

Trip Report — Jamaica II 2025

March 8-15, 2025 with Megan Edwards Crewe & local guide
Dwayne Swaby



The Jamaican Tody must surely rank as one of the world's cutest birds -- barely bigger than a ping pong ball but oh so feisty! It easily took top honors in our informal Bird of the Trip contest. Photo by guide Megan Edwards Crewe.

When it comes to escaping a cold, gray, North American winter, the nearby tropical island of Jamaica offers a top-notch place to land. With sunny weather, some great local food (jerk!), picturesque landscapes and the lovely, blue Caribbean Ocean all around, it can make for a relaxing destination. For birders, it offers an additional reward: 28 endemic species, ranging from the ping-pong ball sized Jamaican Tody to the impressively large Jamaican Owl. Our recent tour there found all of those 28 species, and then some! And in the company of a fine group of traveling companions, we had a great time doing so.

We first met up at our bayside hotel, just outside of the island's capital (Kingston), on a balmy evening and walked over Gloria's Seafood Restaurant in golden, late day sunshine for dinner. It took a while to get our food (more than a while, if we're honest), but the meal was definitely worth the wait -- and we spotted the tour's only Black-crowned Night-Heron flying past in the interim. The following morning, we were up before dawn and headed south to the surprisingly arid Hellshire Hills. Our big target here was the Bahama Mockingbird, a regional endemic limited to a handful of Caribbean islands (though occasionally straying as far north as southern Florida). As the sun rose higher (and hotter!), we rambled along a dirt track through hills studded with cacti and thorny bushes, getting our first looks at widespread species such as Loggerhead Kingbird and Yellow-faced Grassquit and listening to mockingbirds chortling in the distance. A Stolid Flycatcher hunted from an eye level bush right beside the road. A Green-rumped Parrotlet nibbled blossoms from the top of a cactus arm, shadowed by a "Greater Antillean" Bananaquit (subspecies *flaveola*, which is endemic to Jamaica). Dark magenta Jamaican Mangos whizzed past, and one perched in a spindly bush just uphill. And after a reasonably satisfying encounter with the target Bahama Mockingbird, we headed back towards the bus, only to stumble across another pair right beside the track; the only way they could have gotten much closer would have been to actually land on somebody!



On Jamaica, the regionally endemic Bahama Mockingbird is restricted to the island's dry southern hills. Photo by participant Bill Williams.

With temperatures approaching those suggested by the area's name, we decided to skip a planned visit to some nearby (shadeless) sewage ponds and headed instead to Hope Gardens, on the other side of Kingston. This proved to be a great choice: we were rewarded with restrooms and lots of shade, plus a White-chinned Thrush bouncing around the parking lot, our first Yellow-billed Parrots, a Jamaican Woodpecker investigating a nest hole, a perched White-crowned Pigeon, a couple of male Red-billed Streamertails and a busy mixed warbler flock. And who will soon forget the Northern Potoo snoozing right above the gazebo where a double handful of women were loudly proclaiming their devotion to (and invocations of) God?! After a delicious lunch at nearby Sonia's Homestyle, we began the long, winding drive over the mountains to the island's north coast, with a stop for a leg stretch and some birding at the Westmoreland bridge. There, we gazed down on ducks, egrets, ibis, herons (including a Tricolored Heron doing its

best umbrella imitation) and a handful of wintering shorebirds along the river below, then continued on to Goblin Hill, our home for the next four nights.



We enjoyed one picnic breakfast on cliffs overlooking a White-tailed Tropicbird breeding cliff, giving us some superb views of these graceful fliers. Photo by participant Bill Williams.

