



Field Guides Tour Report

Jamaica I 2020

Feb 23, 2020 to Feb 29, 2020

Eric Hynes & local guide Dwayne Swaby

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



What a tremendous bird! We got our morning on Ecclesdown Road off to a great start when this endemic Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo posed in clear view. Photo by participant Holger Teichmann.

Thanks so much for choosing Field Guides Inc. for your Jamaica birding adventure. I hope you enjoyed our time together as much as I did.

Our first day as a whole group was primarily a travel day across the northern part of the island, from Montego Bay to Green Castle Estate (GCE) in St. Marys Parish. We picked up a few coastal species en route but unquestionably, the highlight of the day one was watching the Northern Potoo after sunset. We even managed to observe it sortie out and capture a big moth.

The birding got off to a great start when we met my dear friend and outstanding local guide, Dwayne Swaby, and hit the trails at GCE at sunrise. Rain was a factor at times during the day but we managed to tally a number of the endemics despite the weather. Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo, Jamaican Mango, Streamertail, Jamaican Tody, Jamaican Woodpecker, Sad Flycatcher, Jamaican Vireo, White-chinned Thrush, Jamaican Spindalis, Orangequit, and Yellow-shouldered Grassquit all made appearances on day two.

Tuesday morning we ventured just east of Ocho Rios to a site new to me near Dunns River Falls. We explored some lovely forested trails and picked up endemics such as Arrowhead Warbler, Jamaican Becard and Jamaican Elaenia, while "cleaning up" Jamaican Crow and Yellow-shouldered Grassquit. A noisy Louisiana Waterthrush at the site might have been saying his goodbyes as its northbound migration to the U.S. was eminent.

On February 26, we traveled to the northeast corner of Jamaica and spent the morning birding the foothills of the John Crow Mountains on Ecclesdown Road. This area is the only place in Jamaica where the "black-billed" subspecies of Streamertail occurs and we saw it well. Other highlights were Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo, Yellow-billed Parrot, White-eyed Thrush, and Ring-tailed Pigeon. We tasted some original Jamaican Jerk for lunch in Boston Bay, then picked up a few more species in Port Antonio before checking the Swift River and Spanish River bridges on our way back to GCE. After dinner, we headed out for some owling. We had little trouble hearing the endemic Jamaican Owl but seeing one proved challenging. I was rehearsing my "better luck tomorrow night" spiel when a bird called close by. Thankfully, we all ended up with good looks.

Day five had us headed up into the Blue Mountains to the Hardwar Gap area. We got another early start since our primary target was Crested Quail-Dove and we hoped to catch one on or near the road before traffic pushed them deep into the shadows. Our strategy proved fruitful as the "Mountain Witch" was one of the first birds we scored. A remarkably cooperative Blue Mountain Vireo foraging low was another memorable endemic. We scoured the coast back down in Annotto Bay in the afternoon.

Friday morning it was time to say thanks and goodbye to the wonderful staff at GCE. We set our sights on Cockpit Country and had a pleasant walk in Stewart Town and added the endemic Black-billed Parrot. Another lunch at Father Bull and then it was through Montego Bay to Rocklands Bird Sanctuary. Seeing so many birds up close, I mean really up close, is always a major highlight of the tour. We added a few more notches on the checklist at the Montego Bay waste water treatment facility, then it was off to Mynt Retreat and our farewell dinner.

Take care and stay safe out there everyone. I hope our birding paths cross again someday.

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)

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Spatula discors*) – This small dabbling wint on good numbers on Jamaica.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*) – The number of these ducks wintering at the Montego Bay Waste Water Treatment Facility is impressive.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – We enjoyed good looks at the reservoir at GCE.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – The blue bill of the drake of the little rubber ducky is striking.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LEAST GREBE (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Few and far between.

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Never numerous but seen most days.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Yes - we did see this one. [I]

WHITE-CROWNED PIGEON (*Patagioenas leucocephala*) – Common in Jamaica, especially closer to the coast.

RING-TAILED PIGEON (*Patagioenas caribaea*) – We had to get up in elevation to see this pale endemic. [E]

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

CRESTED QUAIL-DOVE (*Geotrygon versicolor*) – The "Mountain Witch" - It was a tremendous relief when Raymond finally spotted the singing bird in the canopy. Later we had even better looks on ground up in the Blue Mountains. [E]

RUDDY QUAIL-DOVE (*Geotrygon montana*) – We couldn't have asked for a better look at Rocklands Bird Sanctuary of this normally difficult bird to see.

CARIBBEAN DOVE (*Leptotila jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – What a beauty.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – An everyday bird.

ZENAIDA DOVE (*Zenaida aurita*) – Also common throughout the island.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – Tough to catch up to this species but there are a few spots where they are reliable.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

SMOOTH-BILLED ANI (*Crotophaga ani*) – More days than not we saw this odd cuckoo, which makes such funny vocalizations.

MANGROVE CUCKOO (*Coccyzus minor*) – Just up the hill from the roosting Northern Potoo, during our first walk at GCE, we heard this skulker well and some people got brief but decent looks.

