

JAMAICA

FEBRUARY 18-25, 2007

LEADERS:

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TOUR REPORT
JAMAICA
February 18-25, 2007

By Brennan Mulrooney

Imagine six days of birding in a dramatic mountainous island setting surrounded by lush Caribbean forest, while experiencing splendidly balmy temperatures and dining on scrumptious Jamaican cuisine; then throw in 28 endemic species of birds...what's not to like? Jamaica offers more to the visiting birder than perhaps any of the other islands of the West Indies. No other island boasts more endemic birds, and few can match its natural beauty and the ease with which it can all be experienced. Our tour this year (as in most) saw all 28 of the known extant endemic birds in the country. In addition to those single island endemics, we saw 11 species of birds endemic to the Caribbean, and 5 additional Caribbean near-endemics. That's not to mention all of the endemic and near-endemic subspecies! In short, we had a truly awesome trip.

All tours have target birds, and some of these are going to be more difficult than others. In Jamaica, we know going in that the endemic Crested Quail-Dove is going to take some work. It's not especially responsive to tape, it doesn't like to forage in the open, and when vocal, it's rarely easy to see... in other words, it's a real pain! But as with most quail-doves, its beauty makes all the trouble well worth the work. Finding ourselves five days in to this year's tour and still not having any luck with this one, we were starting to feel the pressure. Luckily our best shot was still ahead of us, but you just never know. We had left for the field early that morning with the expressed intent of searching for this bird right at dawn when we hoped it would be out for a walk on its favorite side road. This situation would allow us to sneak up relatively quietly with hopes of seeing it before it might see or hear us. Well, after about 10 minutes of patient sneaking, my hopes were starting to falter. I didn't want to consider the possibility of leaving this spot without our bird. And then, just as we were about to turn back, there it was—all alone on the side of the road, teetering along awkwardly like a child's pull-toy—the Crested Quail-Dove! Everybody quickly got on the bird, and despite the involuntary "oohs," "aahs," and various other whispered exclamations, it didn't seem to be spooked by our presence. Instead, it just slowly continued down the road with its comically unsteady gait allowing for uncommonly good views of a very difficult, not to mention truly gorgeous, endemic bird.

While not all of our encounters with Jamaica's unique species were this much of a struggle, they all generated their own little thrills. There is really something special about seeing a single island endemic, and knowing that nowhere else in the world does such a creature exist. And it only adds to the excitement that so many of Jamaica's endemics are such handsome birds. The list includes the aforementioned Crested Quail-Dove, two truly outlandish cuckoos, three mind-boggling hummingbirds, two charismatic parrots, the multi-hued Jamaican Spindalis, and the incomparable Tody, a perennial trip favorite. Or what about the Jamaican Crow? Known locally as Jabbering Crow, their outlandish vocalizations were the perfect soundtrack to our birding in the Cockpit Country and John

Crow Mountains. The subtly distinctive Blue Mountain Vireo (formerly placed in its own genus) gave us astounding point blank views in Cockpit Country before making several repeat showings, appropriately enough, in the Blue Mountains. The often difficult and uncooperative Arrowhead Warbler was unusually accommodating, giving us several lengthy good looks. And, though not endemics, such marvelous and sought after species as West Indian Whistling-Duck, Masked Duck, Caribbean Coot, Northern Jacana, White-crowned Pigeon, Caribbean Dove, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Vervain Hummingbird (the second smallest bird in the world), Rufous-throated Solitaire, and Bahama Mockingbird all put in showings for us.

Yes, Jamaica was good to us this year. But on this magical Caribbean island, that is the rule far more than the exception.

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, stopping on the way at Spring Pond; afternoon and evening birding at Marshall's Pen.
14 ENDEMICS

20 Feb – Pre and Post-breakfast walks at Marshall's Pen, then afternoon drive to Treasure Beach, Parottee Pond, and the Black River, Upper Morass.
13 ENDEMICS, 18 TOTAL

21 Feb – Early morning departure for Cockpit Country returning to Marshall's Pen for Lunch, afternoon birding at Marshall's Pen.
22 ENDEMICS, 24 TOTAL

22 Feb – Birding at Marshall's Pen both before and after breakfast; tour of the Great House, then post-lunch departure. Stop in Lionel Town for a visit to Brandon's Office before birding at Portland Ridge; late afternoon arrival at our hotel in Kingston.
16 ENDEMICS, 24 TOTAL