We were up and out early again the next day, this time headed east to Hector's River, where we had a picnic breakfast in a field overlooking the sea. Our quarry was the graceful White-tailed Tropicbird, and we weren't disappointed; they flashed like white confetti, chasing each other over the water and along the cliffs. We even found one sitting on its nest in a rocky hole, though how it ever got in there, given how clumsy they are on land, was a mystery. Nearby, a pair of American Kestrels (the pale subspecies *dominicensis*, found on Jamaica and Hispaniola) made a trio of food exchanges (all small lizards) and a parade of tiny Hermit Crabs trundled through the grass wearing a myriad borrowed shells. Then we were off to Ecclesdown Road, famous for being one of the few places where all of the island's endemics are possible. While we weren't **THAT** lucky, we did have a

nice morning, with a showy Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo, some perched Black-billed Parrots, a merry-go-round of male Black-billed Streamertails, a responsive pair of Rufous-tailed Flycatchers, our first Jamaican Elaenia and a pointblank Yellow-shouldered Grassquit singing from a nearby bamboo stand. Unfortunately, the multiple singing Crested Quail-Doves remained stubbornly out of sight. As the day heated up and things quieted down, we descended to the town of Boston Bay -- renowned as the birthplace of "jerk". Raymond had preordered a veritable feast, and we got the chance to try jerked pork, chicken and sausages, plus casava, breadfruit, wonderful twists of fried dough and more. Yum! An Osprey and a resident Red-tailed Hawk (the subspecies *jamaicensis*, the first ever described) soared over the restaurant as we ate. Most of the group luxuriated in some free time that afternoon, but a hardy few met up in the late afternoon for an amble up the road beyond our lodge. It was a productive short walk, with our first good look at perched Ring-tailed Pigeons, a hunting Sad Flycatcher, a male Jamaican Euphonia, a female Jamaican Becard, a couple of feeding Olive-throated Parakeets and another busy mixed warbler flock.



The dry Hellshire Hills were a revelation to those who thought all of Jamaica was covered in tropical rainforest. Here, the gang checks out our first Jamaican Mango. Photo by guide Megan Edwards Crewe.

We were up and out again before dawn the following day, headed west and then south into the Blue Mountains. Our first Jamaican Owl flashed across the road while it was still dark, seen by a few who were awake when it passed through our headlight beams. We arrived at our first birding spot -- which seemed like a random stretch of road but turned out to be a well-known area -- several hours later and almost immediately found a pair of Jamaican Blackbirds foraging busily in nearby trees. They kept us entertained for a good while as they crawled along the branches, poking and prodding through mosses and bromeliads and calling regularly to each other. Nearby, a Sad Flycatcher flitted through roadside shrubs and a Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo flicked from bromeliad to bromeliad, its long tail twitching as it hunted. A pair of Jamaican Pewees hunted from perches over the road, and two Jamaican Becards busily transported mouthfuls of material to a growing nest, which looked rather like a termite mound high in a tree up the hill. A couple of Arrowhead Warblers worked through roadside trees, with a

migrant Black-and-white Warbler nearby for convenient comparison. But the "pièce de résistance" -- one of the island's toughest endemics to actually see -- was the Crested Quail-Dove that Michelle spotted snoozing on a branch about 15 yards from where we all stood. While it raised its head occasionally to check if we were still there, it stayed put, and we spent a good 15 minutes enjoying close views in the scopes. With our main targets in the bag, we retreated to the bus for a well-earned picnic breakfast, then continued on up and over the mountains. A scruffy field with scattered flowering trees attracted a handsome flock of Jamaican Spindalis and a Jamaican Oriole systematically plucked every blossom from a banana plant. In more verdant stretches, groups of Orangequits swirled through moss-covered trees and American Redstarts flirted their tails while Arrowhead Warblers gleaned from twigs. But the top spot on this stretch was a fruiting tree that attracted a host of the species we were seeking, including a gorgeous Rufous-throated Solitaire, a trio of Jamaican Euphonias, both White-chinned and White-eyed thrushes (the former with a mouthful of nesting material) and a quartet of Jamaican Vireos. Happy with our haul, we stopped at a nearby coffee plantation for a taste of their famous Blue Mountain brew, then headed downhill for a late lunch -- more jerk for many -- followed by the long drive back to our hotel.



Crested Quail-Dove is one of the toughest of Jamaica's endemics to actually see, so Michelle's spot of this snoozing bird was a definite highlight on our day in the Blue Mountains. Photo by guide Megan Edwards Crewe.

