



Field Guides Tour Report

Puerto Rico 2015

Mar 21, 2015 to Mar 27, 2015

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Emergent vegetation at Laguna Cartagena hid West Indian Whistling-Ducks, Caribbean Coots, and myriad other waterbirds. Photo by guide Tom Johnson.

This week was a remarkably fun and relaxed way to experience Puerto Rico as well as to see all of the island's endemic bird species and many regional specialties. From the remarkable experience with the Puerto Rican Parrots at Rio Abajo to the seaside birding at La Parguera, the birding was great every day, and we experienced good weather throughout, typical of this trip.

After arriving in San Juan, we ate dinner at a Peruvian restaurant near our hotel and Eric outlined the game plan for the week. Everyone returned to get a night of sleep before an early start the next day.

We arose early in San Juan and headed west, arriving at Rio Abajo (a state forest, or bosque estatal) with enough darkness left to track down some Puerto Rican Screech-Owls calling from bamboo patches. Our walk on a wide track through the forest led us to a spot where, after a bit of waiting, we heard and then saw a pair of Puerto Rican Parrots! These birds landed nearby, and we tracked them down and spent about 30 minutes admiring them. This is a critically endangered species that is barely hanging on in the wild -- the birds we saw were being tracked at Rio Abajo as part of a reintroduction program on the island. We continued on to Cambalache, where we had lunch and enjoyed Puerto Rican Lizard-Cuckoos. The afternoon held in store close views of an American Flamingo at Camuy and White-tailed Tropicbirds zooming around offshore at Guajataca. In the evening, we arrived at our seaside lodging at La Parguera.

The second full day found us walking around La Parguera at dawn, getting our first taste of Yellow-shouldered Blackbirds and other coastal species. In the afternoon, we visited Laguna Cartagena, part of the US National Wildlife Refuge system, where West Indian Whistling-Ducks and a rare Eurasian Wigeon highlighted a nice bit of scrub and wetland birding. At dusk, we found ourselves in dry coastal scrub forest near Guanica, where we were soon surrounded by the sounds of calling Puerto Rican Nightjars as darkness fell.

An early morning start sent us up into the mountains, where we enjoyed the mature forest and endemic-packed environs of Maricao. Among many other birds, this is the home of the Elfin-woods Warbler, and we had repeated and great views. After lunch and a break back at the hotel, we had an afternoon trip to the quiet forest gaps of Susúa. Here, we had a few brief encounters with Ruddy Quail-Dove and an extended visit with two Key West Quail-Doves.

On Day 4, we headed to the saline flats and coastal mangroves of Cabo Rojo. In addition to a welcoming flock of Venezuelan Troupials, we studied large flocks of Semipalmated Sandpipers and Stilt Sandpipers, finding Wilson's Plover, Western Sandpiper, and other goodies. Pulling up stakes at La Parguera, we headed east on the island, stopping at Comerío to find a Caribbean specialty, Plain Pigeon, before continuing on to our lodging on the edge of El Yunque, the charming Casa Cubuy.

Our last full day of birding started with us winding our way out of the mountains from Casa Cubuy down to the coast at the Humacao wetlands. Between here and Fajardo, we stalked around coastal forest, a harbor, and a hotel garden, soaking in new hummingbirds and some great looks at Brown Boobies and Magnificent Frigatebirds. The afternoon was capped off by scope views of Antillean Euphonia in the El Yunque forest above Casa Cubuy. The next morning, we returned to San Juan for our flights back to the Lower 48.

Eric and I had a wonderful time leading this short but sweet trip to a fun and scenic bit of the United States. Thanks to everyone for coming along, and we look forward to our next time together in the field!

-Tom Johnson

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*) – A group of 4 posed for distant scope views from the tower at Laguna Cartagena.

Later, we saw this group fly by and land out of sight in the marshes.

