

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: A CARIBBEAN BIRDING ADVENTURE

APRIL 18 - 26, 2009

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Welcome to the Dominican Republic—a beautiful country in the Caribbean featuring outstanding natural history, a rich human history and, best of all, wonderful birding. Like other locations in the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic embodies the classic vacation in paradise: sandy beaches, palm trees, beautiful coastline, rugged mountains, and lush tropical forests. Add to this a splendid array of endemic or nearly endemic bird species and the picture is complete.

The Dominican Republic is surely the most geographically diverse country in the Caribbean, containing four mountain ranges, with peaks rising over 10,000 feet, as well as an inland lake, Enriquillo, that lies an astonishing 130 feet below sea level. Nearly half the plant species are endemic and we will visit at least four of the country's five major vegetation zones. The birding, of course, is superb. Out of a remarkable 30 endemic bird species, we have a chance to see all of them! Among the numerous possibilities, we should encounter the Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo, Hispaniolan Parrot, Hispaniolan Parakeet, Hispaniolan Emerald, Hispaniolan Pewee, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Hispaniolan Trogon, Antillean Piculet, and Green-tailed Ground-Warbler (Green-tailed Ground-Tanager). A special family of birds endemic to the Greater Antilles is the todys, one of nature's more fascinating creations. These sprites of the forest would seem more at home in a cartoon rather than the woods of the Dominican Republic. We should have the great fortune of encountering two species, the broad-billed and narrow-billed.

The richness of this island is further revealed through the presence of at least 15 other bird species endemic to the Caribbean region as a whole, including West Indian Whistling-Duck, Antillean Palm-Swift, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Red-legged Thrush, Antillean Euphonia, and Greater Antillean Oriole (sometimes treated as an endemic species, Hispaniolan Oriole).

This tour also includes an opportunity to search for the Ridgway's Hawk, one of the world's rarest, most threatened Buteo. For this endeavor we will journey to the northeast part of the island, to Los Haitises National Park, a sprawling mosaic of habitats where mangrove lagoons and deepwater bays meet densely forested hills of ragged karst limestone. Here is where the last known pairs of this critically endangered species hang on. We will have as much as a day and a morning in the park to search for the bird. A local guide will take us near known nest sites, making our chances of finding the hawk good.

The wonders of the Dominican Republic are certainly not limited to its impressive birdlife. We are sure to encounter marvelous scenery everywhere we go. Additionally, the island exudes a charm that is manifested through its friendly people, roadside shops and restaurants, and delightfully painted houses. In Santo Domingo we will spend a final afternoon walking through the city's beloved colonial zone,

The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure, Page 2

site of the earliest Spanish colony in the New World. For this portion of the trip we will be accompanied by a historian of the era who will enlighten us on Columbus, his family, and the Spanish authority over Hispaniola in the colonial period.

Our tour is timed for the height of the breeding season and for maximizing our chances for seeing as many birds as possible. Aside from the island and regional endemics, we may encounter lingering Neotropical migrants. This dynamic island will not only give the birder a unique impression of the alluring beauty of the Caribbean and its birds, but is also guaranteed to impart a true sense of adventure.

On a final note, VENT supports the conservation of the birds of the Dominican Republic and the habitats they depend on. A portion of your tour fee will be dedicated to the Society of Hispaniolan Ornithology, a small but dedicated organization which seeks to preserve the birds of the Dominican Republic through public education, habitat preservation, and properly paid park guards.

April 18, Day 1: Arrival in Santo Domingo. Participants reserved on flights which are scheduled to arrive in Santo Domingo between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. will be met and transferred to the Hotel El Embajador where a room will be reserved in your name. There are direct flights from Miami, Atlanta and New York which match this criterion.

Participants reserved on flights which are scheduled to arrive outside the above time window will need to take a taxi to the hotel. Taxi service is found readily outside the airport and participants should expect the ride to take 35 minutes and cost approximately \$40.00

Those wishing to avoid the risk of travel delays should consider spending the night of April 17 in Santo Domingo or a gateway city in the USA. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any lodging arrangements.