With the area's targets in hand, we spent the next day getting better looks at things we hadn't all seen well. After a leisurely breakfast at the hotel, we headed to nearby San San and spent the morning ambling downhill. First up, a tiny Vervain Hummingbird on a lichen-encrusted nest right over the road. While our hoped-for Jamaican Owl was a no-show, apparently flushed off by another group that had trampled the vegetation right under its low roost, we did get great views of Jamaican Tody, White-eyed Thrush and Black-whiskered Vireo, cleaning those sightings up for the group. Several species were nest building, and we watched a Jamaican Oriole wrestle with strings of grass she was weaving into her nest while a Loggerhead Kingbird worked on its own nest mere yards away from her. We finished the morning with frustratingly poor views of our first Greater Antillean Bullfinches right near the police station. Then it was off to lunch at Juici Patties -- the first experience of "patties" (another Jamaican specialty) for most of us. Tummies full, we headed to the Errol Flynn marina to check out the flowering trees

there for hummers and warblers; though we didn't see anything new, we got some nice views of Jamaican Mango and a handful of warblers getting ready to head north. We finished our visit with ice creams from a nearby parlor -- a real treat on a toasty afternoon! A nearly full moon beamed brightly down on us that evening, when we gathered to try for Jamaican Owl on the grounds. We crept in under the darkest part of the trees, heard its low, gruff growl, had a 15 second view of its back end, and then the noisiest group of humans ever arrived at the hotel entrance right near us with a riot of shouting and slamming of doors. Arg! We spent the next hour trying to entice it back into view (or even earshot) with no luck at all. A few of us had a brief glimpse of an American Barn Owl ghosting past over a nearby field, but most of us retired to bed owl-less. Phooey!



Breeding was already in full spate in Jamaica, with many species nest building during our visit. This little Vervain Hummingbird was already incubating. Photo by guide Megan Edwards Crewe.

The following morning, after another leisurely breakfast at the hotel, we packed up and left the lovely villas at Goblin Hill, heading west along the

island's north coast under heavy cloud. Though Jamaica is only 146 miles long, its roads are narrow, pocked and heavily used, and it was well into the early afternoon before we reached outskirts of Montego Bay (having stopped for some much appreciated chocolate bars at Buccaneers Jerk and Juice on the way). We had lunch right on the beach at Father Bull, getting the tour's only Laughing Gulls while we waited for our food. Now replete, we headed through the city to the fabulous Rocklands Bird Sanctuary, a small private reserve and feeding station that has been in continuous operation since the early 1960s. Of course, the increasingly dark heavens finally opened about two minutes before our arrival, and we scampered to the covered balcony with the rain absolutely bucketing down. Fortunately, the birds didn't seem to care, and we spent the next enchanted hour feeding a grateful parade of hummingbirds from tiny repurposed liquor bottles full of sugar water, with our fingers providing convenient perches. As the rain finally eased to sprinkles, manager Fritz took us down a hillside track to where he had found a Jamaican Owl nest, and we got great views of a fluffy, wide-eyed youngster peering from a nest hole while its mother napped watchfully on a nearby branch. Back at the station, with the rain again pounding down, we decided to forego a planned visit to the city's sewage ponds and chose instead to feed the plentiful Black-faced Grassquits on our outstretched palms while Caribbean and Zenaida doves and Common Ground-Doves trundled around at our feet. Rocklands is a pretty magical place! As dusk fell, we headed to our next hotel, the comfortable Mynt Retreat for a candlelit dinner on its covered balcony.



Even widespread species like the Bananaquit have distinctive forms on Jamaica. The subspecies *flaveola*, which is endemic to the island, is part of the 'Greater Antillean' subgroup. Photo by participant Bill Williams.

Fortunately, the next morning dawned bright and clear, and by the time the sun actually rose, we were already well east of the city on the Falmouth bypass. There, we stood along a busy highway on ramp (to the bemusement of the Jamaicans catching busses and carpools nearby) and watched a steady stream of Plain Pigeons wing overhead on their way inland from their coastal night roosts to their daytime feeding areas. Once we'd all had a good view of this uncommon and local species, we headed inland ourselves, bumping along a back road to Stewart Town, where we had our final picnic breakfast, shared with a cat who loved hard-boiled eggs. While we ate, we ogled a quartet of Black-billed Parrots sitting in a nearby treetop, and watched calling Jamaican Crows flap past overhead. Bellies full, we walked through town to a sloping hillside, where we had eye-level views of some downhill treetops. And there, along with a plethora of Northern Parulas, we found our final endemic -- the subtly colored Blue Mountain Vireo, which gave us some outstanding views as it circled around us on the roadside. Our quest

