

# JAMAICA

MARCH 22 – 29, 2009

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*The Caribbean! A chain of tropical paradise islands, known for their beaches and palm trees, but boasting outstandingly beautiful and diverse rainforests, mangroves, cactus thorn scrub and endemic BIRDS. Millions of years ago most of the islands of the Greater Antilles were created as part of a volcanic arc on the edge of the Caribbean plate. Over the ensuing millennia, rising and falling sea levels allowed for considerable deposition and sedimentation over the original volcanic cores and for the islands to greatly increase in size. Current theories suggest that the islands were never connected to the Central American landmass above water. The fauna and flora of Jamaica reflect their protracted physical isolation, which has resulted in the evolution of numerous regional specialties.*

*Jamaica offers an enchanting experience with 28 endemic bird species (species found nowhere else). On our previous trips we have almost always seen all 28, plus most of the more than 17 Jamaican subspecies and many other Caribbean endemics! In addition to fantastic birds, butterflies, lizards, plants, and other wildlife, there is spectacular scenery; dark green, rain-forest-clad mountains swooping down to sparkling, aqua-blue ocean waters lined with dense mangrove forests and wetlands.*

*Jamaica is blessed with a wide variety of habitats, from coastal scrub to mountains looming 7,000 feet into the clear blue skies. Much of this rugged island is still forested. This trip will take us far from the tourist beaches, to the less visited interior of the island. After a gentle introduction to the delights of the country in the cool rolling hills of the center of the island (where we will see a majority of the endemics, including Jamaican Owl and Jamaican Tody), we'll visit some of the last remaining freshwater marshes in the region. There we hope to find West Indian Whistling-Duck, one of the rarest ducks in the world. Then we will journey into the enigmatic Cockpit Country, home of the Ring-tailed Pigeon and two endemic parrots: Black-billed and Yellow-billed. As we move east across the island we'll first descend briefly to the coastal mangroves, cactus thorn scrub and dry limestone forests, where we will find the very localized Bahama Mockingbird. Then we'll ascend into the remote Blue Mountains and the John Crow Mountains. There we will search for Blue Mountain Vireo, the elusive Crested Quail-Dove, Jamaican Blackbird, and the Black-billed Streamertail hummingbird, which is only found in this area.*

*In addition to all the wonderful birding and scenery, we will enjoy the pleasures and accommodations of a private Great House. Far from the bustling city, this 200 year old plus home dates from the colonial period and is as fascinating as the natural attractions. Our host for this part of the trip is Ann Sutton, the owner of the property and one of the most prominent figures in Caribbean conservation efforts. Additionally, we will have with us for the duration of the trip, Brandon Hay, a Jamaican biologist with intimate knowledge of Jamaica and its wildlife.*

*This delightful short trip offers a wonderful opportunity to experience the excitement of birding the Caribbean while also serving as an excellent introduction to the world of tropical birding.*

**March 22, Day 1: Arrival in Montego Bay.** Participants can make plans to arrive in Montego Bay at any time this afternoon. All participants arriving this afternoon will be met by an agent or representative of our local operator, who will then provide transportation to the hotel. Early arriving passengers will need to secure a private transfer to the hotel. Taxis are readily found outside the airport. There are direct flights to Montego Bay from various U.S. cities including Miami, Atlanta, Houston and New York (subject to change).

This evening, at a time to be announced, the group will meet in the hotel lobby for a tour orientation and dinner.

NIGHT: Emerald Escape Resort, Montego Bay

**March 23, Day 2: Rocklands Bird Sanctuary and on to Marshall's Penn.** This morning we will kick the trip off in an auspicious way with a visit to the Rocklands Bird Sanctuary. Not far from Montego Bay, we will immediately begin birding. Expected species include many of the endemic birds of Jamaica, with Jamaican Woodpecker, Rufous-tailed Flycatcher, Jamaican Oriole and Orangequit likely. The chief attractions here are the wild hummingbirds that will perch on your fingers to feed. Both big and beautiful, the Red-billed Streamertail hummingbird is not only the national bird of Jamaica, but one of the world's most spectacular birds. These stunning beauties stream about the sanctuary and are sure to leave you bedazzled.

We will then transfer to Marshall's Pen, near Mandeville, in the center of Jamaica. Marshall's Pen is home to Ann Sutton, Jamaica's foremost conservationist and one of the most important figures in conservation anywhere in the Caribbean. She is also the wife of the late Robert Sutton, generally regarded as the leading ornithologist in Jamaica. A 200-year-old historic Great House and 300-acre cattle property and private nature reserve is Ann's home and will serve as our accommodations for this part of the trip. Marshall's Pen is always an unforgettable experience and is open to birders by special arrangement only.

