

# **JAMAICA**

**FEBRUARY 18-25, 2006**

**LEADERS:**

**BRENNAN MULROONEY AND BRANDON HAY**

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Birders love Jamaica—known for having the most endemic bird species of any Caribbean island. It is also relatively easy to see most, if not all of Jamaica's endemics on a birding tour. This year's tour was no exception, as all 28 extant Jamaican endemics made fantastic appearances along our journey across this enchanting island. In addition we tallied ten Caribbean endemics, four Caribbean near-endemics, and 123 species in total.

We began our birding efforts at the justly famous Rocklands Bird Sanctuary. Here we all had the opportunity to hand-feed two of Jamaica's spectacular endemic hummingbirds. Both the stocky, purple and black Jamaican Mango, and the flamboyant, black and emerald Red-billed Streamertail buzzed around our heads and perched on fingers, imbibing offerings of sugar water. Also on the grounds we had our first glimpses of several other wonderful species including both Black-faced and Yellow-faced grassquits (also feeding out of our hands), Caribbean Dove, Vervain Hummingbird (the second smallest bird in the world!), Orangequits, Bananaquits, and Jamaican Orioles.

Soon we had to tear ourselves away and start our trek across the spine of the island to our lodging for the next three days, Marshall's Pen. Our drive took us through some beautiful landscapes amongst hills draped in dense, deep green forest. As we drove we were accompanied by a nearly constant parade of Jamaicans making their way on foot to Sunday church services. We must have passed more than 25 different churches in a less than three-hour trip!

Ann Sutton, our gracious host for the next three nights, greeted us at Marshall's Pen. This is also where we met our superb local leader, Brandon Hay. Brandon's guidance for the rest of the trip ensured that our expedition would be a total success. Marshall's Pen was a fantastic base for our birding efforts. We were able to see more than half of the island's endemic species on the grounds, including the difficult Jamaican Owl, which nests right in the driveway! We saw both an adult and a fuzzy juvenile on our first night there. The endemic subspecies of Northern Potoo added to the nightlife at Marshall's Pen. It was from here that we visited the famous Cockpit Country of Jamaica's interior. Our morning visit produced fantastic scope views of the endemic Black-billed and Yellow-billed parrots, as well as the shy and difficult to see Ring-tailed Pigeon. Back at Marshall's Pen we were treated to delectable authentic Jamaican cuisine, and on our last morning Ann gave the group a fascinating tour of the Great House. More than 200 years old, the house has been in the Sutton family for many generations.

The remainder of our trip would be based out of Kingston, and our final two days offered both spectacular scenery and fantastic birding. Our day in the Blue Mountains, or more specifically the Port Royal Mountains, was magical right from the start. At our first stop, just as dawn was breaking, we all gathered together to slowly creep down a quiet road in search of the elusive Crested Quail-Dove. It wasn't 30 seconds before our quarry was in view, comically tottering down the road away from us. Several times we were able to sneak up on this bird and watch as it would slowly walk back out of view around the next bend. Soon we moved on to the many other birding opportunities that awaited us.

Our first order of business was to track down the bird that had been wonderfully serenading us since we stepped off the bus. It wasn't long before we had our initial glimpses of a Rufous-throated Solitaire, one of the few birds that look just as impressive as they sound. The endemic White-eyed Thrush may be another that fits that description, and we enjoyed watching and listening to several that morning. But perhaps our crowning achievement of that action-packed morning was tracking down our first Jamaican Blackbird. This is perhaps the least numerous of the remaining endemics, and its quiet, retiring demeanor doesn't help when trying to locate one. With a little patience and persistence we eventually found one, creeping along branches and poking into bromeliads, acting very unlike any blackbird we were familiar with. An authentic Jamaican buffet at a remote mountain chalet was the reward for our morning's efforts, and a visit to a Blue Mountain coffee plantation broke up our drive home.

Our final day of birding found us at the extreme eastern end of the island. We birded the Drivers River Valley in the John Crow Mountains, and it was here that we tracked down our last target bird, the Black-billed Streamertail. This sister species to the Red-billed Streamertail (or subspecies depending on your reference) can be found only here; with a little effort, we were rewarded with walk-away close-up scope views. Though this was certainly the highlight of our morning, there were many other fantastic birds that day. The hulking Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo gave us several great looks, Green-rumped Parrotlets furtively fed in the crowns of cecropias, Black-billed and Yellow-billed parrots wheeled overhead, and a Yellow-shouldered Grassquit gave us long and much appreciated views.