complete, we spent the rest of the morning wandering through town and along a quiet track, getting better views of a number of things that people were hoping to see again. A male Jamaican Becard flashed in to land on a stump near the road. A Greater Antillean Bullfinch nibbled berries in a tree by the police station. Two Jamaican Crows foraged low in the forest, then checked out some bromeliads right over the track. A Jamaican Elaenia made quick little sallies from a treetop. After a pleasant, birdy morning, we backtracked to the coast and had our final lunch at the Chill Hut Bar and Grill right along the beach. It wasn't speedy, but the breezes were blowing, the sea lay just beyond the restaurant and it seemed a fitting finale to our Jamaican stay. And the food, when it finally arrived, was delicious. Then it was back to the hotel to pack and prepare for flights the next morning, with a final dinner under the stars on the lodge's lawn -- complete with some fairly questionable karaoke from next door!

A few of us with later flights on our final morning gathered for a bit of birding from the hotel balcony before breakfast. Among the host of widespread "regulars", we netted the last new bird of the trip -- a pair of Saffron Finches that glowed like yellow beacons among the leaves of the spreading tree over the bar next door to the lodge. We owe big thanks to Dwayne for his expert local guiding, to Raymond for his careful driving and to Sharon and Maria in the Field Guides office for their organizational efforts behind the scenes. And a special thanks to all of you for joining us for the adventure. It was great to share the island with you! I hope to see you all again in the field, somewhere soon.

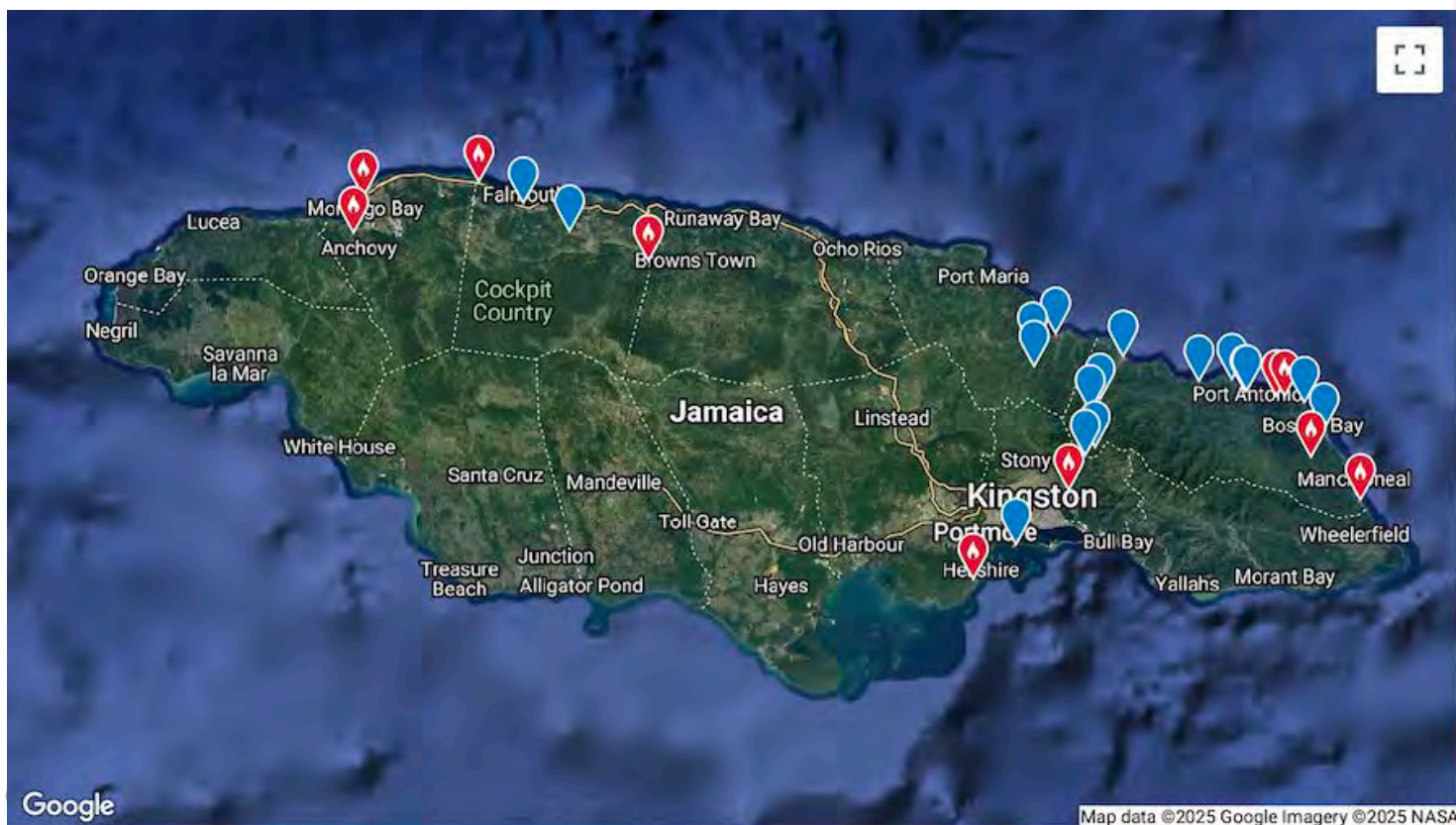
You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/339828>