NOTE: Since Marshall's Pen is a private home, single accommodations cannot be guaranteed if the group is large, but the wonderful atmosphere and great birding more than makes up for it!

After settling in, we will have the remainder of the afternoon to explore the lush gardens and forests that surround the property. Birdlife is abundant and beautifully supplements the quaint setting. The flowering trees are simply alive with birds. Red-billed Streamertails and Jamaican Mangos dart and perch around us. Jamaican Woodpeckers noisily inspect dead branches and Jamaican Vireos flit about the bushes.

NIGHT: Marshall's Pen, near Mandeville

**March 24, Day 3: Marshall's Pen and the Black River.** Birding around Marshall's Pen is a delightful way to become acquainted with Jamaica's endemic species, many of which are common here. We will have the entire morning to leisurely explore the many gardens and forest paths. We should find many common and widespread species including Jamaican Becard, Jamaican Crow, Jamaican Euphonia, and Jamaican Spindalis (Stripe-headed Tanager). All of these birds are wonderfully different and will only serve to further entice your curiosity. More searching should yield the bright blue Orangequit, the hulking Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo and the glamorous Jamaican Oriole. White-chinned Thrushes bounce around the road and paths while Sad Flycatchers call from delicate branches. Perhaps most interesting though is the Jamaican Tody, the sole island representative of a uniquely Caribbean group of birds. These pastel-colored sprites call and dart about the forest edge, seemingly daring you to get as close as you can. Birding at Marshall's Pen is always rewarding and its abundance of birdlife includes far more than endemic species. Bananaquits, Zenaida Doves, Loggerhead Kingbirds and Olive-throated Parakeets are easily seen. Even the dainty Vervain Hummingbird is here, usually peering out from some lofty perch.

In the mid-afternoon we'll depart for the Black River, upper morass. This freshwater marsh is home to one of the rarest ducks in the world, the West Indian Whistling-Duck. Although extremely difficult to see, we have had

good luck spotting this species when individuals leave their day roost for nocturnal foraging. American Coot, Purple Gallinule, Least Bittern, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and Northern Jacana are among the other common residents of this beautiful marshland. Masked Duck, Spotted Rail, and Yellow-breasted Crake have also been recorded at this site, but they are rare and hard to see. Our return drive will provide good opportunity to locate Barn Owl. The subspecies here is known as White-winged Barn Owl and is restricted to Jamaica, Cuba and the Cayman Islands.

NIGHT: Marshall's Pen, near Mandeville

**March 25, Day 4: Cockpit Country.** This will be one of the most exciting days of the tour. We'll start early to bird one of Jamaica's most fascinating areas—the Cockpit Country. In these karst limestone mountains, the multitude of valleys enclosed by ragged, steep-sided hills resemble the pits used in cockfighting; hence the name Cockpit Country. Here, Yellow-billed and Black-billed parrots form large flocks at dawn and dusk and feed in roadside trees, at times perching in the open for superior scope views. Ring-tailed Pigeons (and possibly Plain Pigeons) skulk in dense vegetation and occasionally fly overhead, going from one feeding area to another, and the unearthly gobbling cry of the Jamaican Crow resounds. The one-lane road that traverses these rugged mountains offers spectacular views of birds and scenery, with no need to walk long distances or cross rough terrain. This area is excellent for the Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo, one of the island's most striking specialties. With its long, spear-like bill and cacophonous calls, prehistoric would adequately describe this bird's appearance. Jamaican Vireos can be common and at this elevation, we will have our first opportunity to spot the Blue Mountain Vireo.

We'll return to Marshall's Pen in the afternoon in time to bird the property more or simply to relax. This evening will feature a special effort to see the Jamaican Owl. Several pairs live in the area and our chances of spotting one are good. We will also spend time searching for the endemic subspecies of Northern Potoo that is fairly common here.

NIGHT: Marshall's Pen, near Mandeville

**March 26, Day 5: Marshall's Pen East to Portland Ridge.** We'll have several hours this morning to explore the gardens and forests of Marshall's Pen a final time. Perhaps our next new birds will be flycatchers, like the Jamaican Pewee, Jamaican Elaenia or Rufous-tailed Flycatcher, all of which are endemic; or maybe it will be the Yellow-shouldered Grassquit, a stunning black and yellow bird usually found on shrubby hillsides. If we are truly fortunate, the beautiful Crested Quail-Dove or cryptic Ruddy Quail-Dove may be seen walking ever so quietly on the forest floor.

