

JAMAICA

MARCH 31 – APRIL 7, 2010

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This year's tour of Jamaica was just like every year's tour of this gorgeous Caribbean island—a huge success. Once again we found all of the island's endemic birds, a feat we've matched every time we've visited this enchanting island. This speaks not only to the wonderful abundance of birds in Jamaica, but also to the skill and knowledge of our local leader, Brandon Hay. In total, we found all 28 Jamaican endemic species, an additional 16 endemic subspecies, and 15 species or subspecies endemic to the Caribbean. Add to this a number of attractive butterflies, stunning mountain vistas, the hauntingly beautiful Cockpit Country, and delicious local cuisine, and it's easy to see why Jamaica is such a popular destination for the traveling nature enthusiast.

Our tour got off to a great start with a visit to the sewage ponds at Montego Bay. We normally don't check this spot, but with the island just coming out of an extremely dry winter, we were afraid that we might miss some wetland birds otherwise. Well, it certainly paid off, as we found a great variety of waterbirds including a flock of Least Grebes, an unusually conspicuous Masked Duck, and a Caribbean Coot.

Our next stop was the famous Rocklands Bird Sanctuary. Red-billed Streamertails and Black-faced Grassquits perched on our fingers as they took advantage of our sugar water and seed offerings. Jamaican Orioles, Bananaquits, and the improbably cobalt-blue and orange-colored Orangequits all competed for sugar and bites of citrus fruit. Zenaida Doves and Jamaican Woodpeckers perched in the garden trees and Black-throated Blue Warblers darted from bush to bush. All too soon, though, we were back on the road and heading for Marshall's Pen, where we would spend the next three nights.

At Marshall's Pen, our good fortune continued, as we found some of the harder birds rather quickly. A Jamaican Elaenia perched right over our heads before we even left the garden. Not to be outdone, the Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo, a massive hulk of a bird, flew in to give us a fantastic look. Later, we were able to find the Jamaican Owl in record time, as the begging juvenile perched prominently in the giant cedar tree in the garden. With a little more effort we were able to find the Jamaican Pewee, Yellow-shouldered Grassquit, Jamaican Euphonia, and several other endemics. Always a highlight of our stay, our host Ann Sutton gave a tour of the great house, providing us with a wealth of information on the history of the property and the country.

We departed early one morning from Marshall's Pen for a visit to beautiful Cockpit Country. Black-billed and Yellow-billed parrots flew through the valleys, and the bizarre-sounding Jamaican Crow was heard echoing across the hills. Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo provided fantastic views, and we found a large flowering plant that was being attended by multiple tiny, but pugnacious Vervain Hummingbirds.

The last leg of our tour is based out of Kingston. From here we visited two stunningly beautiful locations, the Port Royal Mountains and the Drivers River Valley in the John

Crow Mountains. In these areas, we were able to find almost all of the endemics, including a few that we hadn't yet seen. Blue Mountain Vireo made us work a little, but when we finally found one it really put on a show for us. A pair of Jamaican Blackbirds (the rarest of the extant endemics) gave us great looks as they foraged in a bromeliad-covered tree right next to the road. A Greater Antillean Elaenia sat in the open for several minutes and sent us scrambling for our cameras, as this is a bird that is missed as often as not. The highlight of our day in the Port Royal Mountains had to be the Crested Quail-Dove. We had heard a few and even had a brief glimpse of one flying past when suddenly we saw one come hurtling in and perch on an open branch for us. It was by far the best look I had ever had at this bizarre and beautiful endemic.

Our last morning was spent on the east end of the island, and it started with a bang. From a limestone cliff above the blue Caribbean Sea, we watched at least eight White-tailed Tropicbirds flying in front of us at close range. Some of them even engaged in courtship flights, reminding us that their nests were right below us in the cliff from where we watched.

The remainder of the morning was spent on the Ecclesdown Road overlooking the Drivers River Valley. Our last endemic to find was the relatively shy Black-billed Streamertail, and despite the off-and-on rain, we were able to get multiple looks at this gem of a bird. The low cloud cover was probably responsible for the amazingly good looks we had at a flock of Black Swifts. A nice variety of warblers was also found, including Worm-eating, Magnolia, and the endemic Arrowhead Warbler. And even though we had seen them on every day of the trip, we just had to stop and look every time we heard the funny little cough of the Jamaican Tody, once again the winner of the "favorite bird of the tour" vote.

