

*Presents:*

***Cuba: Caribbean Endemic Birding***  
***21<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> January 2018 (10 days)***



**Blue-headed Quail-Dove by Clayton Burne**

Cuba, the Caribbean's largest island, lies just 120 km (75 miles) south of Florida, yet offers an impressive 28 endemic birds, numerous Caribbean specialities and a rich assemblage of overwintering North American warblers and waders. Our comprehensive Rockjumper tour targets almost every possible endemic and near-endemic species; and, using the services of local bird specialists at each site, we promise an impressive success rate in observing the island's amazing avian diversity. From the world's tiniest bird (Bee Hummingbird) to such sought-after species as Giant Kingbird, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Gundlach's Hawk, Oriente and Yellow-headed Warblers, Zapata Wren and no less than four species of stunning quail-doves, Cuba is an absolute pleasure to bird!

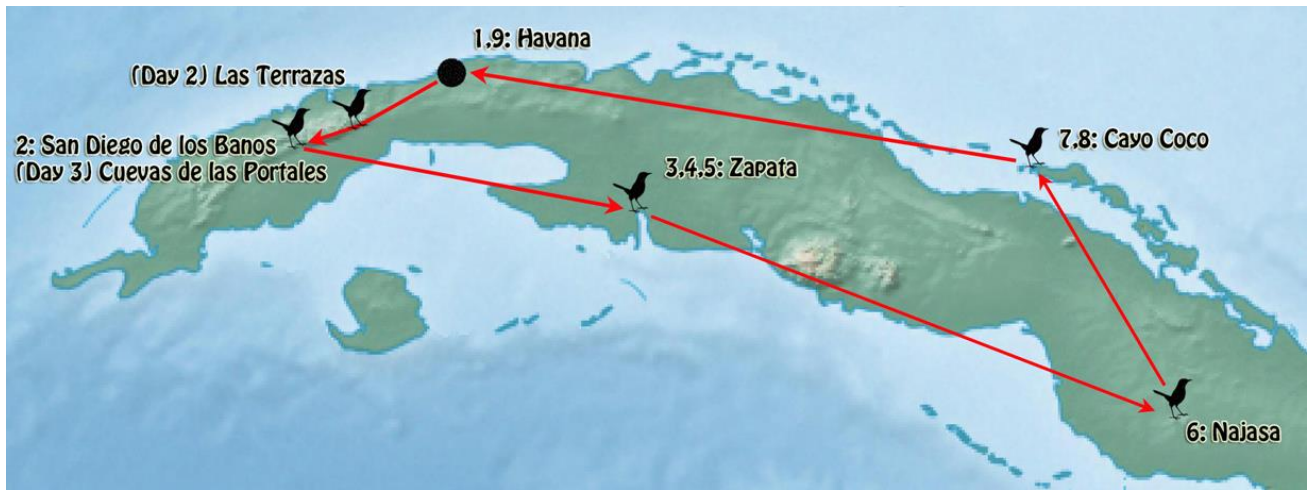
On this tour we will cover a wide variety of habitats, ranging from interior tropical forests and mangroves, to extensive wetlands and white sand beaches along the northern coral cays. The awesome birdlife is further augmented by ease of travel, comfortable lodges, fascinating culture, a turbulent history, vintage cars that take one back to the 1950's, and super-friendly people, making this a thoroughly enjoyable adventure for both the hardcore and casual birder alike!

## THE TOUR AT A GLANCE...

### THE ITINERARY

Day 1	Arrival in Havana
Day 2	Havana to Las Terrazas Biosphere Reserve and La Güira
Day 3	Cuevas de las Portales to Zapata Peninsula
Days 4 & 5	Zapata Peninsula
Day 6	Zapata Peninsula to Najasa
Day 7	Najasa to Cayo Coco
Day 8	Cayo Guillermo, Cayo Coco, Cayo Paredón Grande
Day 9	Cayo Coco to Havana
Day 10	Havana City & Departure

## TOUR ROUTE MAP...



## THE TOUR IN DETAIL...



Cuban Trogon by Adam Riley

**Day 1: Arrival in Havana.** After landing in the capital city of Havana, participants will be met and escorted to our hotel in one of the western hemisphere's oldest European cities. Participants are welcome to explore the city, where history drips from every corner, famous landmarks dot almost every street corner and live music and dancing is considered de rigueur. This evening we shall meet up for a welcome dinner and talk over our plans for the forthcoming tour of this much maligned (unfairly!) Caribbean Island.