Depending on your actual arrival time, you are welcome to spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing or birding the attractive hotel gardens. The grounds of the hotel are often birdy and will produce our first sightings of some of the D.R.'s special birds. Hispaniolan Woodpeckers, Palmchats, and Bananaquits are common and Yellow-faced Grassquits are often found among the flowering bushes. One of the more exciting events of the trip is the daily spectacle of hundreds of wild Hispaniolan Parakeets descending on the large trees of the hotel grounds as they congregate for the evening roost. These green beauties are loud and easy to locate as they swirl amongst the trees and buildings in tight, screeching flocks. We should have unlimited opportunities for good views of these birds. Participants may meet the tour leaders in the lobby at 5:30 p.m. to see the parakeets.

At 6:30 p.m. we will reconvene in the lobby for a tour welcome and orientation, followed by dinner. Late arriving participants will receive notification from the tour leaders about plans for the next day.

NIGHT: Hotel El Embajador, Santo Domingo

April 19, Day 2: National Botanic Gardens; Drive to Barahona. We will begin our tour of the Dominican Republic in an auspicious way, with an early morning visit to the Dr. Rafael M. Moscoso National Botanic Gardens. Created in 1976, and named for the botanist who first catalogued the flora of Hispaniola, the gardens are truly one of the special landmarks of the Dominican Republic. The wide, paved paths wind through gardens, open lawns, forests, and past a wooded meandering stream. Native and exotic plants include ferns, palms, cacti, and flowers.

Remarkably, a number of endemic and near-endemic species are found in and around the gardens, nestled in this city of two million people! From the moment we come through the gate, we are assured of a rewarding morning of birding and some exciting encounters with the birds of the D.R. Antillean Palm-Swifts soar just above the tops of the stately Royal Palms; a pair of striking Hispaniolan Woodpeckers chatters as they work a dead limb; a

handsome Black-crowned Palm-Tanager investigates a clump of tangled vines; a dazzling Antillean Mango darts about in the morning sun; a Black-whiskered Vireo sings overhead, just out of sight. We may see the diminutive Vervain Hummingbird, the world's second smallest bird (only the Bee Hummingbird of Cuba is tinier). We should also see the Palmchat—not only a Hispaniolan endemic, but the sole representative of its family! These gregarious birds are conspicuous and we should see them at their communal nest sights or “apartments.” Bananaquits are downright abundant and even the prehistoric-looking Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo is likely.

A shaded paved path parallels the garden's waterway, and close attention may turn up Least Grebes, often with chicks, or a Limpkin stalking the water's edge.

We will spend several hours at this delightful location before making a short side-trip to the National Zoo in search of wild West Indian Whistling-Ducks. Once widespread throughout the West Indies, the populations of this bird have been drastically reduced by hunting, habitat destruction, and the introduction of non-native predators. Also contributing to this bird's rarely seen status is its habit of being partially nocturnal. Remarkably, a small population of truly wild birds exists along the waterways and gardens surrounding the zoo. Free-flying wild ducks often mix with the zoo's assortment of imported waterfowl and are frequently seen at close quarters within the grounds of the zoo itself.

Following lunch in the city, we will begin the drive to Barahona, located on the rocky Caribbean south coast. During our three-hour drive west from Santo Domingo, the subtropical forests of the Santo Domingo lowlands give way to an increasingly arid region of acacias and thornscrub. We expect to arrive in Barahona in the late afternoon.

NIGHT: To be announced, Barahona

April 20, Day 3: Cloud Forest and Lago Enriquillo. Lying in the southwest corner of the Dominican Republic is a remote and largely inaccessible mountain range known as the Sierra de Bahoruco. Quite unlike the other ranges of the country, the story of the Bahoruco is a fascinating one of evolution, endemism, and island biogeography. Twenty million years of mountain building and changing sea levels routinely connected and separated the Bahoruco from the rest of the island in a continuing cycle. The effect on the flora and fauna of the island cannot be overstated. Nearly all the endemic bird species are found on this part of the island and we will spend three days exploring the different habitats of the Bahoruco range. The changes in birdlife can be monitored as we follow the changes in vegetation.

