



Field Guides Tour Report

Jamaica II 2016

Mar 7, 2016 to Mar 13, 2016

Eric Hynes with local guide Dwayne Swaby

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



The charismatic and tiny Jamaican Tody shares the honor of favorite species for the tour with Streamertail. (Photo by guide Eric Hynes)

Thank you so much for choosing Field Guides for your Jamaica birding adventure. We completed the clean sweep of all 27 endemics and tallied a number of the regional endemics as well. We enjoyed comfortable accommodations, easy transportation, quality food, agreeable weather, and excellent camaraderie. There is no such thing as the perfect tour, but a lot of things fell into place nicely for us on this run. Our local guide, Dwayne Swaby, performed admirably for us and showed us all a good time. Thanks again to the wonderful staff at Green Castle Estate.

The tour began with Antillean Palm-Swifts. The avian acrobats that they are, these birds entertained us as they flew in and out of the Royal Palm at the airport. All of us and our luggage arrived without a hitch, so we were able to start our journey east on time. Green Castle Estate and the friendly staff were a welcome sight at the end of a long travel day.

Our first full day together we spent entirely on the trails of Green Castle Estate (GCE). We birded the Coffee Trail and the Cuckoo Trail before breakfast, the Waterfall Trail before lunch, and the Davey Hill loop in the afternoon. By the end of the day we had almost half the endemics on our checklist already.

Day three was our first venture into Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park; specifically, we birded in the Hardwar Gap region. Our early departure from GCE was rewarded when we came upon a pair of Crested Quail-Doves in the road. There was an audible sigh of relief from the guides once everyone was on the "Mountain Witch." Thick fog seemed to suppress bird activity, and it absolutely hampered our vision at Hardwar Gap, so we decided to cut bait and head over to Woodside. The steep descent was definitely worth our while with another handful of endemics tallied. We had my best look yet a White-eyed Thrush. One of our principle targets, Blue Mountain Vireo, put up a good fight, but thanks to Dwayne we all got the look we needed before returning to the coast. The mouth of the Wag Water River in Annotto Bay was a brief walk, but it gave the first two pages of the checklist a boost.

We traveled to the far east end of the island on day four. Ecclesdown Road in the foothills of the John Crow Mountains has a well-earned reputation for producing lots of endemics. One of the more memorable moments of the tour was standing at our breakfast lookout and watching flocks of Yellow-billed Parrots in morning light. The black-billed subspecies of Streamertail was all over the African Tulip Trees (*Spathodea campanulata*). Jamaican Blackbird was a bit of a holdout but we caught up to one nicely before turning around. Our lunch at a jerk center in Boston, the home of Jamaican jerk, was a yummy treat. We went from "Where are all the Jamaican Mangoes?" to a waterfront park full of them in Port Antonio.

Our early morning destination on day five was Vinery. The outing was a success before we ever took a step as we studied an infinitesimal Vervain

Hummingbird nest. Jamaican Tody was particularly cooperative this morning, and we had some grand views of the Blue Mountains. Before returning to GCE for lunch, we studied some shorebirds on the beach at Long Bay. In the afternoon, we took the new trail down to the reservoir and quickly added a half dozen species. Two West Indian Whistling-Ducks were the highlight. Both endemic cuckoos during the walk were noteworthy. It was fascinating to study the foraging Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo, which seemed indifferent to our presence. The last endemic for us to find was Jamaican Owl, and Dwayne's sweet spot came through for us our last night at GCE.

After an early breakfast and goodbye to the wonderful staff at GCE, we departed for Cockpit Country on day six. Our walk that morning was just what we were hoping for: vocalizing Jamaican Crows plus better looks at Black-billed Parrot, Olive-throated Parakeet, and Crested Quail-Dove. We also added a regional endemic with the Stolid Flycatcher on our walk back. After checking into our lovely hotel in Montego Bay, we ventured over to Rocklands Bird Sanctuary. The elaborate feeding station lived up to my hype as we had hummingbirds feeding from our hands and our best looks at a number of Jamaica's special birds. The intimate study of the Northern Potoo was a real bonus.

Our successful Big Sit and scrumptious breakfast at Mynt Retreat were a wonderful way to kick off our travel day. Hopefully everyone arrived home uneventfully. Enjoy spring migration, and may our birding paths cross again sooner than later.

Best,

Eric a.k.a Eagle

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*) – Lucky for us, the reservoir at GCE held two of these range-restricted species.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Four drakes paddled around the reservoir at GCE.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – This highly migratory species turned up in several locations.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – There was a huge concentration of these comical dabblers in one of the impoundments at the waste water treatment facility in Montego Bay.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – More than a dozen (predominately hens) were found on the reservoir at GCE

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*) – There was a drake and two hens on the GCE reservoir; an uncommon migrant to Jamaica.

