



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Jamaica II 2017**

Mar 5, 2017 to Mar 11, 2017

Eric Hynes with local guide Dwayne Swaby

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



*This splendid male Orangequit was one of many cooperative individuals at our last stop. Photo by guide Eric Hynes.*

My thanks to our group for choosing Field Guides for your Jamaican birding adventure! Dwayne and I very much enjoyed showing you all the fabulous birds found only on Jamaica, and I hope that our squeaky clean sweep of the endemics sent you all home happy.

On our first full day together on the island we awoke to a tremendous gale. Despite the challenging conditions, we managed to spot a dozen of the endemics on the trails of Green Castle Estate (GCE) before lunch. Favorites among the lifers were Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo and Jamaican Tody. After our blustery morning, we wised up in the afternoon and headed down to the sheltered reservoir to get out of the wind. Four West Indian Whistling-Ducks, a regional specialty, highlighted the list of waterbirds we picked up there.

That big storm dropped a huge amount of rain on the Blue Mountains. We witnessed a staggering volume of water rushing down the Buff Bay River as we wound our way up to Hardwar Gap on our second morning. Dense and persistent fog was the challenge of the day when we finally reached our destination at over 4000 feet. What a surprise to see that Osprey perched on a snag and being harassed by a Streamertail! Our most important prize before descending was an obliging Jamaican Blackbird, often a touch species to find.

Day three started predawn with perched and calling Northern Potoos. A delightful walk at Vinery yielded our only White-eyed Thrush of the trip, plus a cooperative pair of Jamaican Becards, super close Jamaican Todies, and a Jamaican Mango nest. On our way back to GCE, we stopped at Annotto Bay for some shorebirding at the mouth of the Wag Water River. We were thrilled to discover an American Golden-Plover, which is a real rarity on Jamaica and was a lifer for Dwayne. The cherry on top at the end of this great day was a successful outing for Jamaican Owl.

We then headed to the eastern end of the island for day four. The foothills of the John Crow Mountains are well known for species richness, and they lived up to reputation with some Black-billed Parrots, a pair of Chestnut-bellied Cuckoos, and Jamaican Crows before we could even get breakfast started. The Black-billed subspecies of Streamertail was a necessary tick as it seems destined to be split. The unquestionable high point of the outing came when Dwayne spotted the elusive Crested Quail-Dove walking in the road way ahead of us. We celebrated our success with the best Jamaican Jerk around for lunch in Boston Bay. Our return toward GCE was interrupted with pleasant stops in Port Antonio, at the Swift River Bridge, and at Annotto Bay again.

We spent our last morning at GCE trying to clean up Jamaican Elaenia. While that species remained elusive for the time being, we saw quite a few of the endemics again well before packing up and heading for Cockpit Country. Almost immediately out of the bus, we then scored a very cooperative pair of

Jamaican Elaenias to complete the clean sweep! For the grand finale, we made our way to the far side of Montego Bay and savored the intimate experience that is Bird Sanctuary. A gleaming Streamertail on your finger is an unforgettable experience.

Predictably, Jamaican Tody was voted the favorite. Runners-up were Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo and Jamaican Owl. Thanks again for being such an agreeable and fun-loving bunch of beautiful birders. I sincerely hope our birding paths cross again someday.

Best,

Eric

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#### 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

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## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**WEST INDIAN WHISTLING-DUCK** (*Dendrocygna arborea*) – The reservoir at GCE held four of these handsome and hard to come by ducks.

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*) – Just one at the GCE reservoir

**BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas discors*) – Seen well at multiple locations

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*) – By the hundreds at the Montego Bay sewage ponds

**RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*) – About a dozen at the GCE reservoir were probably thinking about migrating north soon

**RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – Great looks at these comical divers

### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**LEAST GREBE** (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Just a few at the Montego Bay sewage ponds

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Never numerous but found at a couple sites

### Fregatidae (Frigatebirds)

**MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD** (*Fregata magnificens*) – A couple looked odd and enormous perched atop utility poles

### Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

**BROWN PELICAN (SOUTHERN)** (*Pelecanus occidentalis occidentalis*) – Impressive beasts

### Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

**GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) – A few wintering birds were seen well

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*) – Common

**SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*) – Our best views were from the Swift River Bridge

**LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulea*) – You would think I would get used to it by now but I still get surprised to see these guys along the river well inland and fairly high in elevation on the Blue Mountains field trip

**TRICOLORED HERON** (*Egretta tricolor*) – Just one individual for the trip materialized out of nowhere and flew by us in Annotto Bay

**CATTLE EGRET** (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Conspicuous in many places around the island

**GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*) – The two birds that flew up and settled back down out of view at GCE reservoir were the only sightings of the tour

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Two individuals in flight were the only encounters with this species

**YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – We enjoyed excellent scope views of an adult and a subadult at the Swift River Bridge

### Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

**GLOSSY IBIS** (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Seen on the north coast closer to Montego Bay

### Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*) – "John Crow" was a constant companion in Jamaica. How cool was it to see that leucistic bird on our descent in the Blue Mountains?!

