



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Jamaica II 2019**

Mar 3, 2019 to Mar 9, 2019

Eric Hynes & local guide Dwayne Swaby

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



*Jamaican Tody was voted the favorite bird of the tour in a landslide. These charismatic sprites won us over with their vivid colors, bold behavior, and silly vocalizations.  
Photo by guide Eric Hynes.*

Thank you very much for choosing Field Guides for your birding adventure in Jamaica. It was a pleasure birding with all of you. Hopefully you enjoyed birding in Jamaica as much as I do.

Our first day together was primarily focused on getting into position. Two birds stand out however: the pair of Jamaican Crows perched in Runaway Bay and the pair of Northern Potoos that joined us for dessert.

The next morning the endemics came fast and furious on the trails of Green Castle Estate (GCE). Yellow-shouldered Grassquit, Jamaican Tody, Streamertail, Sad Flycatcher, Jamaican Elaenia, Jamaican Woodpecker and Jamaican Vireo were on the list before we even sat down for breakfast. As the day went on, we continued to tally more endemics: White-chinned Thrush, Orangequit, Jamaican Mango, Rufous-tailed Flycatcher, Jamaican Euphonia and Jamaican Becard. A walk down to the reservoir seriously padded our day list with a number of waterbirds. Coots, grebes and ducks were on the water, while Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, Black-necked Stilts and an unexpected Solitary Sandpiper dotted the shore.

Day three began early as we headed to the far eastern end of the island. The John Crow Mountains are the only place where all the endemics can be found. We did not accomplish a sweep in one day (has it ever been done?) but we picked up a number of tricky targets along Ecclesdown Road. Dwayne's trained eyes found us a perched Crested Quail-Dove, the sometimes tricky Jamaican Blackbird showed up almost immediately, a Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo flew right in front of us with a lizard in its bill, we had scope views of the black-billed subspecies of Streamertail, and flocks of Yellow-billed Parrots kept flying by. After an exciting morning in the foothills, we descended to Boston Bay and enjoyed a traditional jerk meal of jerk chicken and pork, plus bammy, festival and other Jamaican treats. The hummingbirds in Port Antonio and the shorebirds at the mouth of the Spanish River helped break up our drive back to GCE and added to our rapidly growing list.

On Wednesday morning we made our way up to Vinery for a pleasant walk. Unquestionably, the highlight of the outing was the multiple encounters with cooperative pairs of Jamaican Tody. Several individuals were so close it seemed as if you could reach out and touch them. Back down in Annotto

Bay we added Black-bellied Plover, Osprey, and Northern Jacana to our trip list at the mouth of the Wag Water River. Our afternoon was spent returning to the reservoir at GCE, a habitat tough to come by in Jamaica. After dinner, we took a good day and turned it great by scoring a pair of Jamaican Owls.

Hardwar Gap, up in the Blue Mountains, was our destination for day four. A Crested Quail-Dove walking in the road, a gorgeous male Jamaican Spindalis perched and a Sad Flycatcher at our feet got the outing off to a great start. Hearing and then seeing a Rufous-throated Solitaire was a highlight for many. The bird of the day however, was the obliging Blue Mountain Vireo. I don't think any of us will forget that individual pausing on the broad leaf in the open. Hearing from David Twyman about the operation at Old Tavern Coffee Estate during a tasting was interesting.

Still needing Black-billed Parrot to complete the sweep of endemic species, our destination for our final full day together was Cockpit Country. We managed to score the last target even before we arrived at our birding site -- another clean sweep! It sure made that walk more relaxed from a guide's perspective. Wilson's Plover, Willet, Least Sandpiper, Sandwich Tern, and Lesser Yellowlegs were all added as we made our way back to Montego Bay. We rounded out our adventure with a visit to Rocklands Bird Sanctuary. It was thrilling to be among so many native birds.

I would like to give a special thanks to all the wonderful Jamaicans I get to work with on this tour who worked so hard to make your experience in their country special. I am truly grateful to be working with local guide Dwayne Swaby, driver Raymond Condappa, the staff at GCE, as well as the staff at Mynt Retreat. I hope I get to bird with all of you again someday.

Cheers,

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).

**BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Spatula discors*) – We first saw a few at the reservoir at GCE but counted quite a few more in Montego Bay

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Spatula clypeata*) – The concentration on the impoundments at the Montego Bay sewage treatment plant is remarkable

**RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*) – Good scope views at the GCE reservoir

**LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*) – One hen was an unexpected surprise on the GCE reservoir

**RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – The blue bills of the drakes practically glow

#### Podicipedidae (Grebes).

**LEAST GREBE** (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Seen well at GCE reservoir

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Less conspicuous than the previous species but also at GCE reservoir

#### Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Most seen while we were in transit [I]

**WHITE-CROWNED PIGEON** (*Patagioenas leucocephala*) – A common bird across much of Jamaica

**RING-TAILED PIGEON** (*Patagioenas caribaea*) – Dwayne showed us a bird on a nest in the Blue Mountains [E]

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

**CRESTED QUAIL-DOVE** (*Geotrygon versicolor*) – The "Mountain Witch" - we had excellent luck with this challenging endemic. Dwayne did a marvelous job of spotting our first, then we came across one showing off its shaky gait in the Blue Mountains and yet another perched bird that Al spotted! [E]

**RUDDY QUAIL-DOVE** (*Geotrygon montana*) – Most sightings were the typical rapid flyby but the bright rufous plumage was evident, even with our quick glimpses

**CARIBBEAN DOVE** (*Leptotila jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – This reclusive species was anything but at Rocklands

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** (*Zenaida asiatica*) – All over

**ZENAIDA DOVE** (*Zenaida aurita*) – Common "yard bird"

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*) – A quick detour added this species to our list

#### Cuculidae (Cuckoos).

**SMOOTH-BILLED ANI** (*Crotophaga ani*) – These guys make some funny sounds

**MANGROVE CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus minor*) – This species was heard only during one of our walks at GCE [\*]

**CHESTNUT-BELLIED CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus pluvialis*) – An impressively large cuckoo; one of its vocalizations sounds like somebody with a belly ache [E]

**JAMAICAN LIZARD-CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus vetula*) – We had dramatic encounters on multiple days with this dynamic endemic, including a bird flying right in front of us with a lizard in its beak! [E]

#### Nyctibiidae (Potoos).

**NORTHERN POTOO (CARIBBEAN)** (*Nyctibius jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – This impressive nocturnal insectivore showed up during dessert our first night on cue

#### Apodidae (Swifts).

**WHITE-COLLARED SWIFT** (*Streptoprocne zonaris pallidifrons*) – A few birds buzzed the hilltop at GCE but the standout in my mind was the dynamic flock whirling up into the clouds over the Blue Mountains

**ANTILLEAN PALM-SWIFT** (*Tachornis phoenicobia phoenicobia*) – We observed this aerial speedster on multiple occasions but never far from a Royal Palm (their preferred nesting site)

*Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)*

**JAMAICAN MANGO** (*Anthracothorax mango*) – Big, dark and beautiful; the views in Port Antonio were the best [E]

**VERVAIN HUMMINGBIRD** (*Mellisuga minima minima*) – Vocal and tiny; we enjoyed great views immediately around the estate house at GCE

**STREAMERTAIL (RED-BILLED)** (*Trochilus polytmus polytmus*) – "The Doctorbird" - Jamaica's national bird. What a thrill to have these gorgeous hummers alight on our fingers! [E]

**STREAMERTAIL (BLACK-BILLED)** (*Trochilus polytmus scitulus*) – This distinct subspecies is only found in the easternmost portion of the island. Hybrids are reported so perhaps that is why it has not been split yet. [E]

*Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)*

**SORA** (*Porzana carolina*) – One silent bird was foraging along the distant shoreline at the GCE reservoir. Unfortunately, it appeared in the scope for only a couple of us.

**COMMON GALLINULE** (*Gallinula galeata*) – Nancy spotted one on a nest at the Spanish River Bridge

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*) – A number of them were down at the reservoir at GCE

*Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)*

**BLACK-NECKED STILT** (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – These elegant shorebirds lined the impoundments at Montego Bay

*Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)*

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – A few pretty far out in the scope at Annotto Bay but we enjoyed much better looks at Long Beach

**WILSON'S PLOVER** (*Charadrius wilsonia*) – We enjoyed excellent close views of this proportionally large-billed, small plover on our return trip to Montego Bay

**SEMPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Good looks on the beach as we returned to GCE

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*) – The one we observed from the Spanish River Bridge turned out to be the only one we saw

*Jacanidae (Jacanas)*

**NORTHERN JACANA** (*Jacana spinosa violacea*) – A few were in the wetland in Annotto Bay

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*) – Seen at multiple locations along the coast

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*) – We saw a fair number on our way back to Montego Bay

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*) – The reservoir at GCE is a reliable spot to find a few

**SOLITARY SANDPIPER** (*Tringa solitaria*) – We observed one in the scope down at the reservoir at GCE. This species is an uncommon migrant and wintering bird. Our sighting was a first for Field Guides tours in Jamaica.