EURASIAN WIGEON (*Anas penelope*) – A drake was an exceptional sighting at Laguna Cartagena. This red-headed beauty was mixed in with American Wigeon there.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – About 65 of these migrant ducks lingered at Laguna Cartagena during our visit. We also saw 4 mixed in with the large teal flock at Camuy.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – Hundreds of these small migrant ducks lingered at Laguna Cartagena and farm ponds near Camuy.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – We saw 9 mixed in with other migrant ducks at Laguna Cartagena.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Small handfuls of these northern migrants were mixed in with the loads of Blue-winged Teal at Laguna Cartagena and Camuy.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – Though we encountered these stiff-tailed ducks at Camuy and Laguna Cartagena, we couldn't find their more secretive cousins, the Masked Ducks.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LEAST GREBE (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Two of these diminutive divers were at Camuy, and another was at Laguna Cartagena.

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Two were at Laguna Cartagena, and another two were at Humacao.

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

AMERICAN FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) – A long-staying individual was on the farm ponds at Camuy, providing for awesome scope views.

Phaethontidae (Tropicbirds)

WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD (*Phaethon lepturus*) – About ten of these high contrast seabirds flew back and forth off the cliffs at Guajataca.

Fregatidae (Frigatebirds)

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata magnificens*) – A common overhead sight at most coastal locations - two encounters stood out. We got to see numerous frigatebirds dipping down to drink freshwater at Laguna Cartagena. Across the island at Fajardo, we watched from close range as a Ring-billed Gull was attacked from above by a frigatebird in search of a meal.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

BROWN BOOBY (*Sula leucogaster*) – Two were at Fajardo; one immature flew by quite close, giving us all great views.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – Common in coastal areas; one plunged into the water frequently outside our hotel at La Parguera.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Two were at Laguna Cartagena.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Common and widespread in the island's lowlands.

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – Common; seen most days while driving or at waterbird sites.

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – Common; seen most days.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – Two of these striking waders were at Humacao.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Common and widespread; often seen while driving.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – These small herons were especially common at Laguna Cartagena and Humacao.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Seven were at Laguna Cartagena.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – These gangly waders roosted nightly in the mangroves outside our hotel in La Parguera.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – We saw these dark ibis at Laguna Cartagena and Camuy.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Common and widespread.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Three were at Laguna Cartagena.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (CARIBBEAN) (*Accipiter striatus venator*) – An individual of the rare *venator* subspecies flew over us twice at Maricao, an area where they are known to nest.

RED-TAILED HAWK (JAMAICENSIS) (*Buteo jamaicensis jamaicensis*) – Fairly common and widespread.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

CLAPPER RAIL (CARIBBEAN) (*Rallus crepitans caribaeus*) – These mangrove skulkers fed and called along the side of the road in La Parguera, allowing for great views.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – One called at Laguna Cartagena. [∗]

PURPLE GALLINULE (*Porphyrio martinicus*) – Great views at Laguna Cartagena.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – Common and widespread in freshwater.

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – Common in freshwater bodies.

CARIBBEAN COOT (*Fulica caribaea*) – We had great scope views at Laguna Cartagena and Humacao, often in direct comparison with American Coots.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – High numbers of these striking shorebirds were at Camuy, Laguna Cartagena, and Cabo Rojo.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Five were at Cabo Rojo; another was in Fajardo Harbor.

WILSON'S PLOVER (*Charadrius wilsonia*) – One of these large-billed plovers ran around the edge of the salt lagoon at Cabo Rojo.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – These small, ring-necked plovers were at Laguna Cartagena and Fajardo.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – We found these plovers at Camuy and Laguna Cartagena.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – Widespread at wetlands and coastal sites.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*) – One was at Laguna Cartagena; another was at Humacao

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Small numbers were at wetlands sites from Camuy and Laguna Cartagena to Cabo Rojo.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – Fairly common at wetlands and coastal sites.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – One was at La Parguera.

STILT SANDPIPER (*Calidris himantopus*) – About 300 of these boreal migrants were on the flats at Cabo Rojo.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – Seen at several wetlands sites; 75 were at Cabo Rojo.