**Day 2: Havana City to Las Terrazas Biosphere Reserve and La Güira.** From the



city of Havana, or La Habana as it's locally known, we will head westwards into Pinar del Río Province. *En route* we may scan several wetlands while keeping a look-out for Snail Kite hovering or perched around these lakes, migrant waterfowl (commoner species include Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup and Blue-winged Teal) and wading birds such as Limpkin, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper and Tricolored, Little Blue and Green Herons. We will soon be struck by the abundance of Turkey Vultures; these huge birds are almost a guaranteed sight each time we cast an eye skywards!

We will make a stop at Las Terrazas Biosphere Reserve. This community run reserve was once clear cut for charcoal production, but millions of replanted trees have restored the area to its former grandeur. The reserve hosts one of our primary targets for the day, the delightfully coloured Cuban Grassquit. This beautiful little finch is now endangered largely due to trapping for the cage-bird trade. We can also expect to see many of Cuba's specialities including Cuba's national bird, the Cuban Trogon, and the very cute Cuban Tody. Belonging to a family of 5 species endemic to the Caribbean and most closely related to kingfishers, this brilliantly coloured jewel of the forest sometimes allows for an incredibly close approach and amazing photographic opportunities. There will also be time for the common buff-bellied Cuban subspecies of Red-legged Thrush and Cuban Green Woodpecker. It won't take long to work out that we are in North American wood warbler heaven, as these brightly coloured gems flit around us and respond strongly to spishing. Particularly common are American Redstart, Northern Parula, Palm Warbler and Black-throated Green Warbler.

Later in the day we pay a visit to La Güira Park. This formerly glorious colonial mansion's expansive manicured grounds offer superb birding. Species we are likely to encounter are the colourful Western Spindalis (or Western Stripe-headed Tanager), the dumpy Cuban Bullfinch, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Cuban (or Crescent-eyed) Pewee, Loggerhead Kingbird and the beautiful Red-legged Honeycreeper. We also have our first chance at seeing the impressive Fernandina's Flicker.



**Cuban Tody by Rich Lindie**



**Yellow-headed Warbler by Adam Riley**

red and blue (as well as an ample supply of green!). We should also locate the lovely Yellow-headed

**Day 3: Cuevas de las Portales to Zapata Peninsula.** After breakfast, our next port of call will be the Cuevas de las Portales. This impressive system of caves set within a high limestone formation is famous for hosting Ché Guevara during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The humid, vegetation covered limestone hills provide perfect habitat for arguably Cuba's most accomplished songster, the Cuban Solitaire. Although it's not the most beautiful thrush in the world, it more than makes up for this with its sweet, melodic jangled notes.

Here we may have more chances to see the beautiful lattice-tailed Cuban Trogon. This stunner sports Cuba's national colours – white, red and blue (as well as an ample supply of green!). We should also locate the lovely Yellow-headed





Warbler, another Cuban endemic; small family groups of this wood warbler often allow close approach. Another warbler target is a relict of the past ice ages. The lovely Olive-capped Warbler is a denizen of tall pine trees and shares its limited range in Cuba with a population in the Bahamas.

After a morning's birding we head east and southwards to the famed Zapata Peninsula. On the drive we will notice numerous signs commemorating the Cuban revolution as well as Cuba's national heroes, including of course Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara. We will see a large variety of transport modes on Cuba's roads, from oxen pulling wooden sleighs, fancy horse-drawn buggies and vintage 1950's US automobiles in every shape, size and colour! Tonight we will settle in for the first of three nights at our lodge, nestled on the shores of Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs), close to the infamous 1961 invasion point of Playa Giron.