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – We enjoyed good scope views of this large shorebird from the Spanish River Bridge

**WILLET** (*Tringa semipalmata*) – Good looks at Salt Marsh

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*) – Quite a few are attracted to the Montego Bay waste water treatment facility

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**LAUGHING GULL** (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Our best looks were during our lunch stop on the penultimate day

**ROYAL TERN** (*Thalasseus maximus*) – THE default tern along the coast

**SANDWICH TERN** (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) – About a dozen of these terns were roosting on a rooftop as we looked west from our lunch stop en route to Montego Bay

*Fregatidae (Frigatebirds)*

**MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD** (*Fregata magnificens*) – Their effortless soaring is a treat to study

*Pelecanidae (Pelicans)*

**BROWN PELICAN (SOUTHERN)** (*Pelecanus occidentalis occidentalis*) – Seen well at several spots along the coast

*Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)*

**GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) – Only a few

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*) – Seen well

**SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*) – Good looks along the coast

**LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulea*) – We couldn't have asked for a better look than the bird stalking the shoreline at our lunch stop

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

**GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*) – A few down at the reservoir at GCE

**YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – The close bird in Port Antonio was cooperative, for a time

*Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)*

**GLOSSY IBIS** (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – More common closer to Montego Bay

*Cathartidae (New World Vultures)*

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*) – Jamaicans called them "John Crow"

*Pandionidae (Osprey)*

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – The distant bird perched on a long on the beach at Annotto Bay turned out to be the only one of the tour

*Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)*



**RED-TAILED HAWK (JAMAICENSIS)** (*Buteo jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – Nice to see the nominate race

*Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)*

**BARN OWL (AMERICAN)** (*Tyto alba furcata*) – A particularly light individual held its fencepost perch predawn the day we left GCE

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**JAMAICAN OWL** (*Pseudoscops grammicus*) – Wow - what an awesome experience. It is easy to say you really enjoyed hearing it call, once we all got a good look [E]

*Todidae (Todies)*

**JAMAICAN TODY** (*Todus todus*) – These charismatic sprites were voted the favorite species of the tour and for good reason. Can you still hear the "kitten sneeze" calls? [E]

*Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – The bird flying along the shore in Port Antonio was the only one we came across the whole tour

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**JAMAICAN WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes radiolatus*) – In all forested habitats; the individual downslope at Ecclesdown Road was a standout [E]

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*

**AMERICAN KESTREL (HISPANIOLAN)** (*Falco sparverius dominicensis*) – Best looks occurred our last morning together

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – Just one flyby the final morning; they are always in a hurry it seems

*Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)*

**BLACK-BILLED PARROT** (*Amazona agilis*) – The last endemic to fall -- what a tremendous look between rain showers in Cockpit Country [E]

**YELLOW-BILLED PARROT** (*Amazona collaria*) – We had flyby after flyby in several locations [E]

**GREEN-RUMPED PARROTLET** (*Forpus passerinus*) – Harlan spotted our first investigating a potential nest cavity at GCE [I]

**OLIVE-THROATED PARAKEET (JAMAICAN)** (*Eupsittula nana nana*) – We came across this bird on numerous occasions but the scope views down at the GCE reservoir were probably the best looks

*Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)*

**JAMAICAN ELAENIA** (*Myiopagis cotta*) – Never numerous, so I was happy to get this on our first full day together [E]

**JAMAICAN PEWEE** (*Contopus pallidus*) – We always seem to see the most up in the Blue Mountains [E]

**SAD FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus barbirostris*) – This lovely flycatcher was easy to see everywhere we went [E]

**RUFOUS-TAILED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus validus*) – Few and far between, which is not our typical experience with this species [E]

**STOLID FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus stolidus stolidus*) – This regional endemic looks similar to the Sad Flycatcher but the vocalizations are noticeably different

**GRAY KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus dominicensis*) – This species is just getting back to Jamaica as a migrant; we saw one well in the scope from the rooftop deck at Mynt

**LOGGERHEAD KINGBIRD (LOGGERHEAD)** (*Tyrannus caudifasciatus jamaicensis*) – A common and conspicuous regional endemic

*Tityridae (Tityras and Allies)*

**JAMAICAN BECARD** (*Pachyrhamphus niger*) – We watched a female foraging at GCE and spotted their enormous nests [E]

*Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)*

**BLUE MOUNTAIN VIREO** (*Vireo osburni*) – Wow -- just wow. For a bird that is hard to come by, we sure savored some spectacular views in the Blue Mountains [E]

**JAMAICAN VIREO** (*Vireo modestus*) – It is hard to find a spot anywhere in Jamaica where this species does not occur [E]

**BLACK-WHISKERED VIREO** (*Vireo altiloquus altiloquus*) – This migrant was just returning and singing up a storm

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*

**JAMAICAN CROW** (*Corvus jamaicensis*) – I was a bit shocked to have this endemic be the first endemic we tallied as a group. Hearing all their wonderful calls in Cockpit Country was even better [E]