Our first day will involve a 2:00-2:30 a.m. departure for the higher reaches of the Bahoruco. The early departure is necessary due to the considerable distance to our destination, as well as for taking advantage of birding in the early morning hours. At the middle elevations we will make a predawn search for the Least Poorwill and the Hispaniolan Nightjar, two rarely seen island endemics. As we reach the higher elevations (about 7,000 feet) the forest becomes much wetter, with magnificent, twenty foot tall tree ferns dominating the understory. The birdlife here is totally different. We will target the seldom-seen La Selle Thrush and Western Chat-Tanager, and may also spot Hispaniolan Emerald and Hispaniolan Spindalis, White-winged Warbler (Hispaniolan Highland-Tanager), Rufous-throated Solitaire (its haunting early morning song is ethereal in the dripping cloud forest), Greater Antillean Elaenia, Golden Swallow, and Antillean Siskin. The recently split White-fronted Quail-Dove is possible along the roadside in the early morning hours.

We'll head down the mountain in the late morning for a final search for any of the dry forest species we may be missing. The featured activity is to walk along the road at a site known as La Placa. This site is excellent for enjoying a diversity of habitats and an equal diversity of birdlife. As many as a dozen of the D.R.'s endemic species may be found here.

This afternoon our destination is the alkaline shore of nearby Lago Enriquillo. Lying to the north of the Sierra de Bahoruco is the Neiba Valley, a highly alkaline coral desert. Now 130 feet below sea level, this valley was once a strait of the Caribbean. What is left now is a massive body of water fed by about ten streams and rivers, but with

The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure, Page 4

no outlet! Evaporation is high and, as a result, the lake is three times as salty as the sea. Descending from the higher elevations, the view of the sprawling lake below us is one of great panoramic beauty. The deep valley is further highlighted by the view of the Neiba Mountains to the north. Photographic opportunities are plentiful here.

The purpose for our visit is to seek out another island endemic, the Hispaniolan Palm Crow. Normally a bird of the pine forests, they occur in small numbers around the shore of the lake. By driving near the lakeshore we stand a good chance of locating them. Other birds we may come across are Plain Pigeon, Antillean Nighthawk, and Greater Antillean Oriole (Hispaniolan Oriole). By scanning the shoreline we are bound to spot a few Greater (American) Flamingoes. These pink beauties stand out even at a great distance. We will then proceed back to the hotel, arriving in late afternoon, simply to relax or watch the late afternoon sun set on the ocean.

NIGHT: To be announced, Barahona

April 21, Day 4: Sierra de Bahoruco and Puerto Escondido. Our second day in the area will see us on the road bright and early. Arriving at the foothill town of Puerto Escondido, we will enjoy a picnic breakfast at a scenic location overlooking a narrow part of the river valley below us. Here, we will be strategically situated for spotting the White-necked Crow. This declining species occasionally flies up and down the river valley in the early morning, belting out its wild calls. Our location is also excellent for viewing such other sought-after species as Plain Pigeon, Greater Antillean Euphonia, Greater Antillean Grackle, and White-fronted Quail-Dove. For the majority of the day, we'll be birding the zone where thorn-scrub meets semi-evergreen, sub-humid forest. Birds are often plentiful and we may see as many as 20 island and regional endemics this morning. Among our targets are the beautiful Hispaniolan Trogon, Hispaniolan Parrot, Hispaniolan Pewee, Flat-billed Vireo, Green-tailed Ground-Warbler (Green-tailed Ground-Tanager), Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo, Bay-breasted Cuckoo, Black-crowned Palm-Tanager, Stolid Flycatcher, Zenaida Dove, Key West Quail-Dove, Antillean Piculet, and the bright Greater Antillean Euphonia. Of course, we will be on the lookout for Broad-billed and Narrow-billed todys, part of a small family endemic to the Greater Antilles. These amazing little birds are always at the top of every birder's list. Diminutive in size and comical in appearance, they are a welcome companion along our birding route.

