



Trip #2 – Jamaica Report March 7 - 14, 2009

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Day 1:

We arrived at Montego Bay late in the morning. **Magnificent Frigatebirds**, **Brown Pelican** and **Great and Cattle egrets** had been viewed from the plane and during landing. While loading up into our car rental for the week, a Suzuki Grand Vitara, a tiny **Vervain Hummingbird** whizzed by. It is the second smallest species of bird on earth. We jumped onto the A1 and started driving east along the north. Cattle Egrets were the most abundant species, we figured, filling the gull and crow niche in the lowlands. **Turkey Vultures** and frigatebirds were numerous. We drove past a series of ponds off the highway (which we'd inspect closer on the way back) which had **Caribbean** and **American Coot**, **Little Blue Heron** and **Snowy Egret**. In a search for a lunch stop, we stumbled upon our only **Caribbean Martin** of the trip as well as numerous **Cave Swallows**. We also heard numerous calls from what we would later discover were **Jamaican Mango**. After a satisfying jerk chicken lunch we continued east towards a scenic route through Fern Gully. A brief walk near a gas station produced our first **Zenaida** and **White-winged dove** as well as a light morph **American Kestrel**. We continued on to and eventually through the treacherous fern gully which was as beautiful as it was dangerous. Driving in Jamaica is not for the faint of heart. As we continued south towards Spanish Town we stopped at a lookout somewhere near halfway down the island. **Northern Mockingbird**, **Smooth-billed Ani**, and **Greater Antillean Grackle** were abundant and we heard and glimpsed our first **Jamaican Crow**. We got satisfying looks at **Yellow-faced Grassquit** and **Loggerhead Kingbird** which were common all over the island. We also spotted the resident race of **Red-tailed Hawk**. We pushed on and drove through Spanish Town just in time for evening rush hour traffic in Kingston. We eventually found our route north towards the mountains and still had some light to spare. We made some brief stops and found some familiar faces: **Northern Parula**, **American Redstart** and **Black-throated Blue Warblers** were quite common in many habitats. We were greeted by the 'long legged' **White-chinned Thrush** which kept us company for the entire mountain drive. **Bananaquits** were extremely abundant and we got great looks at a threesome of **Jamaican Orioles**. We arrived at Mount Edge guest house somewhat exhausted but excited for the tomorrow's birding.

Day 2:

We were all up before light to increase our chances of seeing a big target species – the elusive Crested Quail-Dove. This endemic species likes to walk along the roads before traffic drives it into the forest. We drove uphill and not long after flushed a good sized pigeon of some sort off the road before reaching Newcastle. We realized that could have been our bird but could only hope we'd run into another one in the coming days. We stopped near Woodside Dr. and walked the main road towards Hardwar Gap. The birding was phenomenal and would be our most productive the entire trip. **Black-faced** and **Yellow-shouldered grassquits** were along the road edges. **Orangequits** and **Bananaquits** were all over the place. A stunning and cooperative **Jamaican Spindalis** stole our binocular views for minutes on end. We eventually found a large group of

males and females feeding at a fruiting tree. It wasn't long until the famous "**Red-billed**" **Streamertail** flew over and around us and we watched several males with full tail plumes dispute over territories. It was neat to hear the whirling noise made from their tails. We all got onto an all-black icterid which flew high over the road and called a harsh buzzy note briefly. The bird had a relatively short tail and was flapping its round wings in a very exaggerated display then abruptly held its wings against its body and dropped down to the canopy. Despite further efforts later that afternoon and the following morning, that would be our only look at the endangered **Jamaican Blackbird**. The next two hours were spent leisurely enjoying **Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo, White-eyed Thrush, Sad Flycatcher, Greater Antillean Bullfinch, Blue Mountain Vireo, Jamaican Vireo, Jamaican Woodpecker**, and of course **Jamaican Tody**. These cute little guys were remarkably approachable and trusting. Endemic **Ring-tailed Pigeons** showed well, a species sometimes tricky to find. We had been hearing the haunting calls of **Rufous-throated Solitaire** the entire morning and eventually had memorable looks. Neotropical migrants added included **Louisiana Waterthrush, Black-and-white and Prairie Warbler**. On our walk back to the car we glimpsed our first **Arrowhead Warbler** of the trip. **Jamaican Euphonias** were viewed from the patio at Mount Edge. After lunch we walked the road again and got more looks at many of the species seen that morning.

