus jamaicensis*) – This regional specialty is very conspicuous on this island.

Tityridae (Tityras and Allies)

JAMAICAN BECARD (*Pachyrhamphus niger*) – This unusual flycatcher makes the most fantastic nests. We watched one female in the early stages of nest construction at GCE and saw a completed mansion up in the Blue Mountains. [E]

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

JAMAICAN VIREO (*Vireo modestus*) – The effort we made to see this endemic on day one was laughable considering how in your face they were the next day up in the Blue Mountains. [E]

BLUE MOUNTAIN VIREO (*Vireo osburni*) – One of the more challenging endemics; we all got looks eventually. [E]

BLACK-WHISKERED VIREO (*Vireo altiloquus altiloquus*) – This species only recently returned to Jamaica for the breeding season. We heard more than we saw.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

JAMAICAN CROW (*Corvus jamaicensis*) – The presence of this nest predator really got all the smaller birds riled up that first morning when it flew into the large tree near the tennis court. What wonderful gurgling calls they make. [E]

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Dozens coursed back and forth over the lagoon near Trelawny on our way back to Montego Bay.

CAVE SWALLOW (CARIBBEAN) (*Petrochelidon fulva poeciloma*) – We saw a few here and there but the big concentration was working the cove in front of the Trident Hotel on our drive to the John Crow Mountains.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

RUFOUS-THROATED SOLITAIRE (RUFOUS-THROATED) (*Myadestes genibarbis solitarius*) – In the Birds of the West Indies field guide the song is aptly described as "A hauntingly beautiful minor-key whistle." We heard quite a few when we were at elevation and had one come in for good views at Hardwar Gap.

WHITE-EYED THRUSH (*Turdus jamaicensis*) – These guys never seemed to stay in the open for everyone to get on the same bird but we eventually we all got looks. The pale eye against the warm brown head is quite striking. They are never far from a fruiting tree. [E]

WHITE-CHINNED THRUSH (*Turdus aurantius*) – Hopping Dick, as the Jamaicans call them, was frequently in the road or trail ahead of us, jumping along with its tail cocked up. [E]

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Plenty of appropriate habitat for this species

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

WORM-EATING WARBLER (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) – One bird was in view momentarily for a couple of us on our afternoon walk at GCE.

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – A daily sighting

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – A few here and there

ARROWHEAD WARBLER (*Setophaga pharetra*) – This uncommon endemic gave us multiple good looks in the Blue Mountains and the John Crow Mountains. [E]

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Seems like a big chunk of the population must winter on Jamaica.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – Another warbler we saw multiple times each day

YELLOW WARBLER (GOLDEN) (*Setophaga petechia eoa*) – A few birds were calling in the mangroves along the coast as we headed back to Montego Bay.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – Rivalled American Redstart for the most common wintering warbler

PRAIRIE WARBLER (*Setophaga discolor*) – Individuals seen on multiple days

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

BANANAQUIT (CARIBBEAN) (*Coereba flaveola flaveola*) – Jamaica is thick with these guys

YELLOW-FACED GRASSQUIT (*Tiaris olivaceus olivaceus*) – A few of these tiny birds were spotted each day.

BLACK-FACED GRASSQUIT (*Tiaris bicolor marchii*) – Less common than the previous species

ORANGEQUIT (*Euneornis campestris*) – A curious species occupying its own genus; the males are beautiful if you catch one in sunlight. [E]

GREATER ANTILLEAN BULLFINCH (*Loxigilla violacea ruficollis*) – Great looks in several locations

YELLOW-SHOULDERED GRASSQUIT (*Loxipasser anoxanthus*) – One of the endemic species we picked up on our very first walk at GCE. [E]

JAMAICAN SPINDALIS (*Spindalis nigricephala*) – The most visually conspicuous species during our morning walk in the Blue Mountains. [E]

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

ROSE-BREADED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – A lifer for Dwayne! A female foraged in the canopy up at Hardwar Gap.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

JAMAICAN BLACKBIRD (*Nesopsar nigerrimus*) – Wow -- I never expected to see this bird so well as we did on our walk along Ecclesdown Road!

Our first bird up at Hardwar Gap was foraging in bromeliads, which is classic for this species. [E]

GREATER ANTILLEAN GRACKLE (*Quiscalus niger crassirostris*) – The din as we drove by the roost predawn in St. Mary's near the banana chip factory was impressive.

SHINY COWBIRD (*Molothrus bonariensis*) – We only encountered one female at the reservoir.

JAMAICAN ORIOLE (*Icterus leucopteryx leucopteryx*) – They look like an Evening Grosbeak and an Icterid managed to produce offspring.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

JAMAICAN EUPHONIA (*Euphonia jamaica*) – An everyday bird [E]

MAMMALS

SMALL INDIAN MONGOOSE (*Herpestes auropunctatus*) – Unfortunately, they are fairly common on Jamaica. [I]

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 109 bird taxa and 1 mammal taxa