NIGHT: To be announced, Barahona

April 22, Day 5: Optional Eastern Chat-Tanager Search; Jaragua National Park, Alcoa Road, and Cabo Rojo. Today we will offer an OPTIONAL early morning trip to the village of Cachote to search for the recently split Eastern Chat-Tanager. This exciting opportunity represents the second time VENT will be in position to find this species on a tour of the D.R. We found the bird for the first time on the 2006 tour! Until recently, the species was thought to occur only in areas that we had no real chance of accessing. Recent DNA work on chat-tanagers in the eastern end of the Bahoruco Mountains has verified what some had suspected; the birds that occur here are indeed Eastern Chat-Tanagers! This option involves a 5:00 a.m. departure from the hotel. After breakfast we will continue to the south face of the Bahoruco for a drive up the incredible Alcoa Road. From a birding standpoint, Alcoa Road is one of the wonders of the Dominican Republic. The upper reaches of these mountains once yielded significant deposits of bauxite, and for years the multi-national company Alcoa mined it for export. In order to accommodate the heavy truck traffic, a wide, paved road was built from the sea all the way up to the open pit mines. Abandoned for nearly a decade, the road is now part of a national park, is in superb condition and virtually free of all other traffic. In essence, we have the road to ourselves! Our strategy will be to start at the top and work our way down the mountain. During our initial ascent the changes in vegetation are obvious; cactus and thornscrub give way to broadleaf forest, which in turn becomes open woodland of Caribbean Pine. At the top we'll scan the skies carefully for Golden Swallow, an uncommon endemic species (formerly occurring in Jamaica, the bird is now extinct there). Caribbean Martins occasionally make passes over the treetops.

In the pine woodlands we will seek the Hispaniolan Crossbill, Antillean Siskin, and Hispaniolan Emerald. Pine Warblers are common here too. Back down in the broadleaf forest we may find Antillean Piculet, Scaly-naped Pigeon and Narrow-billed Tody.

The ride to and from Alcoa Road is equally interesting. The beautiful, rocky Caribbean coast is a pleasant sight under the early morning sun. Brown Pelicans, Royal Terns, and Magnificent Frigatebirds patrol the calm waters. As the road turns inland we will cross the northern section of Jaragua National Park. This park is the largest in the Caribbean and sits in a near pristine condition. The lack of surface water probably accounts for the paucity of human habitation and accompanying habitat alteration. Rugged beds of limestone host a semiarid ecosystem of cactus and thorn-forest. This area is truly remarkable and is further augmented by several delightful views of the distant sea. Hispaniolan Parrots form large flocks and are at times seen from the road. Greater Antillean Bullfinches are found here as well, and occasionally are seen feeding on the fruits of cactus.

Before returning to Barahona, we will deviate for a side trip to Cabo Rojo, near the southern-most tip of the island. Cabo Rojo is an interesting seaside location that offers the chance to see the island form of the “Golden Warbler,” a special Caribbean race of the Yellow Warbler. This area also is sometimes productive for White-cheeked Pintail. The lagoon at nearby Oviedo supports small populations of Roseate Spoonbills and Greater Flamingos.

NIGHT: To be announced, Barahona

April 23, Day 6: Return to Santo Domingo; Transfer to Sabana de la Mar. After meeting the demands of the previous day, today will mostly be a welcomed day of resting and relaxing as we return to Santo Domingo, before pushing on toward the northeast and Los Haitises National Park. After breakfast, we will collect our baggage and begin the trip back to Santo Domingo.

Following lunch in the city, we will load up and head to the northeast coast of the island and Los Haitises National Park. The drive will take several hours, with an expected arrival in the late afternoon. Any remaining time will be spent relaxing or birding the grounds of our hotel and surrounding area. A number of island and regional endemics are likely, with Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Hispaniolan Pewee, and Palmchat among the better possibilities. Vervain Hummingbirds frequent the flowering gardens and Greater Antillean Orioles are often spotted perched atop the tallest trees.

Our hotel for the next two nights exudes a ton of character. Situated on the edge of the national park, the owners of the property spared as much of the native vegetation as possible during the construction of the hotel, and all the buildings are made of local material. Winding pathways, bubbling fountains, and towering trees characterize the grounds, while an outdoor dining area keeps us close to nature at all times.