### Pandionidae (Osprey)

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – The perched bird in the fog up at Hardwar Gap must have been displaced by the big storm. I bet there aren't many people who have observed a Streamertail harassing an Osprey.

### Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**RED-TAILED HAWK (JAMAICENSIS)** (*Buteo jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – We had nice looks of soaring birds on a couple occasions

### Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

**COMMON GALLINULE** (*Gallinula galeata*) – This species was present at every freshwater site we visited.

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*) – Caribbean Coot is no longer considered a valid taxa so we saw "white-shield" and "red-shield" birds but all from just one species

### Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

**BLACK-NECKED STILT** (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Good looks at GCE reservoir and many birds at Montego Bay sewage ponds

### Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – We observed up to a dozen birds on the beach at Annotto Bay.

**AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER** (*Pluvialis dominica*) – According to eBird, this is only the third record for the species for Jamaica! We studied this rarity through the scope, among Black-bellied Plovers, at Annotto Bay.

**SEMPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Several in the distance at Annotto Bay

#### Jacaniidae (Jacanas)

**NORTHERN JACANA** (*Jacana spinosa violacea*) – Our best looks were in the little pond at Annotto Bay

#### Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*) – These handsome shorebirds were molting into breeding plumage

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*) – Just a few roosting birds at Annotto Bay

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*) – Multiple sites but never numerous

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*) – About a half dozen were working the edge of the impoundment at Montego Bay wastewater facility

#### Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

**LAUGHING GULL** (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Several concentrations along the coast; likely a mix of migrant and resident birds

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus fuscus*) – A "red light" rarity! We scored only the second record (according to eBird) for this species in Jamaica while stuck in Montego Bay traffic.

**ROYAL TERN** (*Thalasseus maximus*) – Common along the coast

#### Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

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

**WHITE-CROWNED PIGEON** (*Patagioenas leucocephala*) – You can't beat the looks we got from the rooftop deck at Mynt Retreat [N]

**RING-TAILED PIGEON** (*Patagioenas caribaea*) – This species is normally more conspicuous than during our five days of birding but we caught up to some on our drive up in the Blue Mountains and cleaned it up on Ecclesdown Road [E]

**COMMON GROUND-DOVE** (*Columbina passerina jamaicensis*) – Practically underfoot at Rockland's

**CRESTED QUAIL-DOVE** (*Geotrygon versicolor*) – "Mountain Witch" -- This one lived up to its reputation as one of Jamaica's hardest endemics to see but our persistence was rewarded with a single bird doing its herky-jerky walk in the road. [E]

**RUDDY QUAIL-DOVE** (*Geotrygon montana*) – We never spotted one sitting still but we enjoyed several brilliant flashes of cinnamon wings as they exploded off the shoulder of the road a couple times.

**CARIBBEAN DOVE** (*Leptotila jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – You can't improve upon the looks we had at Rockland's; that iridescent nape was special.

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** (*Zenaida asiatica*) – This species was most conspicuous in the Montego Bay area.

**ZENAIDA DOVE** (*Zenaida aurita*) – Common

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*) – A pair loves to sit in the road just after leaving the highway

#### Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

**SMOOTH-BILLED ANI** (*Crotophaga ani*) – We came upon small flocks on most days

**MANGROVE CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus minor*) – We enjoyed a great look at a responsive bird on our afternoon walk at GCE.

**CHESTNUT-BELLIED CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus pluvialis*) – We had barely gotten out of the van before a pair swooped in at Ecclesdown Road; another bird in the scope farther up the road was frosting on the cake. [E]

**JAMAICAN LIZARD-CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus vetula*) – One of the endemics we saw well the first morning despite the wind [E]

#### Strigidae (Owls)

**JAMAICAN OWL** (*Pseudoscops grammicus*) – Your guides breathed a huge sigh of relief when we were able to call in a cooperative pair [E]

#### Nyctibiidae (Potoos)

**NORTHERN POTOO (CARIBBEAN)** (*Nyctibius jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – It was fun to hear them calling predawn but the bird on the day roost was tops.