An additional activity is a tour of the Great House. This 200-year-old plus house dates from Jamaica's colonial period and has been in the Sutton family for several generations. The elegantly decorated rooms, many with authentic period furniture, take the visitor back in time. We will then depart our lovely surroundings and head east toward Portland Ridge. The drive takes several hours but will give us ample exposure to the verdant Jamaican hinterland. The rich agricultural lands of Jamaica's valleys and foothills are chock full of coffee and banana plantations as well as a variety of other fruits and vegetables. Serving as a backdrop are the rolling and sometimes rugged mountains that traverse the country, all cloaked in dark green forest.

Proceeding east, the landscape becomes steadily drier until we reach Portland Ridge on the south central coast of Jamaica. The "ridge" takes its name from the huge limestone deposits that form hills in an otherwise mostly flat country. This area is highly unique in Jamaica and offers the birder/traveler a whole new set of habitats to explore. Mangrove lagoons meet dry forest while the aquamarine waters of the Caribbean beg for attention. Portland Ridge is part of the Portland Bight Protected Area. A bight is an indentation in the coastline, like a bay with a very wide mouth, and the protected area is one of the most important areas in Jamaican conservation. With salt pans, dry forest, mangrove lagoons and rocky hillsides, this area is of critical importance. The birding here can be quite good with opportunities for migrating shorebirds and numbers of herons, egrets and terns. Clapper Rails and Mangrove Cuckoos are some of the shyer residents found here and can sometimes be coaxed

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out of hiding. The premier sight here though is the Bahama Mockingbird, a species whose range is restricted to this corner of Jamaica. More common in the Bahamas and parts of Cuba, it maintains a toehold here in this most arid part of the country. We will dedicate significant time to locating this threatened (in Jamaica) species.

We can expect a late afternoon arrival in Kingston.

NIGHT: The Courtleigh Hotel, Kingston

**March 27, Day 6: The Blue Mountains.** We'll depart the hotel early this morning for a full day in the Blue Mountains. The Blue Mountains are famous for coffee, but that's not all. Among the lush vegetation high on the steep slopes, we'll search for the strange, bromeliad-haunting Jamaican Blackbird and the reclusive Crested Quail-Dove, arguably Jamaica's two most-difficult endemics to find. Neither bird is a sure thing, but we do have a good chance at both. Our first stop at Hardwar Gap (pronounced "Hardware" ) has often proved successful. While searching for these two specialties in the dense, misty, montane forests, we should see Ring-tailed Pigeon, Blue Mountain Vireo, White-eyed Thrush, Arrow-head Warbler and Jamaican Oriole. Wherever we go, we'll be accompanied by the hauntingly beautiful song of the Rufous-throated Solitaire. The road through the mountains traverses the middle elevations and we will make numerous stops for birding. The scenery is great as well and photographic opportunities abound. Gently sloping valleys often give way to distant views of the Jamaican lowlands. The dripping forest around us holds a plethora of plants and trees that will be new to most of us.

During our drive across the mountains we will focus on the Jamaican Blackbird, numerically the scarcest of the island endemics, so we will allocate as much time as is necessary for the endeavor. Ring-tailed Pigeons are, additionally, unpredictable in their occurrence and will be high on our wish list as well. We will enjoy a lunch on a hilltop perch where views of the surrounding valleys are impressive and often with White-collared Swifts soaring overhead.

We'll retrace our route back over the mountains this afternoon with a mid to late afternoon arrival likely.

NIGHT: The Courtleigh Hotel, Kingston

**March 28, Day 7: The John Crow Mountains.** Today we will travel from Kingston to the eastern end of the island. Our destination is the deep forests of the John Crow Mountains. Our trip will take us along the cliffs and rocky headlands of the rugged and beautiful Jamaican coastline. Strategic stops atop the towering cliffs might yield White-tailed Tropicbird. These dazzling white beauties are seasonally common here and can be seen fishing the open ocean and engaging in aerial courtship display.

The John Crow Mountains are an integral part of the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park. The deep ravines and dark forests offer more chances for Black-billed and Yellow-billed parrots and more Jamaican Blackbirds. Roadside clearings can be excellent for Ring-tailed Pigeons as well. The focus of our attention in the area, however, is the glistening green Black-billed Streamertail hummingbird. Unlike their brassy, brazen and bold Red-billed brethren, these birds are shyer and more retiring nymphs of the forest. We should be able to locate several as they dart about the sunlit openings of the woods. For good measure, the uplifting song of the White-eyed Thrush should be much in evidence. During our birding we will want to take notice of the undamaged forests and mysterious mountains that watch over our location, here in the Drivers River Valley. This part of Jamaica is often a favorite among tour participants and holds some of the largest remaining tracts of pristine, native forest.