Day 3:

Another early morning attempt for the quail-dove turned up empty and we birded the Hardwar Gap area a little more adding a few migrants such as **Common Yellowthroat, Ovenbird, and Black-throated Green and Palm Warbler**. Still early morning, we packed our bags and decided to drive to Port Antonio for "Black-billed" Streamertail. A stop near some wetlands outside Port Antonio produced **Killdeer** and **Baird's Sandpiper**. Upon arrival we realized one of us had forgotten a bag back at Mount Edge. This put a serious time constraint on us and we had to abandon the search and didn't even get a chance to bird the Ecclestown Road area. We did however get our first good looks at **White-crowned Pigeon** and **Olive-throated Parakeet** on the drive. We stopped in Papine near dusk and scored **Black** and **White-collared swift** as well as **Antillean Palm-Swift**. We arrived back at Mount Edge for dark. A unanimous decision to drive to the Black River was made. It was a long drive but we figured it would be worth covering a lot of ground while it was dark.

Day 4:

We stayed at South Shore Guest House right at the Black River estuary. We watched the dazzling **Jamaican Mango** during breakfast. A scan of the beach gave us **Ruddy Turnstone, Willet, Sanderling, Semipalmated and Black-bellied plover. Royal and Sandwich terns, and Laughing Gulls** were sitting on the remnants of an old pier. We were picked up directly from the hotel by our boat and drove into both the lower and upper morass area. We added **Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Tricolored Heron, Common Moorhen, Pied-billed Grebe, Northern Jacana, Common Ground-Dove, Osprey** and the "**Golden**" **Yellow Warbler. Antillean Palm-Swift, Barn Swallow, Cave and Northern Rough-winged swallows** were all easily observed. We made a successful stop at a known spot for American Crocodile. We didn't score the hoped for West Indian Whistling-Duck or the Yellow-breasted Crake. Our personal tour boat stopped at a crab shack for lunch and Red Stripes and then we made our way back to the hotel. We packed up for an early afternoon departure to Cockpit Country. A more prolonged stop at the ponds east of Montego gave us great looks at

Least Grebe and **Greater Yellowlegs**. We added a **Peregrine Falcon** and later a **Ruddy Quail-Dove** to the list as we flushed one on our last stretch to Windsor.

Day 5:

We were up for sunrise and wandered the quiet roads and tracks surrounding the Windsor Great House. We enjoyed more great looks at the massive Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo while getting our first good looks at Rufous-tailed Flycatcher, Jamaican Elaenia, and a female Jamaican Becard. We eventually nailed down the abundant but tricky to spot **Yellow-billed** and **Black-billed Parrots**. A sneaky **Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo** was spotted near our accommodations. A distant **Caribbean Dove** was found in a tree and we glimpsed more in the coming days. With the help of the local Rasta named Dango, we hiked to the upper caves to watch the evening bat exodus. Along route we got more looks at Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Ring-tailed Pigeon, and our only **Plain Pigeon** for the trip. The bats were truly a spectacle and several thousand were observed. We heard **Limpkins** calling (from the nearby stream) over dinner and we set out for some proper owling promptly after. We got some close up views of a seemingly tame **Northern Potoo** on a fencepost. We didn't wait long before hearing a **Jamaican Owl** in the distance. We eventually heard as many as four individuals vocalizing including what was likely a screeching call from juvenile birds. Hearing would have to suffice because we never got a look at the owls though we tried.

Day 6:

We woke up fairly early to walk some different trails in the Windsor area. We hiked a trail known to be good for the **Crested Quail-Dove** and eventually flushed one which 2 of us got identifiable looks at. **Jamaican Pewee** and **Stolid Flycatcher** were eventually nailed down. A return to the quail-dove spot allowed for more brief glimpses of an individual we flushed unknowingly. Talk about a shy bird. We also added great looks at **Mangrove Cuckoo** and **Worm-eating Warbler**. That afternoon we drove north to the coast and checked out some coastal mangroves. At Salt Marsh we found **Reddish Egret**, **Blue-winged Teal**, **Black-necked Stilt** and **Glossy Ibis**. Night at Windsor

Day 7:

This was our last full day in Jamaica. A pre-breakfast walk along the Guthrie trail gave us more fleeting glimpses of the Crested Quail-dove but nothing else new was added. We decided to drive a large Cockpit Country loop towards Barbeque Bottom. The road conditions were less than ideal and the birding was unproductive likely due the time of day. We eventually found our way back to the coast where we stopped at some tidal mangrove mudflats. Shorebirds were abundant and we saw **Lesser Yellowlegs**, **Short-billed Dowitcher** and plenty of **Least Sandpipers** among others. **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** was also there completing our heron list. We wandered to our last accommodation, the Time and Place Resort near Falmouth.

Day 8:

Early morning departure and drive to airport in Montego Bay. No birds added.