#### Apodidae (Swifts)

**WHITE-COLLARED SWIFT** (*Streptoprocne zonaris pallidifrons*) – These massive swifts zipped around the windmill tower at GCE.

**ANTILLEAN PALM-SWIFT** (*Tachornis phoenicobia phoenicobia*) – I observed more of these narrow speedsters on this tour than on any of my previous trips to Jamaica. The two dozen zipping in and out of the Royal Palm in downtown Annotto Bay gave us our best looks. [N]

#### Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

**JAMAICAN MANGO** (*Anthracothorax mango*) – Finding a bird on a nest was particularly thrilling and a first for our local guide Dwayne [EN]

**VERVAIN HUMMINGBIRD** (*Mellisuga minima minima*) – One of the smallest birds in the world -- The individual foraging so close on the blossoms of a *Rubus* sp. came up in the Blue Mountains was fantastic.

**STREAMERTAIL (RED-BILLED)** (*Trochilus polytmus polytmus*) – "Doctorbird" -- Jamaica's national bird. This absolutely stunning creature couldn't have been more obliging at Rockland's. [E]

**STREAMERTAIL (BLACK-BILLED)** (*Trochilus polytmus scitulus*) – This remarkable bird can only be found in the northeastern corner of Jamaica. This taxa is a strong candidate for a split. [E]

#### Todidae (Todies)

**JAMAICAN TODY** (*Todus todus*) – These charismatic sprites were always "sneezing." [E]

#### Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Just a few

#### Picidae (Woodpeckers)

**JAMAICAN WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes radiolatus*) – This large, heavy-billed, dark *Melanerpes* was present in every forested patch we visited. [E]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**AMERICAN KESTREL (HISPANIOLAN)** (*Falco sparverius dominicensis*) – This subspecies exhibits a wide range of plumage variability. We stopped for an immaculate white-bellied individual.

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – Raymond came through for us on this species in the last hour (literally). He spotted one perched across the impoundment and the falcon held its perch long enough for scope views.

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)

**BLACK-BILLED PARROT** (*Amazona agilis*) – This endemic joined us for breakfast in the foothills of the John Crow Mountains. [E]

**YELLOW-BILLED PARROT** (*Amazona collaria*) – Normally the easier of the two endemic parrots to observe; everyone eventually enjoyed good scope views. [E]

**GREEN-RUMPED PARROTLET** (*Forpus passerinus*) – Dwayne spotted an individual teed up at Ecclesdown that we were able to scope. We marveled at the brilliant hue in the wing of this parrot that was hit by a shrink ray. [I]

**OLIVE-THROATED PARAKEET (JAMAICAN)** (*Eupsittula nana nana*) – The cooperative birds eating blossoms in Port Antonio were a treat.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

**JAMAICAN ELAENIA** (*Myiopagis cotta*) – The last species we needed to complete the clean sweep. A very active pair presented themselves almost immediately when we arrived in Cockpit Country. One bird even gave some of us a flash of its yellow crown stripe. [E]

**JAMAICAN PEWEE** (*Contopus pallidus*) – This species was most conspicuous in the Blue Mountains. [E]

**SAD FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus barbirostris*) – We enjoyed a number of great looks at this endemic *Myiarchus* flycatcher. [E]

**RUFOUS-TAILED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus validus*) – This was the heftier of the two endemic *Myiarchus* flycatchers. [E]

**STOLID FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus stolidus stolidus*) – Our best looks at this regional endemic were in the "12 acre curve" section of GCE.

**LOGGERHEAD KINGBIRD (LOGGERHEAD)** (*Tyrannus caudifasciatus jamaicensis*) – One of the most obliging species anywhere

Tityridae (Tityras and Allies)

**JAMAICAN BECARD** (*Pachyrhamphus niger*) – The frenetic window washer vocalization [E]

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

**BLUE MOUNTAIN VIREO** (*Vireo osburni*) – This endemic didn't reveal itself as easily as some of the others but we caught up to this species in several locations eventually. [E]

**JAMAICAN VIREO** (*Vireo modestus*) – This is one vociferous bird [E]

**BLACK-WHISKERED VIREO** (*Vireo altiloquus altiloquus*) – Several birds singing away on our first morning along the Waterfall Trail [\*]

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

**JAMAICAN CROW** (*Corvus jamaicensis*) – They may not be anything special to look at but their calls are simply the best! [E]

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – We had excellent looks as they swirled all around us at Reed Pond at the entrance to GCE.