**Days 4 & 5: Zapata Peninsula.** The Zapata Peninsula is the essence of Cuban birding. Large areas of this reserve now protect salt pans, mangroves, swamps and dry evergreen forests, home to most of Cuba's endemic birds. With the help of a superb local birding guide, we will visit numerous sites in search of these localised specialties. High on our agenda will be the world's smallest bird, the minuscule Bee Hummingbird. Measuring in at just 2.5" (tail to bill!), this tiny hummer really does resemble a bee as it flits around flowers. Its numbers have decreased dramatically unfortunately, and it can prove a tough bird to find. We will also encounter the far more common Cuban Emerald, a sparkling green, fork-tailed nymph of the forest edge.

One of our mornings here will require an early start to reach a deciduous forest reserve where an incredible 4 species of secretive and beautiful quail-doves can be seen! A local conservationist has started putting out food along a forest trail, and both the stunning Blue-headed and iridescent Grey-fronted Quail-Doves often come in, allowing excellent viewing. We will also walk the trails to stand a reasonable chance of observing the more widespread Key West and rarer Ruddy Quail-Doves, while the attractive Zenaida Dove as well as Common Ground and Mourning Doves occur as well.



Cuban Pygmy Owl by Dubi Shapiro



Bee Hummingbird by Clayton Burne

Along these trails we will also seek out the Cuban Pygmy Owl and Bare-legged (or Cuban Screech) Owl, which are usually found at known roosts. We will take time to seek out Cuban Crow; this large, all black *corvid* is rather rare and we will listen out for its loud and distinctive parrot-like vocalisations in order to track it down. Another tough and rare endemic best found on the peninsula is the huge Fernandina's Flicker, a surprisingly attractive woodpecker. Other species in this group that occur here are West Indian Woodpecker, Northern Flicker (an endemic resident race) and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Raptors are not particularly numerous but we will keep a look out for Red-tailed and Broad-winged Hawks, Northern Crested Caracara, Merlin and of course the endemic and extremely tough Gundlach's Hawk.



Another morning will be spent along the edges of the great saw grass Zapata Swamp in the Cienega de Zapata National Park. Our chief target here is the very secretive Zapata Wren, a rather aberrant *troglodyte* that is the sole member of its genus. It might take some patience and sharp spotting in order to obtain views of this specialty, though sightings are by no means guaranteed. Here we will also seek the surprisingly attractive and fairly accommodating Zapata Sparrow. This is also the prime locality for the localised Red-shouldered Blackbird; the males are almost identical to the North American Red-winged Blackbird but the females differ in sporting all-black plumage. We will also look out for the near-endemic Tawny-shouldered Blackbird and endemic Cuban Oriole (recently split from Greater Antillean Oriole, and now considered a good species).



Giant Kingbird by Adam Riley

Further excursions will take us onto the tidal flats and mangrove islets at Salinas de Brito, which are situated along the southern shore of the Zapata Peninsula. The salt water marshes are justly famous for their waders and waterfowl, and we will seek out the recently split Cuban Black Hawk, now an endemic (previously considered a subspecies of Common Black Hawk). Stunningly pink American Flamingos occur in healthy numbers and we will add numerous waterbirds to our burgeoning list, including Brown Pelican, Anhinga, Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, American White Ibis, Wood Stork, Clapper Rail, Caspian and Royal Terns, Black Skimmer, Grey (Black-bellied) Plover, Short-billed Dowitcher and Least Sandpiper, among many others.

An evening excursion may be taken to search for Cuban Nightjar and the impressive Stygian Owl. The latter is a dark and imposing-looking predator so-named after the black river Styx (in Greek mythology 'Styx' symbolised the boundary between Earth and the underworld).



Cuban Amazon by Rich Lindie

**Day 6: Zapata Peninsula to Najasa.** After a final morning of searching out any targets we may still need in the Zapata Peninsula we will continue to Najasa. Sierra de Najasa and the protected reserve of Rancho La Belen are areas of unspoilt lowland forest and palm groves that harbour a great diversity of flora and fauna. The two main targets species here are the Cuban Palm Crow and the endangered, massive-billed Giant Kingbird (with an estimated population of less than 1000 birds). The region is also host to several other endemics and near-endemics and we will keep a careful look out for the lovely Cuban Amazon (also known as Rose-throated or Cuban Parrot) and flocks of Cuban Parakeet screeching overhead. Antillean Palm Swifts frequent the palm trees that we will be scrutinising for the rare Cuban Palm Crow. Some of the more unusual wintering North American warblers that we may observe here include Worm-eating and Swainson's.