Megan

Field Guides Birding Tours — JAMAICA II, 2025 (with Megan Edwards Crewe and Dwayne Swaby)

8 – 15 Mar 2025 (8 days) Link-only



Jamaica

Kingston | Portland | Saint Andrew | Saint Catherine | Saint James | Saint Mary | Trelawny

Megan Edwards Crewe (Field Guides)



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip...

 100

 29

 15

LIFERS

 52

 15





Species Observed

Show all details


- 3



Blue-winged Teal

Spatula discors



  1
- 4




Rock Pigeon

Columba livia 


  1
- 18



White-crowned Pigeon

Patagioenas leucocephala  


  1  6
- 45



Plain Pigeon

Patagioenas inornata 


  1
- 24



Ring-tailed Pigeon

Patagioenas caribaea 


  5
- 1



Eurasian Collared-Dove

Streptopelia decaocto 



  1
- 15




Common Ground Dove

Columbina passerina 

  3
- 6



Crested Quail-Dove

Geotrygon versicolor  


  1  2
- 3



Ruddy Quail-Dove

Geotrygon montana

  2
- 20



Caribbean Dove

Leptotila jamaicensis 


  4
- 27



White-winged Dove

Zenaida asiatica

  7
- 16



Zenaida Dove

Zenaida aurita 


  7
- 14



Smooth-billed Ani

Crotophaga ani


  2
- 2



Mangrove Cuckoo

Coccyzus minor 


  1
- 3



Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo

Coccyzus pluvialis 



  2
- 3




Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo

Coccyzus vetula 


  2
- 2



Northern Potoo

Nyctibius jamaicensis  


  1  1
- 8



Antillean Palm Swift

Tachornis phoenicobia 



  3
- 13




Jamaican Mango


























Anthracothorax mango 






























  5
- 8































Vervain Hummingbird

Mellisuga minima  

  1  5

23	Red-billed Streamertail	<i>Trochilus polytmus</i>	✓	▶  4
6	Black-billed Streamertail	<i>Trochilus scitulus</i>	✓	▶  2
8	Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>		▶  1
1	Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>		▶  1
3	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>		▶  1
1	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>		▶  1
24	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		▶  3
5	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		▶  1
50	Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>		▶  1
26	Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>		▶  2
20	White-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon lepturus</i>	✓ 📷	▶  2  1
31	Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>		▶  5
25	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		▶  2
2	Yellow-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>		▶  2
1	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		▶  1
5	Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>		▶  2
2	Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>		▶  2
9	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>		▶  3
2	Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>		▶  2
30	Western Cattle-Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>		▶  4
2	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		▶  2
1	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>		▶  1
3	Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>		▶  2
119	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>		▶  10