RUDDY DUCK (RUDDY) (*Oxyura jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – The drakes were in fine breeding plumage with their remarkably blue bills.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – A few here and there

Fregatidae (Frigatebirds)

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata magnificens*) – These masters of soaring were found along the coast daily.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

BROWN PELICAN (SOUTHERN) (*Pelecanus occidentalis occidentalis*) – Only a few were spotted, mostly toward the west end of the island

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – The individual at the mouth of the Swift River was in high breeding condition. The bill looked boldly orange.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – A few were seen more days than not

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – A common wintering bird

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – Next to Cattle Egret, this was the most common wading bird

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – We didn't pick up this species until the last day but we ended up with good looks at three of them.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Jamaica seems like a great place to be if you are a Cattle Egret.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – Our first good look was of an individual standing on a boulder in the Buff Bay River as we descended from the Blue Mountains.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A handsome adult stood at the mouth of the Swift River on our return from the John Crow Mountains.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – Several adults were roosting in the reeds at the Swift River mouth but our first took off from the mudflat at the waterfront park in Port Antonio.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – There must be a roost somewhere near GCE because we saw quite a few flying from the same direction at dawn one morning.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – "John Crow" - the most noteworthy one was a leucistic bird during our field breakfast on Ecclesdown Road.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – I recall two during the tour: a perched bird in Annotto Bay at the mouth of the Wag Water River and another soaring overhead when we were at Rocklands.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

RED-TAILED HAWK (JAMAICENSIS) (*Buteo jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – The nominate race was an everyday bird.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – Plenty -- including some with chicks

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – More days than not

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Michael picked out or first two stilts in the big pond in Salt Marsh. There were lots at the sewage treatment facility.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Our best looks were at the beach at Long Bay on our way back from Vinery.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Long Bay Beach provided our best looks at this species as well.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Wow -- pretty amazing that Susan was able to spot that cryptic nest before stepping on it!

Jacaniidae (Jacanas)

NORTHERN JACANA (*Jacana spinosa violacea*) – A couple of the pairs we encountered had chicks.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – More days than not

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – This was the most numerous shorebird we encountered.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – A common species but it is always fun to watch them chase the waves.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – Two flew passed us at Long Bay

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – We probably observed the most during our Big Sit at Mynt Retreat the last morning

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*) – It was the only tern species we witnessed but we saw them in a number of places.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Plenty [H]

WHITE-CROWNED PIGEON (*Patagioenas leucocephala*) – This species is very conspicuous in Jamaica.

RING-TAILED PIGEON (*Patagioenas caribaea*) – This large, ghostly endemic was very common in the John Crow Mountains. [E]

COMMON GROUND-DOVE (*Columbina passerina jamaicensis*) – A good look proved elusive until we got to Rocklands where they were practically underfoot [E]

CRESTED QUAIL-DOVE (*Geotrygon versicolor*) – Jamaicans know this elusive endemic as the Mountain Witch. More than a few birders leave Jamaica never having seen one. We seemed to have its number on this tour. We scored a pair on the side of the road at dawn one day, flushed quite a few, heard others, and even managed to herd one into the open on our last day. [E]

RUDDY QUAIL-DOVE (*Geotrygon montana*) – Another WOW bird -- we had a stunning male zip right by us in brilliant sunlight, illuminating its gorgeous hue.

CARIBBEAN DOVE (*Leptotila jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – This regional endemic is a real beauty. We enjoyed superb looks at Rocklands. [E]

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Numerous

ZENaida DOVE (*Zenaida aurita*) – The "Z" Dove -- we saw many pairs

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – It was fun to document this species expansion to the east.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

MANGROVE CUCKOO (*Coccyzus minor*) – We had a bird respond the first afternoon but I don't think everyone got a clean look.

CHESTNUT-BELLIED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus pluvialis*) – This whopper of a cuckoo was most obliging in the John Crow Mountains. [E]

JAMAICAN LIZARD-CUCKOO (*Coccyzus vetula*) – We did very well with this endemic species on this run, with good looks on three separate days. [E]

SMOOTH-BILLED ANI (*Crotophaga ani*) – The most memorable ani was the one following behind the farmer overturning his soil on the hill outside the little community of Section as we headed to Hardwar Gap.

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

BARN OWL (AMERICAN) (*Tyto alba furcata*) – Our view of the owl on a fencepost was as good as you can get. The flyby our first evening at dusk was a pleasant way to kick off the tour too.

Strigidae (Owls)

JAMAICAN OWL (*Pseudoscops grammicus*) – Thank goodness we made the effort our last evening at GCE because the roosting bird at Rocklands was nowhere to be found. [E]

Nyctibiidae (Potoos)

NORTHERN POTOO (CARIBBEAN) (*Nyctibius jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – It was a pleasure to have the bird on the utility pole most mornings predawn. The look we had our last afternoon couldn't be beat. [E]

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-COLLARED SWIFT (*Streptoprocne zonaris pallidifrons*) – One of the many species Julie first spotted for us. Three of these majestic swifts buzzed us in Port Antonio at the waterfront park.