23 Feb – Early morning departure for the Blue (Port Royal) Mountains; roadside birding primarily in the vicinity of Hardwar Gap, esp. Woodside Dr; lunch at the Starlight Chalet, then a visit to Twyman Estates Coffee; 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, 47th 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

CC - Cockpit Country

JCM - John Crow Mountains

MP - Marshall's Pen

PRM - Port Royal Mountains

PP - Parottee Ponds

TB - Treasure Beach

WATERFOWL

West Indian Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna arborea*) - What a relief, after agonizingly only hearing them last year, we had superb views of about 8 of these very rare Caribbean endemics.

American Wigeon (*Anas americana*) - one in TB

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) - on most ponds we looked at

Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) - at least three at TB

Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*) - one at TB

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) - a flock of about 15 at TB

Masked Duck (*Nomonyx dominica*) - one female at Spring Pond and a few more in TB including one or two males

GREBES

Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) - Several at Spring Pond and TB

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) - Spring Pond and TB

TROPICBIRDS

White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*) - admittedly not a stellar view, and only seen by a few as it flew high over the water about a mile out.

PELICANS

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

FRIGATEBIRDS

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*)

CORMORANTS

Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) - a vagrant to Jamaica, we saw an immature bird perched and in flight at TB

HERONS

Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) - H - we heard several calling from BRUM

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*) - PP

Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*) - two immature white morph birds at PP

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) - a few at dusk at BRUM

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) - BRUM and Bamboo Avenue

IBISES AND SPOONBILLS

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

NEW WORLD VULTURES

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) - AKA John Crow, including one "Parson John Crow" a striking looking partial albino that was mostly white

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.

RAILS AND COOTS

Clapper Rail (*Rallus longirostris*) - outstanding looks at three cooperative birds at Portland Ridge

Sora (*Porzana carolina*) - H - we heard several calling vigorously at BRUM

Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio martinica*)

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

American Coot (*Fulica Americana*)

Caribbean Coot (*Fulica caribaea*) we saw one distant bird at TB adjacent to an American Coot allowing for comparison of their bills.

PLOVERS

Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) - PP
Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*) - PP
Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) - PP
Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*)

AVOCETS AND STILTS

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

JACANAS

Northern Jacana (*Jacana spinosa violacea*) - good looks at Spring Pond and BRUM

SANDPIPERS

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*)
Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*)
Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) - Convenient comparison views with the former at Parrottee Pond.
Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)
Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*)

GULLS AND TERNS

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*)
Royal Tern (*Sterna maxima*)

PIGEONS AND DOVES

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)
White-crowned Pigeon (*Patagioenas leucocephala*) - A Caribbean near-endemic, probably seen best in Montego Bay
Ring-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas caribaea*) - E - We had fantastic close scope views of a bird feeding in a fruiting tree on Woodside Dr. then had multiple flight views in JCM.
White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*)
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 macroura*) - mostly in the lowlands
Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina jamaicensis*) - e - widespread in lowlands
Caribbean Dove (*Leptotila jamaicensis jamaicensis*) - e - We had many encounters this year, perhaps best from the bus at MP.
Crested Quail-Dove (*Geotrygon versicolor*) - E - We spent a lot of time creeping quietly along trails and peering into the forest, and we were finally rewarded with fantastic views in the PRM.

Ruddy Quail-Dove (*Geotrygon montana*) - it wasn't the bird that we were looking for, but we weren't complaining, any good look at any Quail-Dove is cause for celebration.

PARROTS AND PARAKEETS

Olive-throated Parakeet (*Aratinga nana nana*) - e - Sometimes referred to as Jamaican Parakeet, these were seen daily feeding in the *Erythrina* flowers at MP.

Green-rumped Parrotlet (*Forpus passerinus*) - An introduced species, these tiny little stopped and perched just long enough for everybody to get a look in the JCM.