**Day 7: Najasa to Cayo Guillermo.** As our Cuban birding adventure begins to wind down, we head northwards to







Grey-fronted Quail-Dove by Rich Lindie

explore some of the thousands of small coral islets fringing Cuba. Upon reaching the coast, we will drive over a scenic 17km (10 ½ mi) causeway that separates the island of Cayo Coco from the mainland (somewhat reminiscent of Key West), and during our journey we should spot large numbers of waterbirds. Highly probable species include Magnificent Frigatebird, Neotropic Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Pied-billed Grebe, American Wigeon, American Coot, Western Osprey, Laughing Gull, Royal Tern, Belted Kingfisher, Semipalmated Plover, Killdeer, Willet, Black-necked Stilt and numerous smaller migrant waders.

**Day 8: Cayo Guillermo, Cayo Coco & Cayo Paredón Grande.** We have a full day's exploration of Cayo Coco, Cayo Guillermo and Cayo Paredón Grande. These low-lying coral islands support a wide variety of birding habitats, ranging from stunning beaches and mangrove-lined mudflats and swamps, to low growing thorn-scrub and dwarf semi-deciduous forest in the island interior. A new suite of species will be sought here including the delightful Oriente Warbler, Cuban Gnatcatcher, endemic Cuban and highly localised Thick-billed Vireos, and the scarce Bahama Mockingbird. A short search of the nearby beach may yield the rare Piping Plover, Sanderling and even small flocks of Cave Swallow.

**Day 9: Cayo Coco to Havana.** Today we depart Cayo Coco and drive back to Havana. Upon arriving in Havana, we will head out for a short walk through the historical old city. Complete with its traditional narrow streets and picturesque overhanging balconies, this culturally dynamic city offers a unique experience that we will have a chance to sample during this concluding evening of our tour. We will enjoy our final farewell dinner at a classic Cuban restaurant. Whether you're into dancing, dining, shopping or simply sightseeing, Havana has it all!



Cuban Gnatcatcher by Adam Riley

**Day 10: Havana City & departure.** After breakfast this morning, we transfer to the Jose Martí International Airport where the tour will conclude.



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**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:**

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on the Montana Audubon [website](#). Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

• **This includes:** On selected tours we are able to arrange free transfers to our **specified hotel or airport**, within 3 days of the beginning or end of the main tour. However, since our capacity to offer this service can vary from tour to tour, details of this option will be sent to you upon confirmation of this tour;

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 10;
- A bottle of purified water each day;
- All lodgings during the tour;
- All ground transportation;
- Soft drink/water/coffee/tea at meals;
- All national park and other reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

**This excludes:**

- **ANY flights** (see above);
- Alcoholic beverages;
- Visa fees;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

**IMPORTANT NOTES:**

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold (British Pounds), and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

**Tipping:**

As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, **this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader**. If, therefore, you feel that he has given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip him.

**Please Note:**

- It can be hot with harsh sun in some areas of Cuba, especially along the coast, so please come prepared with hats and sun cream for protection. Humidity levels are also high throughout most of Cuba.
- Mosquitoes and tiny bloodsucking flies can be numerous at times and it's advisable to pack a good supply of DEET or other effective insect repellent. There is **no** malaria in Cuba.



- There are some long days in the field taking advantage of available habitat, but overall the tour pace is relaxed and the walking is easy. There are also some long drives on this tour, but the comfort of the transport and straight roads means these days are not uncomfortable.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is quite comfortable, barring one night in Najasa where facilities can be variable. A variety of western and local cuisines are available throughout the tour.

**ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:**

This tour **does not** include ANY airfares. The tour will start with a welcome dinner in Havana in the evening of Day 1. The tour will conclude in Havana after breakfast on the morning of day 10.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

**FLIGHTS:**

Jose Marti International Airport, Havana (IATA: HAV) is the main port of entry for international flights into Cuba and is serviced by several international carriers. We have the capacity to advise you on the best route according to your preferences and can assist you in booking flights from Cancun, Mexico City and Panama City to Havana if required. If you would like further assistance kindly contact the Rockjumper office; we have a full-time in-house travel consultant who will happily help you plan your route. **However, please DO NOT book your international flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**

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