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*) – Roughly 2000 were on the flats at Cabo Rojo. A banded individual had been trapped locally, according to the band return.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – At least four of these long-billed peeps were mixed in with Semipalmated Sandpipers at Cabo Rojo.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Over a dozen were in the harbor at Fajardo.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – One flew over repeatedly at Fajardo. It was eventually the subject of an attack from a frigatebird.

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*) – We saw these large, carrot-billed terns at several coastal sites, including Guajataca, Cabo Rojo, and Fajardo.

SANDWICH TERN (CABOT'S) (*Thalasseus sandvicensis acuflavidus*) – After flyovers at Cabo Rojo, we were treated to excellent scope views on the pier at Fajardo.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Common in inhabited areas. [I]

SCALY-NAPE PIGEON (*Patagioenas squamosa*) – This large pigeon was a common sight in forested habitats throughout the island. Especially good views were had at Casa Cubuy.

PLAIN PIGEON (*Patagioenas inornata wetmorei*) – One was perched across from the ball fields at Comerío. We had excellent scope views of this superb pigeon.

AFRICAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia roseogrisea*) – This is the common *Streptopelia* dove in inhabited areas of the island. [I]

COMMON GROUND-DOVE (*Columbina passerina portoricensis*) – The common, widespread small dove on the island.

RUDDY QUAIL-DOVE (*Geotrygon montana*) – Half of the group had good views from the lead vehicle at Susúa. The bird took off before everyone could get a view.

KEY WEST QUAIL-DOVE (*Geotrygon chrysis*) – Excellent views of two individuals on the ground at Susúa.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Common and widespread.

ZENAIDA DOVE (*Zenaida aurita*) – Very common here - the short-tailed "Mourning Dove" with the white trailing edge to the secondaries. At Humacao, we saw a silvery juvenile and had close views at the iridescent neck patches of adults.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – Less common than *Zenaida* Dove - mostly seen in open areas.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus americanus*) – Two skulked around our vans at the parking spot at Laguna Cartagena. These might be part of a poorly known population thought to be resident in dry forest in western Puerto Rico.

MANGROVE CUCKOO (*Coccyzus minor*) – Great views at Laguna Cartagena.

PUERTO RICAN LIZARD-CUCKOO (*Coccyzus vieilloti*) – We heard far more than we saw; however, after the amazing, extended views we had at Cambalache, I don't think anyone was left wanting. [E]

SMOOTH-BILLED ANI (*Crotophaga ani*) – Common in open, agricultural landscapes.

Strigidae (Owls)

PUERTO RICAN SCREECH-OWL (*Megascops nudipes*) – Our first endemic of the tour - several were calling when we arrived at Rio Abajo, and we tracked the sounds as day broke. Eventually we trained the scope on a pair perched high in a bamboo cluster. Some folks also heard the species at Casa Cubuy. [E]

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

PUERTO RICAN NIGHTJAR (*Antrostomus noctitherus*) – Wow! We heard at least 10 near Guanica, and spotlighted a few that flew over. One

hovered right over Tom, giving us all great views. [E]

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

ANTILLEAN MANGO (*Anthracothorax dominicus aurulentus*) – Fairly common, especially in lower elevations at the western end of the island. Great views in flowering trees in La Parguera.

GREEN MANGO (*Anthracothorax viridis*) – Great views in a flowering tree along the trail at Maricao. [E]

GREEN-THROATED CARIB (*Eulampis holosericeus*) – We found a few in mangroves at Humacao. The species is restricted on the island, though it is found widely in the Lesser Antilles.

PUERTO RICAN EMERALD (*Chlorostilbon maugaeus*) – Our best views came at flowering trees in La Parguera and Maricao. Most that we saw well were females, but we did have a few males as well, especially on that last morning walk in La Parguera. [E]

ANTILLEAN CRESTED HUMMINGBIRD (LESSER ANTILLES) (*Orthorhynchus cristatus exilis*) – Great views outside the Blue Iguana restaurant in Fajardo. One of the favorites of the trip!

