

DAY 1 ARRIVAL - VIÑALES

After an mid morning arrival to Havana airport, we had lunch in Old Havana. On our way to Viñales we stop by Las Terrazas looking for a Stygian Owl report seen it very well. After having a good introduction to some of the Caribbean specialties including Olive-capped Warbler, Black-whiskered Vireo and Red-legged Thrush present in a tree patch by a zip line tower, we had a show by Cuban and Yellow-faced Grassquits in a nearby farm. A good surprise on our way out was a Swallow-tailed Kite, not a bird to be expected. After that our next destination was our casas particulares and dinner at Viñales.



Cuban Grassquit and Stygian Owl

DAY 2 VIÑALES NATIONAL PARK (MARAVILLAS DE VIÑALES TRAIL), HISTORIC WALL, BENITO'S FARM, LOS JAZMINES, CUEVA DEL INDIO & EL PALENQUE

Our first full day. The main targets here are easy to guess: whatever was on the way around Viñales! That was exactly what we did. The birds didn't disappointed us! Cuban Tody, Yellow-headed Warbler, Cuban Bullfinch, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Pewee among others. We move to our next spot, near the Historic Wall where we get the main target of the area: the Cuban Solitaire. We had awesome views along with some Cuban Vireo, more Cuban Tody views, one you never get tired to admire! Our next stop was Benito's Farm, a family owned tobacco farm where the participants had a chance to see the process to make cigars. Obviously, some got cigars as a gift or for their personal use right at the farm with some coffee and coffee with rum called "carajillo"

Los Jazmines is where we had not just a wonderful Cuban lunch, but also a beautiful view of the Viñales region, and a few of our group danced to the salsa music being played by a local orchestra.

We had the chance to get into town to a local market to shop for our families and friends. One of the participants anniversary took place while in Cuba, so it was easy to know which participant was with extra luggage on the way back to US!

Following a siesta we found Scaly-naped Pigeon during a brief stop at Cueva del Indio. The Cuban subspecies of Eastern Meadowlark was not present at its usual spot at El Palenque. We waited for the Bare-legged Owl at El Palenque which was seen by some briefly before it flew away.



Cuban Trogon & Cuban Solitaire



Yellow-headed Warbler & Cuban Tody



At Viñales market & at El Palenque with the karst formations views



Participants having a demonstration by Benito's farm worker.

DAY 3 HERRADURA DAM, HACIENDA CORTINA, ZAPATA (LA BOCA, BEE HUMMINGBIRD, PLAYA LARGA)

On the way to Zapata and by the highway we stopped to look for and getting two King Rails (rare resident), spotted by a local guide along with Sora, Black-necked Stilts, egrets and Snail Kites.

Hacienda Cortina was the next stop specially for the endemic Giant Kingbird. This kingbird on steroids was quietly perch behind us and not necessarily cooperating with good angle but a Loggerhead Kingbird perched nearby gave us a good perspective of how massive its bill is. At that spot, among others, we had great views of Cuban Trogon, Cuban Green Woodpecker and La Sagra's Flycatcher.

Zapata, the biggest wetland in the Caribbean was next after lunch at La Habana. Inside Zapata National Park lives people in couple towns and there's where we'll be birding next two days.

We stop by La Boca and had a migrant warblers show. Louisiana & Northern waterthrush, Ovenbird, Black-throated, Cape May, Am. Redstart was the ones seen with their very bright breeding plumages.

Bee Hummingbird is a must for all who visit Cuba since is not just an endemic, the male it's the smallest bird in the world! Visiting a local with many individuals in the backyard helps a lot! With the help of some feeders and a *Hamelia patens* tree full of flowers makes it the perfect hummingbirds spot. Bee Hummingbird was the bird of the day for most of the group. Cuban Emerald along with Cuban Oriole made for an excellent day of birding.



King Rail (digiscoping)



Bee Hummingbird and Giant Kingbird (2017 trip photo)

DAY 4 ZAPATA (BERMEJAS, SAN BLAS, CUEVA LOS PECES, PÁLPITE & SOPLILLAR)

Along the road we had Cuban Parakeets before stopping by Bermejas where we found our main targets Fernandina's Flicker (awesome views!) and Red-shouldered Blackbird (having a brief but good views). We coaxed a Cuban Pygmy-Owl into view. A Great Lizard-Cuckoo gave good views and an opportunity to photograph it. With the road covered by millions of Cuban Red Crabs (*Gecarcinus ruricola*), migrating to lay their eggs into the coast, we headed to Cueva de los Peces where we saw the pretty Blue-headed Quail-Dove. Yellow-headed Warbler along with Black-whiskered Vireo, Cuban Green Woodpecker along with migrant warblers and vireos were seen before heading for lunch.

Later that day we went to Sopllillar. Western Spindalis, Cuban Tody, Cuban Pygmy Owl, Cuban Trogon, West Indian Woodpecker and a few Cuban Parrots were seen before dinner.



Fernandina's Flicker (2017 trip photo) & Blue-headed Quail Dove



Cuban Red Crab & Road covered by crabs (dead and alive)



Great Lizard Cuckoo & West Indian Woodpecker

DAY 5 ZAPATA (SANTO TOMÁS, BEE HUMMINGBIRD & SALINAS DE BRITO)

Santo Tomás is a town in the middle of the Zapata Swamp and is where we are going to spend most of the morning.