After dinner we will go out in search of the Ashy-faced Owl. This species is surprisingly common, yet due to its nocturnal nature remains one of the D.R.’s hardest-to-find birds. If we are truly fortunate, our local guide will know of a foraging-site where we can look for it.

NIGHT: Paraíso Caño Hondo, Sabana de la Mar

April 24, Day 7: Los Haitises National Park. Los Haitises National Park is home to some of the most rugged and impenetrable terrain in the entire Dominican Republic. It is a scarcely populated land and for good reason, as it receives some of the heaviest rainfall and some of the highest humidity levels anywhere on the island. It is also a national treasure. The park is lightly visited and most development is primitive. Featuring mangroves, dry thornscrub, and broadleaf forests, this is a botanically diverse region. All this is probably the reason that the Ridgway’s Hawk has not yet gone extinct. Once found over large swaths of Hispaniola, it is now restricted to the northeast corner of the island. Decades of habitat destruction and persecution have seen this bird’s numbers dwindle to just several known pairs. In fact, until expedition surveys were done in Los Haitises, the bird’s very existence remained in question. Happily, they are still with us. We have allotted a day and a morning for the pursuit of this enigmatic bird of prey.

Where we actually focus our search efforts will be determined by our local guide. Several nest sites are known in various locations of the park, with some sites much easier to get to than others. In 2005 we encountered the bird in two areas, with one being at a nest only a mile from the hotel! The latter birds were still active in the area in 2006

The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure, Page 6

and were easily seen by our tour group. Our visit to the first site requires a nearly full-day trip into the backcountry over a moderately rocky, and sometimes steep trail. Participants should be prepared for changing plans as we will do what is necessary to enjoy success in locating the hawk. Of course nothing is guaranteed, but we feel our chances for finding the bird are good.

If the hawk is nesting nearby, we'll delay viewing the bird until the afternoon and actually begin the day with a fabulous boat trip through an extensive mangrove wetland in search of herons, egrets, frigatebirds, and other waterbirds. Time-permitting, we will exit the mangroves onto stately Samana Bay. These protected waters form what is easily the largest bay in the Dominican Republic. The setting here is one of great scenic beauty. Before us stretches a lake-like body of saltwater, still placid in the early morning hours; so much so, in fact, that it seems to blend with the sky on the horizon. To our south rise magnificent hills of karst limestone, studded with rugged promontories and carpeted in undamaged tropical forest. As we motor to the west, we will encounter oddly-shaped islets, some of which support nesting Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans. Brown Boobies are occasionally spotted among the more numerous other species. Close inspection of bare-topped trees may reveal White-crowned Pigeons or a roost of Caribbean Martins.

An added bonus is a visit to a seaside cave, where you will have the opportunity to view petroglyphs left by pre-Columbian Taino people.

NIGHT: Paraíso Caño Hondo, Sabana de la Mar

April 25, Day 8: Los Haitises and Return to Santo Domingo; Afternoon Colonial Zone Tour. We have purposely left this morning open for further searching for the Ridgway's Hawk if required. We will plan to depart the hotel by 8:30 or 9:00 a.m. at the latest. Our drive to Santo Domingo will take about three hours, but will be interesting. Our local leader will provide interpretation of the scenery, agriculture, and culture of the local residents.

Upon arrival, we'll enjoy a relaxing outdoor lunch in the city's famed Colonial district. Set amid 500-year-old buildings, a shaded plaza and bustling shops, our lunch will be an enjoyable break before we check in to the hotel. Toward mid-afternoon we'll gather for an optional walking tour of the old Colonial District.

We will use the remainder of the afternoon to explore the city's fascinating and historic Colonial District. Columbus reached Hispaniola in 1492, and the island became the focal point of his searches for gold. The Spaniards also attempted to convert the indigenous Taino people to Christianity. After a failed attempt at a permanent settlement on the wild north coast, Santo Domingo was established on the more hospitable south coast in 1494, and is considered the oldest city in the Western Hemisphere. Walking through the Colonial District, we can absorb the colorful history of the city. Many of the structures are well-preserved originals, including the oldest church in the New World, the Cathedral Basilica Menor de Santa Maria, completed in 1544. Several houses constructed in the 1520s were home to some of the important colonial figures of the time. The National Pantheon, built in 1747, served many functions, but is now a burial ground for national heroes.