After lunch we stopped by the famous Blue Lagoon (of Hollywood fame), and then returned to Kingston for our farewell dinner.

ITINERARY

31 Mar – Arrival in Montego Bay followed by tour orientation and dinner at the hotel.

1 Apr – After birding the grounds of the Satori we had a productive visit to the Montego Bay sewage ponds; next up was the fabulous Rocklands Bird Sanctuary for hand-feeding of hummingbirds and intro to Jamaican birds, then a drive to Marshall's Pen for lunch, afternoon and evening birding at Marshall's Pen.

14 ENDEMICS

2 Apr – Morning walks at Marshall's Pen, then afternoon drive to Great Pedro Pond in Treasure Beach, Parottee Pond, Pondsides condo shopping, and the Elim Pools at the Black River, Upper Morass.

19 ENDEMICS, 19 TOTAL

3 Apr – Early morning departure for Cockpit Country returning to Marshall’s Pen for lunch via a sparrow stop at Martin’s Hill; afternoon tour of the Great House and birding around Marshall’s Pen.

23 ENDEMIC, 24 TOTAL

4 Apr – Pre-breakfast birding at Marshall’s Pen then departure. A Juicy lunch stop then birding at Portland Ridge and Salt River; afternoon arrival at our hotel in Kingston.

13 ENDEMIC, 24 TOTAL

5 Apr – Early morning departure for the Blue (Port Royal) Mountains; roadside birding primarily in the vicinity of Hardwar Gap, esp. Woodside Dr and Gap Cafe; lunch at the Starlight Chalet, then a visit to Twyman Estates Coffee before returning to Kingston where we made a brief swing through a bustling Hope Gardens.

17 ENDEMIC, 27 TOTAL

6 Apr – Early morning departure for the John Crow Mountains with morning birding at Hector’s River (awesome T-bird show), then in the Drivers River Valley followed by a visit to Port Antonio for lunch; post-lunch visit to the Blue Lagoon before returning to the hotel for our farewell dinner.

20 ENDEMIC, 28 TOTAL (That’s all of them!)

7 Apr - Departures for home

BIRD LIST

NOTE: This Checklist follows the The A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds, Seventh Edition, 48th supplement. Species appearing in bold print indicate Jamaican endemics or Caribbean endemics and near-endemics.

Abbreviations:

E - Endemic species

e - Endemic subspecies

H - Heard only

BRUM - Black River, Upper Morass (Elim Pools)

CC - Cockpit Country

JCM - John Crow Mountains

MB – Montego Bay area, including the Satori, the sewage ponds, and Rocklands

MP - Marshall’s Pen

PRM - Port Royal Mountains

PP - Parottee Ponds

PR - Portland Ridge

TB - Treasure Beach including Great Pedro Pond

WATERFOWL

West Indian Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna arborea*) – We were very lucky to find this rare Caribbean endemic duck at BRUM. Jamaica had a very dry winter and most of the marshes and ponds were dry. Brandon really impressed with this one! Birdlife International lists this species as vulnerable with the following justification: “This species is listed as Vulnerable because it has a small and severely fragmented occupied range within which the area, extent and quality of remaining habitat is undergoing a continuing decline, with some sites disappearing altogether.”

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) – good sized flocks at MB and TB

Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*) – a single female at MB

Masked Duck (*Nomonyx dominicus*) - We found one female in surprising habitat at MB

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

GREBES

Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus d. dominicus*) – a large flock at MB, a Caribbean subspecies

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps antillarum*) – MB and a huge flock at TB, another Caribbean subspecies

TROPICBIRDS

White-tailed Tropicbird - at least eight at Hector's River allowed some fantastic views as they flew near their nest sites along the cliffs

PELICANS

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) - widespread on the coast

CORMORANTS

Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) - a rare bird in Jamaica; one was seen by Kathy and Chris at TB

FRIGATEBIRDS

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) - good looks at several coastal locations

HERONS

Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) - great looks at a male in breeding colors near Salt River

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*) - a young white morph bird TB

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) - an adult at MB

IBISES AND SPOONBILLS

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) - good looks at a few at MB

NEW WORLD VULTURES

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) - AKA John Crow; seen daily

HAWKS AND EAGLES

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo j. jamaicensis*) - Notice the scientific name, this species, like Ruddy Duck, was described from a specimen taken from Jamaica. This subspecies is a Caribbean endemic.