Before returning to Kingston, we will take time to bird the bay and sandbars of Kingston Harbor, where a variety of shorebirds, gulls and terns can be found. We will return to the hotel this afternoon and then gather for our final group dinner.

NIGHT: The Courtleigh Hotel, Kingston

**March 29, Day 8: Departure from Kingston.** Early this morning, a group transfer will be provided to Kingston's Manley airport in time for flights to various destinations.

**TOUR LEADERS:** Brennan Mulrooney and Brandon Hay

**Brennan Mulrooney** was born and raised in San Diego, California. Growing up, his heart and mind were captured by the ocean. He split his summer days between helping out behind the scenes at southern California's leading aquarium and working on sport fishing vessels off the coast. As a wildlife and fisheries biology major at UC Davis, he developed his fascination with birds and love of birding while taking a required ornithology course. Since graduating from UC Davis, Brennan has traveled throughout the United States working on wide-spread ornithological field studies. His work has taken him from the mountains of northern California to the Salton Sea in southern California, and from Cape May, New Jersey to Key Largo, Florida. Currently Brennan lives in San Diego with his wife Brynne and their son Declan. Participants often comment that Brennan's sharp eyes, sharper wit, and easygoing attitude make it a pleasure to bird with him.

**Brandon Hay** has served as research assistant to Ann Sutton since 1996. Together they are conducting research on migrant land birds in Jamaican mangrove forests. Brandon is also the Scientific Officer for the Caribbean Coastal Area Management Foundation, an organization dedicated to the protection and sustainable development of Jamaican natural resources. At the University of the West Indies (UWI), where he earned a B.S. degree in zoology in 1995 and currently attends graduate school, Brandon was involved in researching the reproductive success of Red-billed and Black-billed streamertails (hummingbirds). He enjoys scuba diving, boating, and radio-controlled model aircraft.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$2975** per person in double occupancy from Montego Bay (tour ends in Kingston). This includes all food from dinner on Day 1 to Dinner on Day 7, all lodging for 7 nights during the tour, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Montego Bay and return from Kingston, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$310**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you. The single supplement does not cover nor guarantee single accommodations for the three nights at Marshall's Pen where you may be asked to share. However, your preference will be noted and accommodated if possible at no additional cost.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$300 per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$300.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE:** Application forms for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

**CONDITIONS:** All travel in Jamaica will be aboard a coaster (medium size touring bus) with a licensed driver. As Jamaica is a former English colony, vehicles are driven on the opposite side of the road than in the United States. There are many curves and bumps in the road along the tour route, so motion sickness medication may be advisable for those who suffer from this unfortunate malady.

At least two days will require predawn (5:00 a.m.) departures to reach birding areas at the optimum time, and a 4:00 a.m. departure one day (Day 7) is possible, depending on what birds we are still looking for. Several days of the tour allow for afternoon breaks/early returns to the hotel when bird activity drops off.

Tap water in the hotels in Montego Bay and Kingston is safe for drinking, but not advisable at Marshall's Pen. Bottled water will be available throughout the trip, as will snacks and other beverages between meals.

This trip does not involve any overly strenuous activity. Most walking will be on paved roads and good forest trails. Some of the trails at Marshall's Pen are a bit steep and can be muddy. Waterproof shoes or rubber boots can be of use for morning walks through dew covered grass.

Chiggers, ticks, and mosquitoes are present on Jamaica and can be annoying. Please see sections on CLOTHING and HEALTH for more details.

**CLIMATE:** March in Jamaica means cool, comfortable mornings and warm days. Although the dry season will have started and rain is not expected, a "norther" could produce more rainy weather than anticipated in the low-

lands. Expect temperatures to range from the upper 60s to the mid 80s. In the mountains, expect cool morning temperatures in the high 50s with days in the upper 70s and low 80s.