*Hirundinidae (Swallows)*

**CAVE SWALLOW (CARIBBEAN)** (*Petrochelidon fulva poeciloma*) – In flight at several locations

*Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*

**RUFOUS-THROATED SOLITAIRE (RUFOUS-THROATED)** (*Myadestes genibarbis solitarius*) – Their ethereal song is a joy to hear; even better we were fortunate enough to see one as well up in the Blue Mountains

**WHITE-EYED THRUSH** (*Turdus jamaicensis*) – Having seen this endemic along Ecclesdown Road, it was nice to improve our looks with the individual that came in up at Hardwar Gap [E]

**WHITE-CHINNED THRUSH** (*Turdus aurantius*) – "Hopping Dick" -- these endemic is common and widespread across the island [E]

*Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)*

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*) – the birds around Mynt Retreat were particularly vocal

*Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)*

**JAMAICAN EUPHONIA** (*Euphonia jamaica*) – Not your typical looking Euphonia; we had good looks on a multiple occasions but once you all tuned into their "car trying to start" vocalization, you realized how widespread this endemic is [E]

*Spindalidae (Spindalises)*

**JAMAICAN SPINDALIS** (*Spindalis nigricephala*) – The view of the male in the tree downslope early in the morning of our Blue Mountain adventure was particularly memorable [E]

*Icteridae (Troupials and Allies).*

**JAMAICAN ORIOLE** (*Icterus leucopteryx leucopteryx*) – The structure of an oriole but the plumage of an Evening Grosbeak

**JAMAICAN BLACKBIRD** (*Nesopsar nigerrimus*) – It was quite a relief to encounter this endemic straight away in the John Crow Mountain foothills

[E]

**SHINY COWBIRD** (*Molothrus bonariensis*) – We didn't catch up to this species until our visit to Rocklands

**GREATER ANTILLEAN GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus niger crassirostris*) – Common and conspicuous

*Parulidae (New World Warblers).*

**WORM-EATING WARBLER** (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) – What a look at Rocklands!

**NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – More days than not but mostly heard birds. Our best looks were in Port Antonio

**BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** (*Mniotilta varia*) – They winter in good numbers on this island

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Ecclesdown Road produced quite a few

**ARROWHEAD WARBLER** (*Setophaga pharetra*) – The "salt and pepper" warbler [E]

**AMERICAN REDSTART** (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Another species that winters in good numbers on Jamaica

**CAPE MAY WARBLER** (*Setophaga tigrina*) – Some of us had a excellent view of a male on our walk up at Vinery

**NORTHERN PARULA** (*Setophaga americana*) – Pretty easy to come by at GCE

**MAGNOLIA WARBLER** (*Setophaga magnolia*) – I recall at least one individual at GCE

**YELLOW WARBLER (GOLDEN)** (*Setophaga petechia eoa*) – We heard this warbler singing along the coast in a couple places but I am not sure anyone got one in the bins [\*]

**BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – Marvelous looks at this handsome warbler

**PRAIRIE WARBLER** (*Setophaga discolor*) – A fairly common wintering bird

*Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies).*

**BANANAQUIT (GREATER ANTILLEAN)** (*Coereba flaveola flaveola*) – "BQs" were everywhere

**YELLOW-FACED GRASSQUIT** (*Tiaris olivaceus olivaceus*) – The head pattern is quite striking on the males

**BLACK-FACED GRASSQUIT** (*Tiaris bicolor marchii*) – They were swarming over the ground at Rocklands

**ORANGEQUIT** (*Euneornis campestris*) – This endemic occupies a monotypic genus. We found them most frequently in the centers of coconut palms

[E]

**GREATER ANTILLEAN BULLFINCH** (*Melopyrrha violacea ruficollis*) – Only a few sightings this tour, less than expected

**YELLOW-SHOULDERED GRASSQUIT** (*Loxipasser anoxanthus*) – This was one of the first endemics we came across. We were challenged to see it well but hopefully everyone got a good look at some point. Their high-pitched, thin call was heard often and we discovered several nest being constructed [E]

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## MAMMALS

**SMALL INDIAN MONGOOSE** (*Herpestes auropunctatus*) – Unfortunately for the native wildlife, this energetic predator is quite common in Jamaica

[I]

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

While Jamaican Tody was the runaway favorite, Jamaican Owl, Blue Mountain Vireo, and Jamaican Spindalis tied for runner-up.

Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo and Black-billed Parrot also received multiple votes.

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**Totals for the tour: 112 bird taxa and 1 mammal taxa**