FALCONS

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius sparveroides*) - The birds we saw were quite distinctive with bright white breasts and indistinct facial markings. This was the light morph of a subspecies that only occurs in Cuba, the Bahamas, and Jamaica.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

RAILS AND COOTS

Clapper Rail (*Rallus longirostris*) - outstanding looks (finally) at PR

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

American Coot (*Fulica Americana*)

Caribbean Coot (*Fulica caribaea*) we had good looks at one at MB adjacent to American Coots allowing for comparison of their bills.

PLOVERS

Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – a few at TB

Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*) – at least one among the flock of...

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – several at PP

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*)

AVOCETS AND STILTS

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – a big flock at BRUM and a few at MB

JACANAS

Northern Jacana (*Jacana spinosa violacea*) - good looks at Pondsides; this subspecies is a Greater Antilles endemic

SANDPIPERS

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*)

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – side by side with Lesser

Willet (*Tringa semipalmata*)

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) - convenient comparison views with Greater

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) - one spotted by Elliot at PP

Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) - seen by a few at PP
Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*) - a flock of four seen at PP
Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*) - a single bird in TB

GULLS AND TERNS

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*)

Royal Tern (*Thalasseus maximus*) - widespread along the coast

Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) - one with the Royal Tern flock at PP

PIGEONS AND DOVES

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

White-crowned Pigeon (*Patagioenas leucocephala*) - a Caribbean near-endemic,
many great views

Ring-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas caribaea*) - E - lots of distant flying birds, but we
eventually found a couple perched in PRM and JCM

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*) - common and widespread

Zenaida Dove (*Zenaida aurita*) - A Caribbean near-endemic, they were fairly common
and widespread. We had many good looks, best at MP.

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida m. macroura*) - a few in the lowlands, this subspecies breeds in
the FL Keys, but is otherwise confined to the Greater Antilles

Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina jamaicensis*) - e - widespread

Caribbean Dove (*Leptotila j. jamaicensis*) - e - great looks at Marshall's Pen where they
were visiting the feeder

Crested Quail-Dove (*Geotrygon versicolor*) - E - heard only at Marshall's Pen for most,
then we all got great views of perched bird in PRM

Ruddy Quail-Dove (*Geotrygon montana*) - we had a couple fly-bys and a few distant
birds on the trails at MP

PARROTS AND PARAKEETS

Olive-throated Parakeet (*Aratinga n. nana*) - e - Sometimes referred to as Jamaican
Parakeet, these were seen almost daily and we had some excellent scope views.

Yellow-billed Parrot (*Amazona collaria*) - E - seen both in CC and the JCM

Black-billed Parrot (*Amazona agilis*) - E - seen perched close in both CC and JCM

CUCKOOS

Mangrove Cuckoo (*Coccyzus minor*) - a responsive bird at PR

Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo (*Saurothera vetula*) - E - nice views at MP and CC

Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo (*Hyetornis pluvialis*) - E - right in the garden at MP, a huge
imposing cuckoo with a voice to match

Smooth-billed Ani (*Crotophaga ani*) - common and widespread

BARN OWLS

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba furcata*) - we had one right next to the van, the distinctive
subspecies, known as White-winged Barn Owl is restricted to Jamaica, Cuba and
the Caymans

OWLS

Jamaican Owl (*Pseudoscops grammicus*) - E - great views of a recently fledged juvenile

NIGHTJARS

Antillean Nighthawk (*Chordeiles gunlachi*) - heard only at BRUM

POTOOS

Northern Potoo (*Nyctibius j. jamaicensis*) - e - excellent views at MP

SWIFTS

Black Swift (*Cypseloides n. niger*) - this race is a Caribbean endemic, we had uncommonly good views in JCM

White-collared Swift (*Streptoprocne zonaris*) - briefly on our departure from MP

Antillean Palm-Swift (*Tachornis p. phoenicobia*) - e - A Caribbean endemic restricted to Cuba, Hispaniola, and Jamaica, we saw them on several days.

HUMMINGBIRDS

Jamaican Mango (*Anthracothorax mango*) - E - scarce this year, only in MB and JCM

“Red-billed” Streamertail (*Trochilus p. polytmus*) - E - A spectacular bird that came close enough to touch, it is the national bird of Jamaica and is commonly known as “Doctor Bird”. Tied for favorite bird of the trip!