On the road to Santo Tomás at the swamp, we had a great scope views of the Cuban Nightjar. After that, at a stop half way to Santo Tomás, we heard some residents Sandhill Cranes.

At Santo Tomás, our group divided into three boats on a canal on the swamp, having our first and only but good views of the Zapata Sparrow. Arriving at a wooden viewing platform, we immediately heard our main target: Zapata Wren! This large wren came into view in less than 2 minutes to showing well for all participants to enjoy before it disappeared on the vegetation.

We also heard Limpkin. Once back on dry ground the local guides found a Gray-headed Quail-Dove which was seen very well by all.

Our quick success in finding the wren allowed us to revisit the Bee Hummingbird site and enjoy this magnificent minute bird. Cuban Emerald along with Cuban Oriole made for an excellent morning of birding.

Following a well deserved siesta after lunch, we headed to Salinas de Brito. At the Salinas we saw Wood Storks, egrets, ducks, shorebirds, terns and a very cooperative Clapper Rail who posed for all.

After dinner we went for the Bare-legged Owl having spectacular and close views.



On the way back from Zapata Wren and Sparrow



Zapata Sparrow (2017 trip photo) & Zapata Wren

DAY 6 CIENFUEGOS BOTANICAL GARDEN & TRINIDAD

Today's targets were Cuban Gnatcatcher and Gundlach's Hawk.

At Cienfuegos Botanical Garden we searched for the recently reported nesting hawks. It was only a short walk before a hawk was spotted flying close by giving us wonderful views. A nice surprise was a Cuban Pygmy Owl popping into view while hunting giving the photographers in the group the chance to get some good shots before lunch. The owl also attracted local non-birders, and we were only too happy to show them scope views of their first owl!

Heading to the city of Trinidad we made a stop along the road successfully getting close views of a cute Cuban Gnatcatcher.

After settling into our casas and following a short break, a local guide showed us around the Old Trinidad City walking around the limits of the old and new city, went to the market, Plaza Mayor, had a traditional local drink called Canchanchara at La Canchanchara Bar, walk by La Casa de la Música (House of Music), culminating at sunset at a fine restaurant with lively local music and an outstanding view of the city.

At night, some of our group opted to experience more of the city by going to the Casa de la Música to enjoy live salsa music and dancing with the locals.



Cuban Pygmy Owl & Cuban Gnatcatcher



La Canchanchara Bar & Plaza Mayor, Trinidad

DAY 7 TRINIDAD, CAYO COCO, CUEVA DEL JABALÍ

On the outskirts of Trinidad we stopped to look for the Cuban Palm Crow before continuing on our journey to Cayo Coco. With just couple hours on the road we arrive at Cayo Coco stopping at ponds by the road and seen among others Purple Gallinules, Neotropic Cormorants, Royal Terns, Black-necked Stilts, American Flamingos and Reddish Egrets. After lunch a mid afternoon walk outside our hotel, produced a West Indian Whistling Duck. Next we visit Cueva del Jabalí where we had among others Key West Quail Dove, Baltimore Oriole and bonus Painted Bunting. Oriente Warbler was also heard a couple of times, but never showed.



Key West Quail Dove & Cuban Green Woodpecker

DAY 8 CAYO GUILLERMO, CAYO COCO

First thing this morning we looked for the Bahama Mockingbird which was seen very well by all in front of one of the five stars hotel in the region! Next we headed for our last endemic of the trip: Oriente Warbler in a local guide spot by Cayo Guillermo, making it our 26th endemic species. We had magnificent views and perfect photo ops of the warbler. All of the possible endemics was seen excluding Zapata Rail and Cuban Kite, believe to be extinct and/or critically endangered. A morning's bonus was a Mangrove Cuckoo, a lifer for couple.

The rest of the afternoon was beach/free/relax time.



Bahama Mockingbird & Oriente Warbler



April 2018 group

DAY 9 CAYO COCO TO HAVANA

This was definitely a long drive day to Havana. We manage to look for birds on every stop along the way to Havana, not having anything new at all.

DAY 10 OLD HAVANA, HEMMINGWAY'S FARM, CLASSIC CARS CITY TOUR

From our hotel, our guide Mariana took us on a walking tour of Old Havana, showing us her neighborhood, answering all of our questions. We walk around two hours

around the Old Havana by four of the main plazas: Plaza de Armas, Plaza de San Francisco, Plaza Vieja and Plaza de la Catedral.

By mid morning we arrived at Finca El Vigía aka as Hemmingway's Farm, a place full of history, and major highlight for Bill Barber. An employee guarding one of the doors to keep people out of the house and answer questions, took Bill's phone -he gave it to her not knowing exactly was that about-, to discover he had a VIP photo shoot inside of the whole house. It definitely makes his day. Ernest Miller Hemingway was an American novelist, short story writer, and journalist and Bill is his fan. You can't get in the house where Hemingway spend his time while in Cuba. There's some spots not visible from the windows and doors and Bill have them all in his phone. Following lunch in Old Havana and shopping for souvenirs, we had an excellent tour of the classic cars that Havana is so famous for. We thoroughly enjoyed our chance to ride in four of these living museum cars around some of the most iconic and historical places in Havana. The day finish with a farewell dinner on one of the streets in this magical place.





DAY 11 OLD HAVANA, MIAMI

After a good breakfast at our casas in Old Havana, we headed (start our last bus trip) to the airport, having enjoyed a wonderful 10 day birding and cultural tour of Cuba.