Todidae (Todies)

PUERTO RICAN TODY (*Todus mexicanus*) – Common in forested habitats across the island. We had some extraordinary encounters with these little green, yellow, white, and red gnomes at Cambalache and especially Maricao. This was understandably voted the group's favorite species of the tour. [E]

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – One flew by calling at Laguna Cartagena.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

PUERTO RICAN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes portoricensis*) – Fairly common - our best views of this spectacular woodpecker came at Maricao and especially Humacao. [E]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (EASTERN CARIBBEAN) (*Falco sparverius caribaeorum*) – Fairly common on roadside wires. We had daily views of a pair at the parking lot of our hotel at La Parguera.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – One bombed past at Cabo Rojo in pursuit of shorebirds.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – At least one, possibly two, hunted waterbirds in the beachside ponds at Camuy.

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)

MONK PARAKEET (*Myiopsitta monachus*) – A few flew past over the highway during our first day on the northern part of the island. [I]

PUERTO RICAN PARROT (*Amazona vittata*) – We had spectacular views of two of these critically endangered parrots at Rio Abajo - they flew by calling, and then Lois found them perched after they settled in to the subcanopy. The species is being reintroduced to the wild there - the birds we saw were banded, and one had a radio transmitter. [E]

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

CARIBBEAN ELAENIA (*Elaenia martinica*) – Common in the scrub forest at Cabo Rojo, including right over our vans.

LESSER ANTILLEAN PEWEE (PUERTO RICO) (*Contopus latirostris blancoi*) – Our views of the Puerto Rican Parrots were interrupted by one of these colorful pewees. We had scope views for a few minutes before it evaporated back into the forest canopy of Rio Abajo.

PUERTO RICAN FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus antillarum*) – We found the island's resident *Myiarchus* at several locations including Cambalache and Humacao. A pair was gathering nesting material in the parking lot at Cambalache. [E]

GRAY KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus dominicensis*) – Extremely common.

LOGGERHEAD KINGBIRD (PUERTO RICAN) (*Tyrannus caudifasciatus taylori*) – Great views at Maricao (remember the aggressive pair at the stone tower?) and Casa Cubuy.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

PUERTO RICAN VIREO (*Vireo latimeri*) – Fairly common in forest in the western half of the island; we had views at Rio Abajo and Maricao. [E]

BLACK-WHISKERED VIREO (*Vireo altiloquus*) – Very common in multiple types of forests. These droners sang all day long.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

CARIBBEAN MARTIN (*Progne dominicensis*) – These were calling overhead at La Parguera on two mornings.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – A few passed by one of the vans during a stop at a small marsh near Cabo Rojo.

CAVE SWALLOW (CARIBBEAN) (*Petrochelidon fulva puertoricensis*) – We had fleeting drive-by views of nesting colonies with swirling swallows alongside highway overpasses; however, we never really nailed close views of this species.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

RED-LEGGED THRUSH (EASTERN) (*Turdus plumbeus ardosiaceus*) – Fairly common in forest. Noam spotted a nest at Rio Abajo, and we had nice views near our breakfast spot at Maricao, too.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

PEARLY-EYED THRASHER (*Margarops fuscatus*) – A few were at Maricao, Susúa, and Laguna Cartagena, though they mostly skulked in the forest. Scope views at Susúa were the best views.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Common, especially in towns and agricultural areas.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – Fairly common in wet woods around the island. Our best views were in La Parguera and at Humacao.

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – One called repeatedly from overhead during our quail-dove vigil at Susúa.

PROTHONOTARY WARBLER (*Protonotaria citrea*) – One flew past us while we were looking for a Wilson's Plover on the edge of mangroves at Cabo Rojo, though it eluded most of the group.