“Black-billed” Streamertail (*Trochilus polytmus scitulus*) - E - Confined to the extreme eastern portion of the island we only saw it in the JCM. The two streamertails are considered one species by the AOU, but are split by other authorities including Clements (and Ann!).

Vervain Hummingbird (*Mellisuga m. minima*) - e - A Caribbean endemic confined to Jamaica and Hispaniola, it is the second smallest bird in the world. We saw several, but heard more than we saw.

TODIES

Jamaican Tody (*Todus todus*) - E – Once again voted favorite bird of the trip by our expert panel (though it shared the honor this year), what can you say about such a fantastic little bird? We had several opportunities to study these little sprites at length and at close-range. The genus *Todus* is a Caribbean endemic and these birds certainly are unique, that huge bill, those outlandish colors, their confiding behavior, all of this adds up to make them a perennial favorite.

KINGFISHERS

Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*) – a few flybys

WOODPECKERS

Jamaican Woodpecker (*Melanerpes radiolatus*) - E - seen daily, we had many great views, best at MP

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

Jamaican Elaenia (*Myiopagis cotta*) - E - we found a responsive bird right away at MP and had more looks in CC

Greater Antillean Elaenia (*Elaenia fallax*) - e - this bird is a bit of a mystery in Jamaica and we miss it as often as we see it; this individual seemed to be attempting to atone for the times we missed it; we couldn't have gotten better views

Jamaican Pewee (*Contopus pallidus*) - E - after really working for our first one, we had several great looks

Sad Flycatcher (*Myiarchus barbirostris*) - E - Fairly common and widespread, we had good looks on most days, though we never figured out why it was sad...

Rufous-tailed Flycatcher (*Myiarchus validus*) - E - a bigger cousin of the former, we had multiple good looks on several days

Stolid Flycatcher (*Myiarchus s. stolidus*) - e - A Caribbean endemic, this was the least common of the three *Myiarchus* flycatchers. It was seen well at PR.

Gray Kingbird (*Tyrannus dominicensis*) - seen most days

Loggerhead Kingbird (*Tyrannus caudifasciatus jamaicensis*) - e - Another Caribbean endemic, we saw them on every day of the tour.

Genus incertae sedis

Jamaican Becard (*Pachyramphus niger*) - E - the only becard in the Caribbean, we had great looks at males, females, and several nests

VIREOS

Jamaican Vireo (*Vireo modestus*) - E - Common and widespread, but not always easy to see, it was maybe the most vocal Jamaican bird during our trip.

Blue Mountain Vireo (*Vireo osburni*) - E - Different enough to be classified in its own genus for some time, we had great close up views in PRM and JCM.

Black-whiskered Vireo (*Vireo a. altiloquus*) - A different subspecies than reaches FL, we heard them everywhere in the forest and got good looks at several.

CROWS

Jamaican Crow (*Corvus jamaicensis*) - E - Known locally as Jabbering Crow, these birds have some really outlandish vocalizations! We had several opportunities to appreciate just how distinctive this species is.

SWALLOWS

Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva poeciloma*) - e - We saw them well at MP.

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) - several at scattered locations

THRUSHES

Rufous-throated Solitaire (*Myadestes genibarbis solitarius*) - e - A Caribbean endemic, these gorgeous birds treated us to their ethereal song on our morning in the PRM, though we had our best look at MP where we don't usually get it.

White-eyed Thrush (*Turdus jamaicensis*) - E - Much more stealthy than the latter, but we still managed several good views.

White-chinned Thrush (*Turdus aurantius*) - E - Common and fairly conspicuous, usually seen hopping on the ground in open areas; we saw many on a daily basis.

MOCKINGBIRDS AND ALLIES

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Bahama Mockingbird (*Mimus gundlachii hillii*) - e - A Caribbean endemic, in Jamaica this species is confined to the dry forest in the area of Portland Bight. Saw it in record time this year.

STARLINGS

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

WOOD WARBLERS

Northern Parula (*Parula americana*)

Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia eoa*) - The resident breeders of the Caribbean are sometimes referred to as “Golden Warbler” though the International Ornithological Conference has just lumped them with the Mangrove Warbler of Central America. The *eo*a subspecies is confined to Jamaica and the Caymans.

Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*) - one in JCM

Cape May Warbler (*Dendroica tigrina*) - great looks at a gorgeous adult male in PRM

Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens*) - A common wintering species in the Greater Antilles, we saw several of these handsome warblers everyday.

Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*) - one at MP

Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*) – seen almost daily

Arrowhead Warbler (*Dendroica pharetra*) - E - “Arrow-headed Warbler” on some checklists, including Clements; we had several excellent views of this denizen of dense tangles.

Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) - seen daily

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*) - seen daily, lots of flashy males

Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorus*) - seen well in JCM

Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*) - Betsy Kick-up, seen best at MP

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*) - seen well in the mangroves at PR

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*)

Genus incertae sedis

Bananaquit (*Coereba f. flaveola*) - e - we saw many every day

TANAGERS

Jamaican Spindalis (*Spindalis nigricephala*) - E - We had repeated fantastic views of these absolutely stunning birds. The females are almost as snazzy as the males!

SPARROWS AND ALLIES

Yellow-faced Grassquit (*Tiaris o. olivaceus*) - a Caribbean endemic subspecies, they were common around the feeder at MP

- Black-faced Grassquit (*Tiaris bicolor marchii*)** - A Caribbean near-endemic, this subspecies only occurs in Jamaica and Hispaniola.
- Yellow-shouldered Grassquit (*Loxipasser anoxanthus*)** - **E** – our timing was good for this species as they were practically invisible just a week earlier; we had several good views, best at MP
- Greater Antillean Bullfinch (*Loxigilla violacea ruficollis*)** - **e** - a Caribbean endemic, we had our best looks at a nesting pair in the garden at MP
- Orangequit (*Euneornis campestris*)** - **E** - Fairly common and seen daily; they are named for their fondness for fruit, but their local name, Bluequit, refers to the wonderful blue-gray color of the males which also show a contrasting orange throat.
- Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus s. savannarum*)** - **e** - great looks at a singing bird only 10' away from us along the road on the way back from CC

SALTATORS, CARDINALS AND ALLIES

Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) - a pair at Hardwar Gap were nice

BLACKBIRDS AND ALLIES

- Jamaican Blackbird (*Nesospiza nigerrimus*)** - **E** - Probably the rarest of the extant endemics and often the biggest challenge to find. This year they were rather easy showing up in both the PRM and JCM. The only member of its genus, some authorities think it is most closely related to the *Icterus* orioles.
- Greater Antillean Grackle (*Quiscalus niger crassirostris*)** - **e** - A Caribbean endemic, the “Cling-Cling” was fairly common and widespread; seen daily.
- Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*) - males at Rocklands at Pondsides
- Jamaican Oriole (*Icterus l. leucopteryx*)** - **e** - A Jamaican near-endemic, it can only be found in Jamaica and on the tiny Colombian-controlled island of San Andres off the coast of Nicaragua.

FINCHES AND ALLIES

- Jamaican Euphonia (*Euphonia jamaica*)** - **E** – good looks at males and females, probably seen best at MP

ESTRILDID FINCHES

Nutmeg Mannikin (*Lonchura punctulata*)

BUTTERFLIES

- False Androgeus Swallowtail (*Papilio thersites*) - **E** - Bahamian (Citrus) Swallowtail (*Papilio andraemon*) Queen (*Danaus gilippus jamaicensis*) Julia Heliconian (*Dryas iulia delila*) Zebra Heliconian (*Heliconius charithonia simulator*) Jamaican Mestra (*Mestra dorcas*) - **E** - Orion Cecropian (*Historis o. odius*) Dirce Beauty (*Colobura dirce wolcottii*) White Peacock (*Anartia jatrophae jamaicensis*) Malachite (*Siproeta stelenes stelenes*)

Tropical Buckeye (*Junonia evarete zonalis*)
Mangrove Buckeye (*Junonia genoveva*)
Jamaican Calisto (*Calisto zangis*)
Cadmus (*Historis acheronta cadmus*)

OTHER CRITTERS

Small Indian Mongoose (*Herpestes auropunctatus*)
Bat sp. – there are over twenty species on Jamaica

Marine Toad (*Bufo marinus*) - AKA Cane Toad, Giant Toad
Jamaican Snoring Frog (*Osteopilus crucialis*)
Jamaican Laughing Frog (*Osteopilus brunneus*)

Common House Gecko (*Hemidactylus mabouia*)
Opal-bellied Anole (*Anolis opalinus*)
Jamaican Giant Anole/Garmin's Anole (*Anolis garmani*)
Jamaican Tuquoise Anole/Graham's Anole (*Anolis grahami*)
American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*)- great looks at PP

Bee hive in a log at MP
Peacock along the road
Cocoa the dog