CHESTNUT-BELLIED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus pluvialis*) – What a tremendous bird! Seeing this endemic so well was a great way to start our morning in the foothills of the John Crow Mountains! [E]

JAMAICAN LIZARD-CUCKOO (*Coccyzus vetula*) – I love their chattering vocalizations. This was one of the highlight endemics from our first full day of birding at GCE. [E]

Nyctibiidae (Potoos)

NORTHERN POTOO (CARIBBEAN) (*Nyctibius jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – Masters of camouflage - what a thrill to see these tremendous aerial insectivores in action right from the first night.

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-COLLARED SWIFT (*Streptoprocne zonaris pallidifrons*) – Watching these massive swifts arc and swirl over the hillside below us in the evening light was one of the more memorable moments of the tour.

ANTILLEAN PALM-SWIFT (*Tachornis phoenicobia phoenicobia*) – Narrow and fast.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

JAMAICAN MANGO (*Anthracothorax mango*) – A big, dark and beautiful hummingbird. [E]

VERVAIN HUMMINGBIRD (*Mellisuga minima minima*) – Once thought to be the smallest bird in the world; it might be tiny but it has a big voice.

STREAMERTAIL (RED-BILLED) (*Trochilus polytmus polytmus*) – "Doctorbird." The national bird of Jamaica. What a treat to have them literally eating out of our hands. [E]

STREAMERTAIL (BLACK-BILLED) (*Trochilus polytmus scitulus*) – This subspecies, restricted to the east end of the island, is a potential split. [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – More days than not.

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – Good looks at the reservoir at GCE.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – There is something oxymoronic about these elegant shorebirds concentrating at the waste water treatment facility.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – We saw one on our way into GCE on Long Beach on the first day, then oddly never caught up to the species again.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – We caught up to this migrant shorebird on the coast in Annotto Bay on our way back from Ecclesdown Road.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – An every other day bird.

Jacaniidae (Jacanas)

NORTHERN JACANA (*Jacana spinosa violacea*) – Endless toes on those lily walkers.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – The cement pilings in Annotto Bay were a favorite roosting spot for these guys.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Watching these guys chasing waves is always a thrill.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – The only ones we saw were at the Discovery Bay waste water treatment ponds en route to GCE the first day.

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

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – We enjoyed good scope views from the Spanish River Bridge.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – The more common of the two yellowlegs in Jamaica.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Plenty along the coast.

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*) – The default tern as we birded along the coast.

SANDWICH TERN (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) – This was a late addition to the list after lunch on our last day.

Fregatidae (Frigatebirds)

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata magnificens*) – Their effortless soaring is mesmerizing to watch.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

BROWN PELICAN (SOUTHERN) (*Pelecanus occidentalis occidentalis*) – Companions during our lunches at Father Bull.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – An uncommon wintering species.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Plenty.

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – More tied to wetland environments than the previous species.

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – Seen every day but never in numbers.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – We didn't catch up to this particularly lanky wader until the end of the tour.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Ubiquitous.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – Individuals seen more days than not.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – Good looks on multiple days; nice scope views down at the reservoir at GCE.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – More days than not.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – "John Crow".

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

RED-TAILED HAWK (JAMAICENSIS) (*Buteo jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – This is the nominate subspecies.

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

BARN OWL (AMERICAN) (*Tyto alba furcata*) – Who could forget that gorgeous individual in the evening light?!

Strigidae (Owls)

JAMAICAN OWL (*Pseudoscops grammicus*) – This endemic raised the anxiety level a bit and we were literally walking away when an owl called one more time and gave its position away. In the end, we had a fantastic look. [E]

Todidae (Todies)

JAMAICAN TODY (*Todus todus*) – This is just such a cool bird. Fossil records show the Tody family used to have a global distribution but have shrunk back to just five species in the Greater Antilles. [E]

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – A one day wonder on this tour.

Picidae (Woodpeckers).

JAMAICAN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes radiolatus*) – We enjoyed this bold endemic on a daily basis. [E]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras).

AMERICAN KESTREL (HISPANIOLAN) (*Falco sparverius dominicensis*) – This species does well on Jamaica. It is likely the resident breeding population is joined by some migrants in the winter.

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots).

BLACK-BILLED PARROT (*Amazona agilis*) – This endemic parrot is the more challenging of the two species. We dipped in the foothills of the John Crow Mountains. Thankfully, we caught up to it in Cockpit Country. [E]

YELLOW-BILLED PARROT (*Amazona collaria*) – We saw this more colorful endemic parrot on two different days. [E]

OLIVE-THROATED PARAKEET (JAMAICAN) (*Eupsittula nana nana*) – More research may elevate this subspecies to full species status.

Tityridae (Tityras and Allies).

JAMAICAN BECARD (*Pachyrhamphus niger*) – Good looks but never numerous. [E]

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers).