**CLOTHING:** In general, lightweight field clothing is the norm. This includes a pair of pants or two, one or two pairs of shorts and cool, comfortable shirts, both long and short sleeved. A hat and sunglasses are also recommended for protection from the sun. It is best to avoid white or brightly colored clothing in favor of more drab, plain-colored attire. A sweater or jacket is recommended for the cooler mornings in the mountain regions. Good raingear is suggested. A light water repellent jacket or parka should be sufficient and a small collapsible umbrella is ideal. It will be cooler in the mountains, so bring a light sweater or jacket. A pair of hiking boots or comfortable walking shoes and a second pair of lightweight shoes are suggested. Tall (calf high) rubber boots help minimize contact with ticks and chiggers and will keep your feet dry on possibly wet mornings

**EQUIPMENT:** Your tour leaders will have their personal spotting scopes available for group use, but feel free to bring your own if you prefer. Binoculars are essential and a camera is recommended as well. Bring a flashlight or headlamp, battery powered travel alarm clock, wash cloth, and a water bottle. In addition, bring a bottle (no cans) of insect repellent. Since ticks can penetrate the best defenses, bring an antihistamine cream. Please bring extra quantities of any medication you will require during the tour. There are many very curvy, bumpy roads along the tour route, so motion sickness medication may be advisable for those who suffer this unfortunate malady in cars or buses.

**DOCUMENTS:** For U.S. citizens, a valid U.S. passport is required for entry into Jamaica as well as a return or continuing airline ticket. For added assurance, we recommend that your passport be valid from at least six months before to six months after your stay in Jamaica.

**CURRENCY:** As of June 2008, Jamaican Dollars trade at 71:1 USD. Money can be exchanged at the airport in Montego Bay upon leaving immigration, as well as at the international airport in Miami. While the need for large amounts of local currency is not great, it is good to have at least a small amount on hand for purchasing gifts and souvenirs. The larger hotels and stores do accept credit cards.

**HEALTH:** At this time, no vaccinations are required for Jamaica. Anyone who has traveled to Asia in the six weeks prior to the tour will be required to have his or her vaccination certificate with them and available on arrival in Jamaica. Although not required, a standard travel precaution is vaccination against Hepatitis types A and B. Hepatitis A is a disease of contaminated food that can produce swelling of the liver and severe flu-like symptoms. Immunization is a two shot sequence. Hepatitis B is a far more serious disease contracted by the exchange of contaminated blood. Immunization is a three shot sequence that is generally thought to be good for life. Please consult your physician.

Tap water in the hotels in Montego Bay and Kingston is safe for drinking, but not advisable at Marshall's Pen. Bottled water will be available throughout the trip, as will snacks and other beverages between meals.

There are chiggers and ticks on the island (especially the tiny seed ticks that are abundant at this time of year) and can be annoying. The ticks carry NO diseases, but can be very itchy. Tucking your pant legs into your socks and spraying shoes, socks, and lower pant legs with insect repellent works well for keeping ticks and chiggers away.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

**A Note About Chiggers:** This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking, or standing in particular, in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutters" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutters" or "Off." Repellents with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to your skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

**BAGGAGE:** Baggage limits for the airlines are two pieces of checked baggage and one carry-on, but since this is a short trip we ask that you limit luggage to one medium-size suitcase and a carry-on bag. Please do not pack documents or medications in checked luggage. These, as well as your binoculars, a change of clothes, and some toiletry items should be packed in your carry-on bag.

**ELECTRICITY:** Voltage in Jamaica is 110 volt, 50 cycle AC. Power at Marshall's Pen is provided by a generator that runs mostly in the evenings and on our departure morning.

**IMPORTANT NUMBERS AND WEBSITES TO KNOW:**

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION  
WEATHER  
TRAVEL ADVISORIES

877-FYI-TRIP or [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)  
900/WEATHER or [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)  
202/647-5225

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website at [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com) offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com), or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com), which specializes in ornithology books.

***Birds:***

Downer, Audrey & Robert Sutton. *Birds of Jamaica: A Photographic Field Guide*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. It is out of print, but can be found at Amazon.com. A new edition is due out soon and may be available at Marshall's Pen in time for this tour.

Raffaele, Herbert A., et. al. *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*. Princeton University Press, 1998. Along with the photographic guide to the birds of Jamaica, this is a very good all around guide to the birds of the Caribbean, with many wonderful illustrations.

Raffaele, Herbert A., et. al. *Birds of the West Indies*. Princeton University Press, 2003. This is the "field guide" version of the former work. It is much smaller and will fit in a pocket for field use. It has a few new plates and the text is much condensed from the original.

Sibley, David A. *National Audubon Society: The Sibley Guide to North American Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2000.

***Recording:***

Reynard, George B. & Robert L. Sutton. *Bird Songs in Jamaica*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. ([http://birds.cornell.edu/lab\\_cds.html](http://birds.cornell.edu/lab_cds.html))

**TIPPING:** As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

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