

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: A CARIBBEAN BIRDING ADVENTURE

APRIL 14-21, 2012

PUERTO RICO EXTENSION

APRIL 21-25, 2012

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Welcome to the Dominican Republic—an exciting 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 almost 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, considered to be the most threatened buteo in the world. For this endeavor we will journey to the northeast part of the island, to the buffer zone of Los Haitises National Park. Here the last known pairs of this critically endangered species hang on. Should there be a nesting site, we will surely be taken by a local guide, making our chances of finding the hawk good.

The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure, Page 2

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

Puerto Rico, a United States commonwealth, is located 1,000 miles southeast of the Florida peninsula. Habitats on the island vary from lush rainforest to low, desert scrub. The mountains are much lower than those of the Dominican Republic, with the highest peaks only around 4,200 feet. The wide range of habitats holds a myriad of bird species. We hope to see 16 of the 17 island endemics, including Puerto Rican Vireo, Puerto Rican Bullfinch, Puerto Rican Tanager, Puerto Rican Lizard-Cuckoo, Puerto Rican Flycatcher, Puerto Rican Tody, and Puerto Rican Emerald.

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.

April 14, 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. A tourist card of \$10 must be purchased upon arrival to the international airport in Santo Domingo.

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 13 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 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 leader about plans for the next day.

NIGHT: Hotel El Embajador, Santo Domingo

April 15, Day 2: Search for Ridgway's Hawk. Los Limones is located in the buffer zone of Los Haitises National Park, the home for one of the most threatened birds of prey: Ridgway's Hawk. The park landscape probably involves the most rugged and impenetrable terrain in the entire Dominican Republic. While most of the unreachable areas are scarcely populated, most of the valleys contiguous to populated areas have been deforested,

reducing the habitat of the hawk. Nevertheless, this area is lightly visited and most development is primitive. 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 and reintroduced to Los Limones, the bird's very existence remained in question. Happily, they are still with us. We have allotted a day for the pursuit of this enigmatic bird of prey in the buffer zone of the park.

Where we actually focus our search efforts will be determined by our local guide. Several nest sites have been located in the buffer zone of the park, with some sites much easier to get to than others. 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.

NIGHT: Hotel El Embajador, Santo Domingo

April 16, Day 3: National Botanic Gardens; Drive to Barahona. Today will begin 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 sites 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.

Following lunch in the hotel, 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: Hotel El Quemaito, Barahona

April 17, Day 4: Zapotén Cloud Forest & 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.

This first full day in the area 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 might make a predawn search for the Least

The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure, Page 4

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.

After a whole morning in the Zapotén area, we will start heading down to bird drier forest where in previous years we have found the incredibly elusive Bay-breasted Cuckoo. Other species that we have observed at mid elevations include Flat-billed Vireo, Olive-throated Parakeet (presumably introduced) and Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo.

NIGHT: El Quemaito, Barahona

April 18, Day 5. Sierra de Bahoruco & 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 plan to look for Plain Pigeon, Greater Antillean Euphonia, Greater Antillean Grackle, and White-fronted Quail-Dove (rare and unpredictable). 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 (infrequently heard, rarely seen), Black-crowned Palm-Tanager, Stolid Flycatcher, Zenaida Dove, Key West Quail-Dove, Antillean Piculet, and the bright Greater Antillean Euphonia. Following a picnic lunch, we will head to 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 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). 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: El Quemaito, Barahona

April 19, Day 6: Eastern Chat-Tanager Search; Jaragua National Park; Aceitillar in the Alcoa Road; Cabo Rojo. Today we will take another dirt road, but much shorter than the one taken to Zapotén. This time we will head to the village of Cachote to search for the recently split Eastern Chat-Tanager. 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 involves a 5:00 a.m. departure from the hotel. After breakfast in Cachote we will depart 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, but our success will depend greatly on the water level.

NIGHT: El Quemaito, Barahona

April 20, Day 7: Return to Santo Domingo; Afternoon Colonial Zone Tour. We have purposely left this early morning open for further searching of left-over species. 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, allowing us to reach the capital city in time for the colonial zone tour. 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: Hotel Francés, Santo Domingo

April 21, Day 8: Departure for Home or Begin Puerto Rico Extension. Participants not continuing on our Puerto Rico Extension are free to depart by taxi to the airport at any time this morning. Upon request, your leader will help prearrange this service.