If time permits, we will visit the National Amber Museum with its impressive collection of amber as well as the national stone of the country, the aqua-blue Larimar.

This evening, we will enjoy a farewell dinner and final checklist session.

NIGHT: Sofitel Hotel Nicolas Ovando, Santo Domingo

April 26, Day 9: Departure for Home. Participants may depart by taxi to the airport at any time this morning.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: David Ascanio with the assistance of a local guide

David Ascanio, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent the last 22 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Guyana, northern Peru, western Ecuador, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations, and has a private library containing sounds of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela, including some which are the only ones known to science. David speaks excellent English and combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published several manuscripts about the birds of the *llanos* (plains) and the tepui endemics for which he has become an authority. He is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him the most popular naturalist/guide in his country.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee is **\$3395** per person in double occupancy from Santo Domingo. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Santo Domingo and return, 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 is **\$335**. 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.

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

The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure, Page 8

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.

BAGGAGE: We request that participants limit their luggage to one medium-sized bag and one carry-on, if possible, as space in the vehicle will be limited.

CLIMATE: The rainy season in the Caribbean runs from mid-spring through early fall, with the dry season running from mid-November to April. However, peculiarities of the island's topography create microclimates where rain can occur at any time. Though significant rainfall is not expected, heavy afternoon thunderstorms are a possibility. Around Santo Domingo, temperatures will be in the 80s to possibly 90 degrees. In the mountainous areas, temperatures could dip to the mid-50s. In the more arid southwest, temperatures may rise into the upper 80s and low 90s. Humidity levels will be low to moderate. At Los Haitises, participants need to be prepared for conditions ranging from hot and dry to wet and muddy. Overall, conditions should be pleasant with cool mornings and warm afternoons. Elevations will range from sea level to 7,000 feet.

OTHER CONDITIONS: The Dominican Republic is a beautiful and fascinating destination, yet participation on a tour here is demanding. Road conditions are often moderate at best, the hotel in Barahona is satisfactory, but not great, and there are several very early starts. Still, the quality of birding is very high and the spirit of adventure is strong.

There will be numerous leisurely bird walks. All walking will be easy on maintained paths, roads, and trails. There will be several early departures, with at least two before dawn. The departure on day 4 is at 2:00-2:30 a.m. due to the length of the drive required and the importance of getting to the cloud forest early. All day's activities are optional unless the day in question is a travel day. The road system in the Dominican Republic is not very good. While they are mostly paved, the roads are often bumpy and marked with shallow holes. This can lead to riding conditions that are at times uncomfortable. We try to mitigate this issue by using a comfortable touring bus with driver for the duration of the trip. The roads on the north side of the Bahoruco Mountains can be downright awful if they have not been graded recently. Tour participants need to be aware that the possibility exists for our not being able to reach the cloud forest on Cachote, if the roads have not been recently graded. The road to Cachote can be in horrible condition. Though the distance is not far, the going is always slow and sometimes impossible. While this should be considered a real possibility, all of our previous tours have made it up the mountain. Travel to the cloud forest on Day 4 and to Cachote on the morning of Day 6 will be in 4 x 4 vehicles. Snacks and drinks will be readily available between meals.

Los Haitises is a legendary location for a number of reasons, one of which is that travel is difficult there. Seeing the Ridgway's Hawk may be as simple as walking a mile and a half through pasture lands to the forest edge, or the experience may require considerably more effort. For this reason, participants should be prepared for a lengthy walk on a rocky trail, possibly with mud and mosquitoes as travel companions.