1	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	✓	▶  1
2	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>		▶  2
1	American Barn Owl	<i>Tyto furcata</i>	✓	▶  1
4	Jamaican Owl	<i>Asio grammicus</i>	✓	▶  3
10	Jamaican Tody	<i>Todus todus</i>	✓ 	▶  1  5
1	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megasceryle alcyon</i>		▶  1
19	Jamaican Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes radiolatus</i>	✓ 	▶  1  10
10	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>		▶  8
8	Black-billed Amazon	<i>Amazona agilis</i>	✓	▶  2
72	Yellow-billed Amazon	<i>Amazona collaria</i>	✓	▶  5
3	Green-rumped Parrotlet	<i>Forpus passerinus</i>	* ✓	▶  2
24	Olive-throated Parakeet	<i>Eupsittula nana</i>	✓ 	▶  1  4
8	Jamaican Becard	<i>Pachyramphus niger</i>	✓	▶  6
3	Jamaican Elaenia	<i>Myiopagis cotta</i>	✓	▶  2
3	Jamaican Pewee	<i>Contopus pallidus</i>	✓	▶  2
11	Sad Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus barbirostris</i>	✓	▶  5
5	Rufous-tailed Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus validus</i>	✓	▶  3
1	Stolid Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus stolidus</i>	✓	▶  1
16	Loggerhead Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus caudifasciatus</i>	✓	▶  6
1	Blue Mountain Vireo	<i>Vireo osburni</i>	✓	▶  1
19	Jamaican Vireo	<i>Vireo modestus</i>	✓	▶  6
13	Black-whiskered Vireo	<i>Vireo altiloquus</i>	✓	▶  3
12	Jamaican Crow	<i>Corvus jamaicensis</i>	✓	▶  1

5	Cave Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon fulva</i>	✓	▶  1
3	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	*	▶  2
4	Bahama Mockingbird	<i>Mimus gundlachii</i>	✓	▶  1
14	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	📷	▶  1  6
3	Rufous-throated Solitaire	<i>Myadestes genibarbis</i>	✓	▶  1
17	White-chinned Thrush	<i>Turdus aurantius</i>	✓	▶  8
8	White-eyed Thrush	<i>Turdus jamaicensis</i>	✓ 📷	▶  1  4
9	Jamaican Euphonia	<i>Euphonia jamaica</i>	✓	▶  4
17	Jamaican Spindalis	<i>Spindalis nigricephala</i>	✓ 📷	▶  1  3
15	Jamaican Oriole	<i>Icterus leucopteryx</i>	✓ 📷	▶  2  6
3	Jamaican Blackbird	<i>Nesopsar nigerrimus</i>	✓ 📷	▶  1  1
1	Shiny Cowbird	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>		▶  1
2	Great-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>		▶  1
25	Greater Antillean Grackle	<i>Quiscalus niger</i>	✓ 📷	▶  1  5
1	Northern Waterthrush	<i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>		▶  1
7	Black-and-white Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>		▶  5
11	Arrowhead Warbler	<i>Setophaga pharetra</i>	✓	▶  4
16	American Redstart	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>		▶  6
6	Cape May Warbler	<i>Setophaga tigrina</i>		▶  5
20	Northern Parula	<i>Setophaga americana</i>	📷	▶  1  6
2	Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>		▶  2
10	Black-throated Blue Warbler	<i>Setophaga caerulescens</i>		▶  5
2	Palm Warbler	<i>Setophaga palmarum</i>		▶  2

- 1 **Yellow-rumped Warbler** *Setophaga coronata* ▶ 📊 1
- 5 **Prairie Warbler** *Setophaga discolor* ▶ 📊 5
- 2 **Saffron Finch** *Sicalis flaveola* * ✔ ▶ 📊 1
- 49 **Bananaquit** *Coereba flaveola* ▶ 📊 11
- 9 **Yellow-faced Grassquit** *Tiaris olivaceus* ▶ 📊 3
- 60 **Orangequit** *Euneornis campestris* ✔ ▶ 📊 6
- 5 **Greater Antillean Bullfinch** *Melopyrrha violacea* ✔ ▶ 📊 2
- 5 **Yellow-shouldered Grassquit** *Loxipasser anoxanthus* ✔ ▶ 📊 4
- 27 **Black-faced Grassquit** *Melanospiza bicolor* ✔ ▶ 📊 3

EXOTIC: PROVISIONAL

- 4 **Rose-ringed Parakeet** *Psittacula krameri* * ▶ 📊 1