**CAVE SWALLOW (CARIBBEAN)** (*Petrochelidon fulva poeciloma*) – These birds were also swirling all around us at Reed Pond

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**RUFOUS-THROATED SOLITAIRE (RUFOUS-THROATED)** (*Myadestes genibarbis solitarius*) – It was a treat to see such a handsome bird that we often only hear

**WHITE-EYED THRUSH** (*Turdus jamaicensis*) – Never numerous; this species was noticeably inconspicuous this trip [E]

**WHITE-CHINNED THRUSH** (*Turdus aurantius*) – Plenty everywhere, particularly in the road [E]

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Common

Sturnidae (Starlings)

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Only in Montego Bay; we had several birds teed up our last morning [I]

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

**OVENBIRD** (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – Individuals at multiple sites

**WORM-EATING WARBLER** (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) – Cheryl spotted our only one on Ecclesdown Road

**LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia motacilla*) – Thanks to the tremendous rain the night before, this stream-foraging species was out using the rivulets in the road at dawn as we climbed up into the Blue Mountains. I bet they are all on their way north to the breeding grounds by now.

**NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – One bird was chipping away at the corner of the wetland in Annotto Bay [\*]

**BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** (*Mniotilta varia*) – Several each day in the forests

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Only one bird as we enjoyed our porridge at Hardwar Gap

**ARROWHEAD WARBLER** (*Setophaga pharetra*) – The salt-and-pepper endemic was easy to come by this year [E]

**AMERICAN REDSTART** (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – The most common wintering warbler, by far

**CAPE MAY WARBLER** (*Setophaga tigrina*) – What a treat to look down on males and females our last morning

**NORTHERN PARULA** (*Setophaga americana*) – Runner-up to American Redstart for abundance

**MAGNOLIA WARBLER** (*Setophaga magnolia*) – Just one individual persistently working the white-blossomed tree across the street from the Mynt Retreat

**BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – You can't beat the looks we enjoyed at Rockland's

**PALM WARBLER (WESTERN)** (*Setophaga palmarum palmarum*) – Our first was at Errol Flynn Marina in Port Antonio but our best looks came with the individual foraging all around us during breakfast our last morning

**PRAIRIE WARBLER** (*Setophaga discolor*) – Lots of tail bobbing from these warblers

**BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER** (*Setophaga virens*) – Only a few people spotted this bird at the Swift River Bridge

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

**BANANAQUIT (CARIBBEAN)** (*Coereba flaveola flaveola*) – Lots and lots and lots

**YELLOW-FACED GRASSQUIT** (*Tiaris olivaceus olivaceus*) – The facial pattern of the male is quite striking

**BLACK-FACED GRASSQUIT** (*Tiaris bicolor marchii*) – About as plain as it gets but still fun to see

**ORANGEQUIT** (*Euneornis campestris*) – This curious species can be found all over the island. The male's indigo hue is special. [E]

**GREATER ANTILLEAN BULLFINCH** (*Loxigilla violacea ruficollis*) – This species was thin on the ground this year

**YELLOW-SHOULDERED GRASSQUIT** (*Loxipasser anoxanthus*) – Carol got to clean up this endemic while we were waiting for our jerk lunch [E]

**JAMAICAN SPINDALIS** (*Spindalis nigricephala*) – The males are stunning [E]

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

**JAMAICAN BLACKBIRD** (*Nesopsar nigerrimus*) – It only takes one bird to make the list and that is all we got. Thank goodness it started calling and emerged out of the fog. [E]

**GREATER ANTILLEAN GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus niger crassirostris*) – They make wonderful sounds and are fond of the birdbath at GCE

**SHINY COWBIRD** (*Molothrus bonariensis*) – We saw some at the east end of the island and had a few in close at Rockland's

**JAMAICAN ORIOLE** (*Icterus leucopteryx leucopteryx*) – "Auntie Katie" -- The Evening Grosbeak of Icterids. Outside of Jamaica, it remains only on the tiny island of San Andres off the coast of Nicaragua.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

**JAMAICAN EUPHONIA** (*Euphonia jamaica*) – The little car that won't turn over song; in silhouette there is no doubt it is a Euphonia but in good light the silvery gray and lime green plumage is unusual compared to its cousins [E]

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## MAMMALS

**SMALL INDIAN MONGOOSE** (*Herpestes auropunctatus*) – We saw this introduced menace daily. [I]

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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**Totals for the tour: 113 bird taxa and 1 mammal taxa**