Our final lunch, at a traditional jerk stand in Boston Bay, was an adventure not soon to be forgotten, and a taste of real Jamaica. It was the perfect ending to a trip full of indelible memories of birds, natural beauty, hospitality, and island paradise.

## ITINERARY

**18 Feb** – Arrival in Montego Bay followed by tour orientation and dinner at the hotel.

**19 Feb** – Morning visit to 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.

**16 ENDEMICS**

**20 Feb** – Pre and Post-breakfast walks at Marshall's Pen, then a post-lunch drive to Spring Pond, Parrottee Pond, and the Black River, Upper Morass.

**15 ENDEMICS, 19 TOTAL**

**21 Feb** – Early morning departure for Cockpit Country returning to Marshall's Pen for Lunch, optional afternoon return to Black River, Upper Morass.

**20 ENDEMICS, 26 TOTAL**

**22 Feb** – Pre-breakfast birding at Marshall's Pen, post-breakfast tour of the Great House, then departure for Portland Ridge. Post lunch visit to Brandon's Office, then birding stop at Hellshire Ponds and late afternoon arrival at our hotel in Kingston.

**15 ENDEMICS, 26 TOTAL**

**23 Feb** – Early morning departure for the Blue (Port Royal) Mountains; roadside birding primarily in the vicinity of Hardwar Gap, lunch at the Starlight Chalet, then a visit to a Blue Mountain coffee plantation; late afternoon return to the hotel.

**19 ENDEMICS, 27 TOTAL**

**24 Feb** – Early morning departure for the John Crow Mountains with morning birding in the Drivers River Valley followed by a visit to Boston Bay for an authentic Jamaican Jerk lunch; post lunch birding on the way back to the hotel with stops at Hector's River, Yallahs Pond, and Kingston Harbour.

**22 ENDEMICS, 28 TOTAL (That's all of 'em!)**

**25 Feb** - Departures for home

## BIRD LIST

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

### Abbreviations:

E - Endemic species

H - Heard only

BRUM - Black River, Upper Morass

CC - Cockpit Country

JCM - John Crow Mountains

MP - Marshall's Pen

PRM - Port Royal Mountains

### WATERFOWL

**West Indian Whistling-Duck** (*Dendrocygna arborea*) - H - Despite repeated searches, we were never able to see these birds, though we did hear two distinct flocks calling near dusk at the BRUM.

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*)

Masked Duck (*Nomonyx dominica*) - About 8 on Spring Pond were seen well.

### GREBES

Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) - Several, including chicks at Spring Pond.

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

### PELICANS

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

### GANNETS AND BOOBIES

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) - one at Hellshire was seen by Phil only

### FRIGATEBIRDS

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*)

### HERONS

Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) - a couple on our return to BRUM gave fantastic scope views as they clung to the reeds

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)

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

### **IBISES AND SPOONBILLS**

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

### **NEW WORLD VULTURES**

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) - AKA John Crow

### **HAWKS AND EAGLES**

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis jamaicensis*) - Notice the Latin name, the species was described from a specimen taken from Jamaica. This subspecies is a Caribbean endemic.

### **FALCONS**

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

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) - Not a common bird in the Caribbean, we had one at BRUM.

### **RAILS AND COOTS**

Yellow-breasted Crake (*Porzana flaviventer*) - Leader Only - Brandon glimpsed one at Spring Pond, where we may have also had a second bird, but it slipped away.

Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio martinica*)

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

American Coot (*Fulica Americana*)

### **PLOVERS**

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*)

### **AVOCETS AND STILTS**

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

### **JACANAS**

Northern Jacana (*Jacana spinosa*) - Great looks at both adults and young at Spring Pond. The yellow flight feathers and wing spurs of the adults were fantastic.

### **SANDPIPERS**

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) - Convenient comparison views with the former at Parrottee Pond.

Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*) - For those who returned to BRUM

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*)

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) - The last new bird of the trip in Kingston Harbour

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*)

Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) - one uncooperative bird at Spring Pond

### **GULLS AND TERNS**

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*)

Royal Tern (*Sterna maxima*)

Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*)

### **PIGEONS AND DOVES**

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

**White-crowned Pigeon (*Patagioenas leucocephala*)** - A Caribbean near-endemic, probably seen best in Montego Bay

**Plain Pigeon (*Patagioenas inornata*)** - H - A Caribbean endemic confined to the Greater Antilles, we heard one in Cockpit Country that may have given us a flyby view.

**Ring-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas caribaea*)** - E - After flyby views in Cockpit Country, we had terrific scope views at close range.

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*)

**Zenaida Dove (*Zenaida aurita*)** - A Caribbean near-endemic, they were fairly common and widespread. A pair at MP provided scope views.