ANTILLEAN PALM-SWIFT (*Tachornis phoenicobia phoenicobia*) – These dynamic fliers entertained the group waiting for the start of the tour as they zipped in and out of the Royal Palm at the airport.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

JAMAICAN MANGO (*Anthracothorax mango*) – I was surprised it took us a couple days to catch up to this endemic but we had them in spades in

Port Antonio. [E]

VERVAIN HUMMINGBIRD (*Mellisuga minima minima*) – One of the smallest birds in the world; this diminutive hummer is quite a singer and we were lucky enough to see an active nest. [E]

STREAMERTAIL (RED-BILLED) (*Trochilus polytmus polytmus*) – This spectacular endemic earned a tie for the bird of the tour. It didn't hurt that we had them perching on our fingers! They seemed to favor the Hong Kong Orchid Trees (which is a *Bauhinia x blakeana* hybrid cultivar). [E]

STREAMERTAIL (BLACK-BILLED) (*Trochilus polytmus scitulus*) – This subspecies has a longer tail in addition to the darker bill and restricted range. A number of experts feel this split is a matter of time. They seemed to show a strong affinity for the African Tulip Trees (*Spathodea campanulata*) along Ecclesdown Road. [E]

Todidae (Todies)

JAMAICAN TODY (*Todus todus*) – You gotta love todies! This family used to have a wide distribution but is now restricted to just five species in the Greater Antilles. It tied for the species of the tour. [E]

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – Julie spotted one on the Buff Bay River but the whole group didn't catch up to one until the last day as we approached Montego Bay.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

JAMAICAN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes radiolatus*) – This is a really good-looking *Melanerpes*. They are widespread on Jamaica and the only regularly occurring woodpecker. A few migrant Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers show up on the island but I have yet to see one. [E]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (HISPANIOLAN) (*Falco sparverius dominicensis*) – Most of the birds we encountered were likely from this subspecies with a range limited to Jamaica and Hispaniola. It is certainly possible that the Cuban subspecies and North American migrants are on the island as well.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – We did pretty well with Merlins on this run. Hop spotted our first high up on the ridgeline. The one that buzzed the Mynt Retreat during our Big Sit was thrilling too.

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)

BLACK-BILLED PARROT (*Amazona agilis*) – Our first pair in the John Crow Mountains were barely identifiable in the scope. Thankfully, we "cleaned" up that species nicely in Cockpit Country. [E]

YELLOW-BILLED PARROT (*Amazona collaria*) – The large flocks of these more colorful parrots in the golden light of the early morning on Ecclesdown Road will not soon be forgotten. [E]

OLIVE-THROATED PARAKEET (JAMAICAN) (*Eupsittula nana nana*) – Our best views by far were in Cockpit Country. This is another endemic subspecies that stands a pretty good chance of being split. It might end up an armchair lifer down the road. [E]

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

JAMAICAN ELAENIA (*Myiopagis cotta*) – Elaenias are better looking than your average flycatcher and this endemic is a standout among elaenias. [E]

JAMAICAN PEWEE (*Contopus pallidus*) – We had some killer looks at this endemic flycatcher. [E]

SAD FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus barbirostris*) – An everyday bird [E]

RUFOUS-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus validus*) – This substantial *Myiarchus* gave a number of good looks. A few of us watched one choke down a whole katydid! [E]

STOLID FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus stolidus stolidus*) – We didn't catch up to this regional endemic until the last day. [E]

LOGGERHEAD KINGBIRD (LOGGERHEAD) (*Tyrannus caudifasciatus jamaicensis*) – It is THE "wire fly" in Jamaica in winter. We saw plenty on a daily basis. [E]

Tityridae (Tityras and Allies)

JAMAICAN BECARD (*Pachyrhamphus niger*) – Almost an everyday bird but never numerous [E]

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

JAMAICAN VIREO (*Vireo modestus*) – We enjoyed a particularly responsive individual on our very first walk at GCE. [E]

BLUE MOUNTAIN VIREO (*Vireo osburni*) – Dwayne and I started to show a little sweat on our brow about this endemic. The thick fog was not helping our cause. Thankfully, Dwayne eventually tracked one down for us. [E]

BLACK-WHISKERED VIREO (*Vireo altiloquus altiloquus*) – We heard so many of these singing we probably started tuning them out [E]

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

JAMAICAN CROW (*Corvus jamaicensis*) – This endemic isn't anything special to look at but what an awesome vocal repertoire. As promised Julie, check out the track at the end of this triplist to hear my recording. Be sure to have your volume up. [E]