JAMAICAN ELAENIA (*Myiopagis cotta*) – A delicate little flycatcher. [E]

JAMAICAN PEWEE (*Contopus pallidus*) – Seen well in the Blue Mountains. [E]

SAD FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus barbirostris*) – This endemic flycatcher is widespread in Jamaica. [E]

RUFIOUS-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus validus*) – We enjoyed some good looks but we caught up to fewer of these than I am used to. [E]

STOLID FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus stolidus stolidus*) – Our only encounter with this endemic subspecies was on our first full day at GCE.

LOGGERHEAD KINGBIRD (LOGGERHEAD) (*Tyrannus caudifasciatus jamaicensis*) – An every day bird.

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

BLUE MOUNTAIN VIREO (*Vireo osburni*) – We heard more than we saw but wow - what fun it was to watch that individual foraging down the road up at Hardwar Gap. [E]

JAMAICAN VIREO (*Vireo modestus*) – This endemic is super vocal and widespread. [E]

BLACK-WHISKERED VIREO (*Vireo altiloquus altiloquus*) – This is one of the species that spend their non-breeding season away from Jamaica and the birds we heard/saw were just returning to breed.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies).

JAMAICAN CROW (*Corvus jamaicensis*) – The vocal repertoire of this endemic crow is so entertaining. [E]

Hirundinidae (Swallows).

CAVE SWALLOW (CARIBBEAN) (*Petrochelidon fulva poeciloma*) – The birds over the waste water treatment facility in Discovery Bay turned out to be the only ones we saw the whole tour, surprisingly.

Sturnidae (Starlings).

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – This introduced species is rare outside Montego Bay, thankfully. [I]

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers).

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Daily.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies).

RUFIOUS-THROATED SOLITAIRE (RUFIOUS-THROATED) (*Myadestes genibarbis solitarius*) – This bird has a beautiful, ethereal song that we heard well but we just couldn't pick one out of the lush vegetation in the mountains. [*]

WHITE-EYED THRUSH (*Turdus jamaicensis*) – What a wonderful singer. We saw it well along Ecclesdown Road. [E]

WHITE-CHINNED THRUSH (*Turdus aurantius*) – "Hopping Dick" is one of the most common endemics. [E]

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).

JAMAICAN EUPHONIA (*Euphonia jamaica*) – More days than not; the plumage of this endemic euphonia is not what you expect to see when you think of euphonias. [E]

Spindalidae (Spindalises).

JAMAICAN SPINDALIS (*Spindalis nigricephala*) – Endemic eye candy. [E]

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies).

JAMAICAN ORIOLE (*Icterus leucopteryx leucopteryx*) – Every time I see this bird I think an Evening Grosbeak and an oriole created a hybrid. The only other island this species occurs on is Isla San Andres off the coast of Nicaragua. The third subspecies on Grand Cayman Island went extinct circa 1967.

SHINY COWBIRD (*Molothrus bonariensis*) – Best looks were at Rocklands.

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

Parulidae (New World Warblers).

OVENBIRD (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – The last few years I have been seeing very few wintering Ovenbirds but we had good luck this tour.

LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia motacilla*) – Wow - the bird(s) at the site beyond Dunn River Falls were super responsive, which I found interesting since none of them stick around to breed.

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – We heard this species chipping away in Port Antonio in the mangroves but we just couldn't tease it into view. [*]

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – Plenty of good looks.

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

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

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Many redstarts spend their winters on Jamaica.

CAPE MAY WARBLER (*Setophaga tigrina*) – Just a few of us saw this warbler during our Ecclesdown Road outing.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – Plenty of good looks.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – Best looks were at Rocklands.

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER (*Setophaga dominica*) – Some of us who arrived ahead of the official tour start time enjoyed this lovely warbler at Mynt Retreat.

PRAIRIE WARBLER (*Setophaga discolor*) – More days than not.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – We spotted a few dappled blue birds foraging with grassquits on the Potoo Trail at GCE on day three.

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

SAFFRON FINCH (*Sicalis flaveola*) – Our little detour through Ocho Rios produced this introduced species.

BANANAQUIT (GREATER ANTILLEAN) (*Coereba flaveola flaveola*) – Everywhere: coastal - mountains - low shrubs - tall trees - everywhere.

YELLOW-FACED GRASSQUIT (*Tiaris olivaceus olivaceus*) – Some of you enjoyed this colorful, tiny species on your lap at Rocklands!

ORANGEQUIT (*Euneornis campestris*) – A monotypic Genus endemic. [E]

GREATER ANTILLEAN BULLFINCH (*Melopyrrha violacea ruficollis*) – Our first good looks were at Ecclesdown Road.

YELLOW-SHOULDERED GRASSQUIT (*Loxipasser anoxanthus*) – This endemic really made us work for it but we eventually all had good looks. [E]

BLACK-FACED GRASSQUIT (*Melanospiza bicolor marchii*) – Good looks at Rocklands.

MAMMALS

SMALL INDIAN MONGOOSE (*Herpestes auropunctatus*) – This non-native predator does a number on the native wildlife. We saw individuals on more days than not. [I]

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 107 bird taxa and 1 mammal taxa