Yellow-billed Parrot (*Amazona collaria*) - E - seen both in CC and the JCM, though we never found one perched we had good looks in flight

Black-billed Parrot (*Amazona agilis*) - E - much more cooperative than the former, we had many great scope views

CUCKOOS

Mangrove Cuckoo (*Coccyzus minor*) - seen only by John from the bus near Lionel Town

Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo (*Saurothera vetula*) - E - superb views at MP and PRM

Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo (*Hyetornis pluvialis*) - E - seen daily at MP

Smooth-billed Ani (*Crotophaga ani*)

OWLS

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba furcata*) – We had great looks on our return drive from BRUM. This subspecies, known as White-winged Barn Owl is restricted to Cuba, the Caymans and Jamaica

Jamaican Owl (*Pseudoscops grammicus*) - E - seen well at dusk at MP in the nest tree, then a young bird heard calling from the entry road

POTOOS

Northern Potoo (*Nyctibius jamaicensis jamaicensis*) - e - We heard a couple of different birds, but they were quite uncooperative. One gave us a glimpse as it flew past us at MP.

SWIFTS

White-collared Swift (*Streptoprocne zonaris*)

Antillean Palm-Swift (*Tachornis p. 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 m. minima*) - e - A Caribbean endemic confined to Jamaica and Hispaniola, it is the second smallest bird in the world. We saw several, including two engaged in a thrilling aerial dog fight.

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 the 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 great views, best at MP.

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

Jamaican Elaenia (*Myiopagis cotta*) - E - We had a few good looks, but probably best in the PRM at the Twyman Estates where one landed right in front of us.

Greater Antillean Elaenia (*Elaenia f. fallax*) - e - a mysterious bird in Jamaica, it's range is not well understood; we had fantastic views in PRM and hear several

Jamaican Pewee (*Contopus pallidus*) - E - Easier than usual this year, we had repeated good looks at MP and PRM.

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*) - e - A Caribbean endemic, this was the least common of the three *Myiarchus* flycatchers. We had fantastic looks at Portland Ridge.

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

Jamaican Becard (*Pachyramphus niger*) - E - the only becard in the Caribbean, we had good looks at both the male and female, bet at MP

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 in CC and again in 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*)

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

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

THRUSHES

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

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, we had great scope views at Portland Ridge.

STARLINGS

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

WOOD WARBLERS

Northern Parula (*Parula americana*) - seen daily

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.

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*)

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 several excellent views of this denizen of dense tangles.

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

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*)

Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorus*) - it took some work, but finally seen by all in the JCM

Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*) - including one imitating a Quail-Dove

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*)

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) - an especially aggressive male in JCM

BANANAQUIT

Bananaquit (*Coereba f. flaveola*) - e - we saw many every day, including in hand study of an unfortunate individual at MP.

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

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 CC. 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*) - e - A Caribbean endemic, they were skulkers, but we had 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 s. savannarum*) - e - we had some close calls, but mostly heard only, only Brandon saw one duck into the grass.

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*) - e - A Caribbean endemic, the "Cling-Cling" was fairly common and widespread; seen daily.

Jamaican Oriole (*Icterus l. leucopteryx*) - e - A Jamaican near-endemic, 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 at MP and we had a few great looks.

BUTTERFLIES

Bahamian Swallowtail (*Papilio andraemon*)
Antillean Great White (*Ascia monuste eubotea*)
Cloudless Sulphur (*Phoebis sennae*)
Yellow sp. (*Eurema* sp.)
Cassius Blue (*Leptotes cassius theonus*)
Hanno Blue (*Hemiargus hanno*)
Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*)
Julia Heliconian (*Dryas iulia delila*)
Zebra Heliconian (*Heliconius charithonia simulator*)
West Indian Buckeye (*Junonia evarete zonalis*)
Jamaican Queen (*Danaus gillipus jamaicensis*)
Dirce (*Colubra dirce*)
Jamaican White Peacock (*Anartia jatrophae jamaicensis*)
Antillean Malachite (*Siproeta stelenes stelenes*)
Jamaican Mestra (*Mestra dorcas*)
Tropical Fritillary (*Euptoieta hegesia hegesia*)
Jamaican Admiral (*Adelpha abyla*)
Jamaican Satyr (*Calisto zangis*)
Tropical Checkered Skipper (*Pyrgus oileus*)
Butler's Jamaican Skipper (*Astrartes jaira*)

OTHER CRITTERS

Small Indian Mongoose (*Herpestes auropunctatus*)
Bat sp.
Giant Toad (*Bufo marinus*)
Jamaican Giant Anole (*Anolis garmani*)
Jamaican Tuquoise Anole (*Anolis grahami*)