CLOTHING: Lightweight field clothing in muted, natural colors and casual attire are suitable for this tour. Bring several pairs of long pants, comfortable lightweight shirts, and a swimsuit. We strongly recommend bringing several long-sleeved shirts, as they provide protection from the sun and occasional biting insects while also providing warmth during cool morning hours. If the rainy season starts early, mosquitoes might be a problem around the coast and the middle elevations. You will be glad you have full body protection. A good hat for sun and

rain is essential. A small umbrella is recommended as well. Your luggage should include some light rain gear. For the higher country in the Dominican Republic, you will want a warm sweater or light jacket. For footwear, a comfortable pair of walking shoes or light hiking boots is fine. For those going to Los Haitises, a good pair of rubber boots for mud may be considered. Additionally, participants should be aware that small hotels do not provide good light for night reading. We strongly recommend to pack a small flashlight or headlamp for blackouts and night reading.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or daypack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medication, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leaders will have spotting scopes, but feel free to bring your own if you like. You should also bring sunglasses and sunscreen, a small flashlight or headlamp, battery-operated alarm clock, water bottle, camera, film or digital storage media, and spare batteries. Insect repellent is essential. We suggest bringing a bottle of pump-action spray as well as a stick or cream for more delicate parts of the body, such as the face and neck.

HEALTH: In the Dominican Republic, malaria is either totally absent or extremely local, and precautions against it are not necessary. Dengue is a mosquito-borne disease and is known to occur in the Dominican Republic. Please pay attention to the Clothing and Equipment sections for suggestions for protection against mosquito bites. Whenever traveling abroad, particularly to Third World countries, vaccinations against Hepatitis A and B are always recommended. The vaccinations against Hepatitis A are a two-shot sequence spaced roughly six months apart. Hepatitis B vaccinations are a three-shot sequence over a six-month period. If not covered by your insurance, these shots cost roughly \$100 apiece. Of course, it is always recommended that you be up to date with tetanus/diphtheria shots. Generally, these last from six to eight years. Be sure to bring a plentiful supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medications you may need. Various travel items to bring include aspirin/ibuprofen, Pepto Bismol, and possibly Immodium. For more health information, contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 877-FYI-TRIP or www.cdc.gov/travel on the web. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health). In the Dominican Republic, tap water is usually not safe for drinking. Your tour leaders will always alert you regarding drinking tap water. Bottled water will always be provided.

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 a standard travel precaution, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots.

CURRENCY: The Dominican Republic uses the Dominican Peso (RD\$). Money can be exchanged upon arrival in the Dominican Republic airport (exchange booth).

DOCUMENTS: For this trip you must bring a valid passport. You cannot get a tourist card in the Dominican Republic without a valid passport. For the sake of security, it is also recommended that you bring a second form of valid identification such as a current driver's license or a copy of your birth certificate. Tourist cards must be purchased by all travelers before entry into the D.R. is granted. Tourist cards can be purchased at some major U.S. airports before boarding international flights to Santo Domingo. If not purchased ahead of time, tourist cards are available in the ARRIVALS hall at the airport in Santo Domingo. Tourist cards cost \$10. You will then need to fill out a customs form, which will be collected after you gather your luggage and exit the customs area.

MISC: Departure Tax - US \$10 from the Dominican Republic to the United States.
Electricity - 110 volts, 60 cycle AC, the same as in the U.S.
Time - 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time

The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure, Page 10

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at 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, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

Bird Identification:

Latta, Steven, Eladio Fernandez, Allen Keith, Christopher Rimmer, Herbert Raffaele, Kent McFarland, and James Wiley. *Birds of the Dominican Republic and Haiti*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. **The most important field guide for this tour.** This recently released field guide should be the bible of any birder going to the D.R. The book is a collaboration of the people who know the island's avifauna best and features the most recent taxonomic changes.

Raffaele, Herbert, James Wiley, Orlando Garrido, Allan Keith and Janis Raffaele. *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*. Princeton University Press. This book gives an excellent overview of the species that occur in the West Indies. The field guide format is smaller and more practical than the previous book for field use.

Dunn, Jon L. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America: Revised and Updated*. Fifth Edition. National Geographic Society, 2006.