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – A few here and there

CAVE SWALLOW (CARIBBEAN) (*Petrochelidon fulva poeciloma*) – Surprisingly, the only one I can recall is the bird that glided over GCE at the end of one of our outings. [E]

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

RUFOUS-THROATED SOLITAIRE (RUFOUS-THROATED) (*Myadestes genibarbis solitarius*) – Thanks for the reminders Rick! Despite the less-than-optimistic guides, we all enjoyed great looks at this bird with the incredible voice. [E]

WHITE-EYED THRUSH (*Turdus jamaicensis*) – Our first one was definitely our best look. Usually, we are straining to look through a canopy to see this thrush that likes to eat fruit. We had a remarkably cooperative bird in the road at Woodside. I wonder if the fog aided us in that situation? [E]

WHITE-CHINNED THRUSH (*Turdus aurantius*) – "Hoppy Dick" -- we saw many [E]

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Conspicuous

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

OVENBIRD (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – One was working the edges of the forest at Rocklands

WORM-EATING WARBLER (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) – We had great success with this species during our tour. We saw multiple birds on multiple days. I've never seen one coming to a banana feeder before?!

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – Heard birds in several locations; I am not sure anyone got eyes on this species though [E]

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – Multiple good looks

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Several locations held multiple birds

ARROWHEAD WARBLER (*Setophaga pharetra*) – We did really well with this endemic. A few foraging birds seemed indifferent to our presence. [E]

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – If not the most numerous wintering warbler, certainly the most conspicuous

CAPE MAY WARBLER (*Setophaga tigrina*) – I tried to turn a bunch of birds into this striking warbler but it was Doug who finally spotted the real thing our last morning together.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – Almost an everyday bird

YELLOW WARBLER (GOLDEN) (*Setophaga petechia eoa*) – We had great looks on Robins Bay Road

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) – Chestnut-sided Warbler might be a common bird for some in appropriate habitat at home during the breeding season but is a rare migrant on Jamaica. Nice pick Doug!

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – Runner-up to American Redstart for most common wintering warbler

PALM WARBLER (WESTERN) (*Setophaga palmarum palmarum*) – The "habitat" wasn't classic but the look we got at this bird couldn't be beat.

PRAIRIE WARBLER (*Setophaga discolor*) – We enjoyed quite a few looks at this sharp warbler but none finer than the bird just beyond reach in the waterfront park in Port Antonio.

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

BANANAQUIT (CARIBBEAN) (*Coereba flaveola flaveola*) – Loads of these frenetic little beasts [E]

YELLOW-FACED GRASSQUIT (*Tiaris olivaceus olivaceus*) – What a sharp-looking little bird

BLACK-FACED GRASSQUIT (*Tiaris bicolor marchii*) – The female of this species is about as nondescript as birds get

ORANGEQUIT (*Euneornis campestris*) – It's the only member of its genus. In good light, the males are a gorgeous hue of indigo. [E]

GREATER ANTILLEAN BULLFINCH (*Loxigilla violacea ruficollis*) – Another regional endemic [E]

YELLOW-SHOULDERED GRASSQUIT (*Loxipasser anoxanthus*) – The bird books do not do this species justice as to how beautiful it is. [E]

JAMAICAN SPINDALIS (*Spindalis nigricephala*) – Some serious eye candy; our first good look in the scope on the start of the Waterfall Trail produced lots of oohs and aaahs. [E]

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

JAMAICAN BLACKBIRD (*Nesopsar nigerrimus*) – This is one of the endemics that can give a guide an ulcer but we eventually had good looks on Ecclesdown Road. [E]

GREATER ANTILLEAN GRACKLE (*Quiscalus niger crassirostris*) – The ones in the bird bath were quite entertaining and all the various sounds they make were interesting as well. [E]

SHINY COWBIRD (*Molothrus bonariensis*) – We finally had good looks at Rocklands

JAMAICAN ORIOLE (*Icterus leucopteryx leucopteryx*) – This is one of the more striking regional endemics [E]

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

JAMAICAN EUPHONIA (*Euphonia jamaica*) – Sounds like a car engine that just won't turn over [E]

MAMMALS

NORWAY (BROWN) RAT (*Rattus norvegicus*) – We saw one scurrying around at the waterfront park in Port Antonio. [I]

SMALL INDIAN MONGOOSE (*Herpestes auropunctatus*) – Sadly, we saw these hyperkinetic predators regularly. [I]

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

You were a merry bunch of beautiful birders and I feel lucky to have had the privilege to be your guide. It was a pleasure birding with each of you. I hope you have a happy and healthy spring and our birding paths overlap again some day.

--Eric a.k.a. Eagle

Totals for the tour: 110 bird taxa and 2 mammal taxa