ELFIN-WOODS WARBLER (*Setophaga angelae*) – We were scarcely out of the vans before one showed up at Maricao, allowing for great views. We then managed to find several more pairs along the trails. Excellent! [E]

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Good views of these migrants at Humacao, Maricao, and a few other sites.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – We found these handsome migrants at Cambalache, Maricao, and Humacao.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – Common, especially in mangroves at La Parguera and Cabo Rojo.

PRAIRIE WARBLER (*Setophaga discolor*) – One of the common warblers that we encountered; best numbers were along the edges of mangroves in La Parguera.

ADELAIDE'S WARBLER (*Setophaga adelaidae*) – Common in several forest habitats; we had good views of this Grace's Warbler look-alike at Cambalache and Laguna Cartagena. [E]

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

BANANAQUIT (CARIBBEAN) (*Coereba flaveola portoricensis*) – Very abundant; a fixture of all locations where we searched for songbirds.

YELLOW-FACED GRASSQUIT (*Tiaris olivaceus bryanti*) – Not as common as Black-faced Grassquit; however, we encountered a few at Laguna Cartagena.

BLACK-FACED GRASSQUIT (*Tiaris bicolor omissus*) – Common and widespread.

PUERTO RICAN BULLFINCH (*Loxigilla portoricensis*) – Common in forested areas like Río Abajo, Maricao, and El Yunque. The song sounds like a Northern Cardinal but with a tight terminal trill. [E]

PUERTO RICAN Tanager (*Nesospingus speculiferus*) – Common in higher elevations; we had great views at Maricao and at Casa Cubuy/ El Yunque. [E]

PUERTO RICAN SPINDALIS (*Spindalis portoricensis*) – Fairly common, especially in montane forest. [E]

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

GRASSHOPPER SPARROW (*Ammodramus savannarum*) – Two in a pasture at Camuy posed on a fence line for us. One stayed in one spot long enough for us to all have nice scope views.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

YELLOW-SHOULDERED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius xanthomus*) – This is one of the rarer endemics on the island - we found them in La Parguera. Several fed in trash bins along the edge of a city street, and we also watched a few morning flights along the edge of the coastal mangroves, with a max. count of 38 birds. [E]

GREATER ANTILLEAN GRACKLE (*Quiscalus niger brachypterus*) – Widespread and abundant, especially around habitated areas.

SHINY COWBIRD (*Molothrus bonariensis*) – Encountered widely, though in small numbers.

PUERTO RICAN ORIOLE (*Icterus portoricensis*) – Our first views were of a pair at an overlook at Maricao; further studies were at Susúa and Casa Cubuy. [E]

VEZUELAN TROUPIAL (*Icterus icterus*) – During the week, we ended up seeing well over a dozen of these attractive, introduced orioles scattered around the island. Mostly in pairs; however, we did see 6 at one time in the scrub at Cabo Rojo. [I]

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

ANTILLEAN EUPHONIA (*Euphonia musica sclateri*) – An eleventh hour bird! We heard a small group in the canopy and eventually had great scope views of a male during our afternoon walk in El Yunque above Casa Cubuy. Beautiful, and one of the group favorites for the trip!

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Common in towns along the journey. [I]

Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies)

NORTHERN RED BISHOP (*Euplectes franciscanus*) – Small groups were along the entrance road to Laguna Cartagena and at another freshwater marsh near Cabo Rojo. [I]

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

ORANGE-CHEEKED WAXBILL (*Estrilda melopoda*) – We saw a flock on the trail to the tower at Laguna Cartagena. [I]

BRONZE MANNIKIN (*Spermestes cucullata*) – A small flock was along the entrance road at Laguna Cartagena. [I]

Viduidae (Indigobirds)

PIN-TAILED WHYDAH (*Vidua macroura*) – Our best views came after our sandwich lunch in San German - a flock of whydahs was on the ground behind our vans. [I]

MAMMALS

SMALL INDIAN MONGOOSE (*Herpestes auropunctatus*) – One repeatedly popped up on the path at Humacao, giving us some nice views of this introduced predator. [I]

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 121 bird taxa and 1 mammal taxa