PUERTO RICO EXTENSION

APRIL 21-25, 2012

April 21, Day 1: Travel to San Juan; Drive to Copamarina Beach Resort. Participants continuing from our Dominican Republic tour will be transferred to the Santo Domingo Airport in time for the 11:45 a.m. departure of American Airlines Flight 4809 which is scheduled to arrive in San Juan, Puerto Rico at 12:57 p.m.(subject to change).

Any participants not continuing from our Dominican Republic tour must arrive in San Juan no later than April 20 in order to be at the San Juan International Airport this afternoon to meet the arrival of this flight. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional pre-tour lodging arrangements. **IMPORTANT: Please meet your leader and participants continuing from the Dominican Republic tour in the 2nd floor of the arrival area in front of the McDonalds restaurant.**

After our arrival and connection with our ground transportation, we will make the scenic three-hour drive west to Guanica, a fishing village surrounded by mangroves, dry forest and desert scrub. The rest of the afternoon will be spent relaxing or birding the hotel grounds, where Pearly-eyed Thrasher will call loudly at dusk.

NIGHT: Copamarina Beach Resort, Guanica

April 22, Day 2: Maricao Highlands. Here in western Puerto Rico, we are far removed from bustling San Juan. The vegetation is subtropical and at least semi-deciduous. An entire day birding the Maricao Highlands should allow us to record at least half of Puerto Rico's endemic bird species. Our main quarry though is one of the Caribbean's most special birds, the Elfin-woods Warbler. This striking little bird was not even discovered until 1971! The Maricao State Forest is nearby and is one of the best areas for this highly sought-after species. Other birds we'll most likely encounter during our search are Puerto Rican Tanager, Puerto Rican Vireo, Puerto Rican Spindalis, Puerto Rican Tody, Puerto Rican Bullfinch, Bananaquit, Loggerhead Kingbird, Red-legged Thrush, and Scaly-naped Pigeon. We will look in flowering trees and bushes for the island's two endemic hummingbird species: the Green Mango and Puerto Rican Emerald.

NIGHT: Copamarina Beach Resort, Guanica

April 23, Day 3: Maricao Highlands; Susua State Forest and La Parguera. Our activities this morning will be determined by the results of our search for the Elfin-woods Warbler. If we were unable to locate it the previous day, we will dedicate at least half of the morning to trying to find it. If, on the other hand, we enjoyed success with the bird, we'll head for the Susua State Forest. This is one of the better places for Key West Quail-Dove and with persistence, we may get to see it. Other species to find include Puerto Rico Flycatcher, Puerto Rican Tody and the wonderful Puerto Rican Woodpecker.

In the afternoon we will head west to the town of Parguera in search of the endangered and endemic Yellow-shouldered Blackbird. Once found all over Puerto Rico, this bird has been reduced in distribution to the southwest corner of the island. We're prepared to spend the afternoon looking for this elegant bird. Our time in the field may yield such bonus species as Gray Kingbird, Smooth-billed Ani, Black-faced Grassquit, and Greater Antillean Grackle.

NIGHT: Copamarina Beach Resort, Guanica

April 24, Day 4: Guanica State Forest; Playa La Parguera. After a well-deserved breakfast in Copa Marina, we will head to the Guanica State Forest. The southwest coast of Puerto Rico is semi-arid and dominated by cactus and acacias. The low, dry forest, with tall, columnar cacti and prickly pears is remarkably similar to the thorn scrub of western Mexico and parts of Central America. The forest at Guanica preserves a large, almost pristine area of this thorn-forest and is home for two of the most elusive Puerto Rican endemics, the Puerto Rico Nightjar and the

Puerto Rican Screech-Owl. In order to have the best opportunity to see them, we will explore the Guanica State Forest. Other species to find include the commoner Antillean Nighthawk, Venezuelan Troupial (introduced), Caribbean Elaenia and Adelaide's Warbler. Here, we will experience habitat totally different than the Maricao Highlands and will try to see Puerto Rican Lizard-Cuckoo. While walking the roadside and short paths, we will also target Zenaida Dove, Mangrove Cuckoo, and Puerto Rican Flycatcher. In the afternoon we will make an optional visit to la Parguera. Here, the wetlands and mangroves are home for Clapper Rail, Killdeer, Semipalmated Plover and many shorebirds, and we might try for an encounter with the endemic Yellow-shouldered Blackbird.