Bird Reference:

Keith, Allan. *The Birds of Hispaniola*. BOU Checklist Series, 2003. Up to 2003, this book was the definitive work on the birds of Hispaniola. Hard to find and pricey, but a fantastic resource. Check with ABA Sales, Amazon.com., etc.

Fiction:

Alvarez, Julia. *In the Time of the Butterflies*. USA: Penguin Group, 1995. Set during the waning days of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic in 1960, this extraordinary novel tells the story of the Mirabal sisters, three young wives and mothers who are assassinated after visiting their jailed husbands.

From the Publisher:

It is November 25, 1960, and the bodies of three beautiful, convent-educated sisters have been found near their wrecked Jeep at the bottom of a 150-foot cliff on the north coast of the Dominican Republic. El Caribe, the official newspaper, reports their deaths as an accident. It does not mention that a fourth sister lives. Nor does it explain that the sisters were among the leading opponents of Gen. Raphael Leonidas Trujillo's dictatorship. It doesn't have to. Everyone knows of Las Mariposas – "The Butterflies." Now, three decades later, Julia Alvarez, also a daughter of the Dominican Republic and long haunted by these sisters, immerses us in a tangled and dangerous moment in Hispanic Caribbean history to tell their story in the only way it can truly be understood – through fiction. In this brilliantly characterized novel, the voices of all four sisters—Minerva, Patria, Maria Teresa, and Dede—speak across the decades, to tell their own stories—from hair ribbons to gunrunning to prison torture—and to describe the everyday horrors of life under Trujillo's rule.

Danticat, Edwige. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. New York, NY: Knopf Publishing Company, 1998. **Barnes & Noble Review:** Told from the viewpoint of a young Haitian American, this novel concentrates on relationships

between generations of women, both in Haiti and in the United States. This is a highly regarded book by an amazingly talented young author.

Danticat, Edwige. *The Farming of Bones*. New York, NY: Knopf Publishing Company, 1999. **Barnes & Noble Review:** Edwige Danticat's first collection of short stories, *Krik? Krak!*, was shortlisted for the National Book Award in 1995, making her the youngest writer ever nominated for that honor. Her first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, which was a recent Oprah pick, established her as not only a remarkable

young talent but also a new and important voice for Haitian Americans. Now, with her latest, Danticat turns to the past, to locate and give a new voice to a moment in history that is an all-but-forgotten holocaust. Her powerful new novel focuses on the 1937 massacre by Dominicans of the Haitians living within their borders.

Danticat, Edwige. *Krik? Krak!* New York, NY: Knopf Publishing Company, 1996. **Barnes & Noble Review:** Nine powerful stories about life under Haiti's dictatorships: the terrorism of the Tonton Macoutes; the slaughtering of hope and the resiliency of love; about those who fled to America to give their children a better life and those who stayed behind in the villages; about the linkages of generations of women through the magical tradition of storytelling.

History and Historical Fiction:

Moya Pons, Frank. *The Dominican Republic: A National History*. Marcus Weiner Publisher, 1998. The definitive history of the Dominican Republic.

Wucker, Michele. *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang Publishing, 2000.

From the Publisher:

Like two roosters in a fighting arena, the Dominican Republic and Haiti are encircled by barriers of geography and poverty. They share one Caribbean island, but their histories are as deeply divided as their cultures: one French-speaking and black, one Spanish-speaking and mulatto. And just as the owners of gamecocks contrive battles between their birds (a favorite sport in both countries) as a way of playing out human conflicts, Haitian and Dominican leaders stir up nationalist disputes or cultural and racial differences as a way of deflecting other kinds of turmoil. Michele Wucker's vivid account of these struggles highlights the features in Caribbean history that are still affecting Hispaniola today, including the often contradictory policies of the United States.

Travel:

Bencosme, Fe Liza, *The Dominican Republic*. Hunter Travel Guides. 2005

Dold, Gaylord. *Dominican Republic Handbook*. Second Edition. Moon Travel Handbooks. Chico, CA: Moon Publications, 2001. This is one of the most comprehensive travel guides available for all-around information on the Dominican Republic.

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.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its Agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on August 26, 2008 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of

The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure, Page 12

any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.