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*)

Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*)

**Caribbean Dove (*Leptotila jamaicensis jamaicensis*)** - A Jamaican endemic subspecies, we had one at Rocklands and then our best view from the bus at MP.

**Crested Quail-Dove (*Geotrygon versicolor*)** - E - Admittedly our first look at MP left something to be desired, but eventually we found a more cooperative birds teetering along the road in the PRM

**Ruddy Quail-Dove (*Geotrygon montana*)** - H - Perhaps seen only by me as it flushed from the road in the JCM, it was then heard singing for much of the morning, but not seen again.

### **PARROTS AND PARAKEETS**

Olive-throated Parakeet (*Aratinga nana nana*) - A Jamaican endemic subspecies (sometimes referred to as Jamaican Parakeet) these were fairly common and widespread, perhaps seen best feeding in orange floweres at MP.

Green-rumped Parrotlet (*Forpus passerinus*) - An introduced species, these tiny little guys were a challenge spot as they fed high in cecropias in the JCM.

**Yellow-billed Parrot (*Amazona collaria*)** - E - Seen both in CC and the JCM, scope views for all.

**Black-billed Parrot (*Amazona agilis*)** - E - similar success to the former

### **CUCKOOS**

Mangrove Cuckoo (*Coccyzus minor*) - One buzzed us at Portland Ridge.

**Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo (*Saurothera vetula*)** - E - We had superb views on our first afternoon at MP.

**Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo (*Hyetornis pluvialis*)** - E - We saw several, one at MP was very cooperative for those who stayed behind, also seen well in CC and JCM.

Smooth-billed Ani (*Crotophaga ani*)

### **OWLS**

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) – We had a couple good looks on our return drive from BRUM

**Jamaican Owl (*Pseudoscops grammicus*) - E -** Superb looks at both an adult and a fledgling at MP.

### **POTOOS**

Northern Potoo (*Nyctibius jamaicensis jamaicensis*) - A Jamaican endemic subspecies, we had fantastic looks at a perched bird at night at MP, it's bright yellow eye was truly stunning in the scope.

### **SWIFTS**

White-collared Swift (*Streptoprocne zonaris*)

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

### **HUMMINGBIRDS**

**Jamaican Mango (*Anthracothorax mango*) - E -** Hand-feeding these amazing hummingbirds at Rockands was an unforgettable experience.

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

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

**Vervain Hummingbird (*Mellisuga minima minima*) - A Caribbean endemic confined to Jamaica and Hispaniola, it is the second smallest bird in the world. This subspecies is a Jamaican endemic. We saw several, including a female building a nest at MP.**

### **TODIES**

**Jamaican Tody (*Todus todus*) - E -** 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 added up to make them a convincing winner of the favorite bird of the trip vote.

### **KINGFISHERS**

Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*)

### **WOODPECKERS**

**Jamaican Woodpecker (*Melanerpes radiolatus*) - E -** Fairly common and widespread, we had many good views, especially of a pair fighting starlings for a nest cavity at Marshall's Pen.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*)

### **TYRANT FLYCATCHERS**

**Jamaican Elaenia (*Myiopagis cotta*) - E** - Scope views for all in CC right as we got out of the bus, then we found a couple more in the PRM and JCM.

**Jamaican Pewee (*Contopus pallidus*) - E** - We had a very cooperative bird our first afternoon at MP.

**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** - Not as common as the former, but we managed to get multiple good looks on several days.

**Stolid Flycatcher (*Myiarchus stolidus stolidus*) - A Caribbean endemic and a Jamaican endemic subspecies; this was the least common of the three “Tom Fool” flycatchers, our best looks were at Portland Ridge.**

**Loggerhead Kingbird (*Tyrannus caudifasciatus jamaicensis*) - A Caribbean endemic and a Jamaican endemic subspecies, we saw them on every day of the tour.**

**Jamaican Becard (*Pachyramphus niger*) - E** - The only becard in the Caribbean, they were with us on almost every day of the tour but often frustratingly difficult to pin down. We eventually got good looks for everybody.

### **VIREOS**

**Jamaican Vireo (*Vireo modestus*) - E** - Common and widespread, but not always easy to see, it was also 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 excellent close-up studies of this great looking bird by the road in the PRM.

### **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**

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*)

**Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva poeciloma*) - A Jamaican endemic subspecies, we saw them well at MP.**

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

### **THRUSHES**

**Rufous-throated Solitaire (*Myadestes genibarbis solitarius*) - E** - A Caribbean endemic and a Jamaican endemic subspecies, these gorgeous birds treated us to their ethereal song all morning in the PRM, several also perched close by for fantastic views.