NIGHT: Copamarina Beach Resort, Guanica

April 25, Day 5: Return to San Juan; Departures for Home. Following breakfast, we will transfer back to San Juan International Airport in time for various direct afternoon flights to such destinations as Miami, Atlanta, Dallas-Fort Worth and New York-Kennedy. Flights should be scheduled for departure no earlier than noon. **IMPORTANT:** The luggage belonging to participants taking flights to the continental USA must be scanned by the USDA in the airport.

For those wishing to extend their stay, old San Juan is a fascinating and worthwhile place to spend a day or two. The most extensive colonial district in the Caribbean, beautiful Old San Juan offers numerous hotels and such famous landmarks as Forts San Felipe del Morro and San Cristobal, the city wall of San Juan, San Juan Gate, San Juan Cathedral, the capital, and several museums. VENT will be happy to assist with any additional post-tour arrangements.

TOUR SIZE: Each section will be limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADER: David Ascanio with the assistance of local guides

David Ascanio, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent the last 26 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, the Amazon River, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Chile, 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 that 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 a book for children about the songs of the birds of Venezuela, and has coauthored the description of a new species, the River Island Spinetail. David has also published various manuscripts about the birds of the *llanos* (plains), as well as the pan-tepui endemic species 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 one of the most popular naturalist/guides in the Neotropics. David is currently writing the species accounts for a forthcoming field guide to the birds of Venezuela.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure is **\$3195** per person in double occupancy from Santo Domingo. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 7, 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 for The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure is **\$300**. 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 fee for the Puerto Rico Extension is **\$1795** per person in double occupancy from San Juan. This includes all meals from lunch on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 5, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground

The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure, Page 8

transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to San Juan and return, airfare between Santo Domingo to San Juan, 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 the Puerto Rico Extension is **\$375**. 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 per section. 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, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. 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. *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 \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

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 & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form 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 as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** 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.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of

coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please read your itinerary carefully to see whether or not your tour/cruise requires MANDATORY Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip.

This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by Travel Insured International. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

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 vehicles 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. In both islands, 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. 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 scheduled for 2:00-2:30 a.m. due to the length of the drive required and the importance of getting to the cloud forest early. Every activity is optional unless it is scheduled on a travel day.

The roads in the Dominican Republic are not very good. While 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 in Cachote, if the roads have not been recently graded. The road to Cachote can be in horrible condition. Although the distance isn't great, the going is always slow and sometimes impossible. However, note that all of our previous Dominican Republic groups have made it up this mountain. Travel to the cloud forest on Day 4 and to Cachote on the morning of Day 6 will be in 4x4 vehicles. Snacks and drinks will be readily available between meals each day.

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 1.5 miles through pasture lands to the forest edge, or the experience

The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure, Page 10

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.

Puerto Rico has a great road system and easy to reach birding locations. Although most birding will be adjacent to paved roads, we expect to encounter mildly muddy trails in Maricao.

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 our visit to Los Haitises, rubber boots for muddy trails will be useful. Since some hotels will not have decent lighting for night reading and may have blackouts, we suggest you bring a small flashlight or headlamp.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or daypack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra digital storage media, 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 800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) 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. Since 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). The U.S. Dollar is the currency of Puerto Rico.

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 for \$10 (subject to change without notice). You will 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 or Puerto Rico (subject to change).

Electricity - 110 volts, 60 cycle AC, the same as in the U.S.

Time - 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time

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.

The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Birding Adventure, Page 12

Vargas Llosa, Mario. *The Feast of the Goat*. A must read for those interested in the last days of Trujillo's era. The author reproduces in a brilliant way the ambiance of Santo Domingo and the fear that surrounded Trujillo's brutal practices at the time when he was murdered.

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.

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