**White-eyed Thrush (*Turdus jamaicensis*) - E** - Much more stealthy than the latter, but

we still managed several good views including some stunning scope views that allowed us to really appreciate its mesmerizing white eye (or was it baby blue?).

**White-chinned Thrush (*Turdus aurantius*) - E** - Common and fairly conspicuous, we saw many on a daily basis.

### **MOCKINGBIRDS AND ALLIES**

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*)

**Bahama Mockingbird (*Mimus gundlachii hillii*)** - A Caribbean endemic and a Jamaican endemic subspecies, this species is confined to the dry forest in the area of Portland Bight, we had great looks at a pair at Portland Ridge.

### **STARLINGS**

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

### **WOOD WARBLERS**

Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*) - seen by a few near Hardwar Gap

Northern Parula (*Parula americana*)

**Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia eoa*)** - The resident breeding race of the Caribbean is sometimes referred to as “Golden Warbler”, the *eo*a subspecies is confined to Jamaica and the Caymans.

Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*) - one male at MP

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

Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata coronata*) - We saw the “Myrtle” race.

Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*)

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*) - seen by a few in Montego Bay

Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*)

Palm Warbler (*Dendroica palmarum palmarum*) - the “Western” subspecies

**Arrowhead Warbler (*Dendroica pharetra*) - E** - “Arrow-headed Warbler” on some checklists, including Clements; we had repeated views of this denizen of dense tangles, but it took quite a bit of effort for everybody to get satisfactory views, eventually persistence paid off.

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

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*)

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*)

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*)

### **BANANAQUIT**

Bananaquit (*Coereba flaveola flaveola*) - A Jamaican endemic subspecies, we saw many everyday, including in hand studies of a couple of unfortunate individuals.

### **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 olivaceus olivaceus*) - A Caribbean endemic subspecies

**Black-faced Grassquit (*Tiaris bicolor marchii*)** - A Caribbean near-endemic, this subspecies only occurs in Jamaica and Hispaniola.

**Yellow-shouldered Grassquit (*Loxipasser anoxanthus*)** - E - This bird made us work a little bit, but we eventually all had good looks in the JCM. It's really more of a "shrubquit" and is the only member of its genus, thought to be most closely related to the *Loxigilla* bullfinches.

**Greater Antillean Bullfinch (*Loxigilla violacea ruficollis*)** - A Caribbean endemic and a Jamaican endemic subspecies, they were skulkers, but we eventually got good looks for everybody.

**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 savannarum savannarum*) - We had fantastic views of this Jamaican endemic subspecies.

## **CARDINALS, GROSBEAKS AND BUNTINGS**

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*)

## **BLACKBIRDS AND ALLIES**

**Jamaican Blackbird (*Nesospar nigerrimus*)** - E - Probably the scarcest of the endemics and usually the biggest challenge to find, we had great luck seeing at least 5 on two different days. The only member of its genus, some authorities think it is most closely related to the *Icterus* orioles.

**Greater Antillean Grackle (*Quiscalus niger crassirostris*)** - A Caribbean endemic and a Jamaican endemic subspecies, the "Cling-Cling" was fairly common and widespread; seen daily.

**Jamaican Oriole (*Icterus leucopteryx leucopteryx*)** A Jamaican near-endemic (endemic subspecies), it can only be found here and on the tiny Columbian-controlled island of San Andres off the coast of Nicaragua.

## **FINCHES AND ALLIES**

**Jamaican Euphonia (*Euphonia jamaica*)** - E - Another bird that liked to stay hidden in dense foliage, but it was common enough that we had plenty of opportunities to coax them into view allowing everybody to eventually get good looks.

## **BUTTERFLIES**

Polydamas Swallowtail (*Battus polydamas jamaicensis*)

Thoas Swallowtail (*Papilio thoas melonius*)

Antillean Great White (*Ascia monuste eubotea*)

Yellow sp. (*Eurema* sp.)  
Cassius Blue (*Leptotes cassius theonus*)  
Julia Heliconian (*Dryas iulia delila*)  
Zebra Heliconian (*Heliconius charithonia simulator*)  
Jamaican Queen (*Danaus gillipus jamaicensis*)  
Dirce (*Colubra dirce*)  
Jamaican Patch (*Atlantea pantoni*)  
Buckeye Sp. (*Junonia* sp.)  
Jamaican White Peacock (*Anartia jatrophae jamaicensis*)  
Antillean Malachite (*Siproeta stelenes stelenes*)  
Jamaican Mestra (*Mestra dorcas*)  
Orion Cecropian (*Historis odius*)