

## Cuba

24th October – 3rd November 2019

A trip to see the available Cuban endemics with the usual suspects Barry Reed and Mick Ilett as well as my son Tom, which was great. An enjoyable trip that was fairly easy-going (too hot to bird in the afternoon), though with a fair degree of driving crammed in to the ten days. It has some great looking birds, illustrated very well in the newly published Lynx Edicions *Birds of the West Indies* that I took with me.

Cuba isn't a spectacular country scenery-wise, very flat with lots of the original habitation replaced with sugarcane plantations and communal farmland; a travel-chessboard came in handy for myself and Tom during the long drives! It also suffers greatly from the US blockade with fuel shortages and very little food in shops. Most of the population away from Havana seem to get by as subsistence farmers and get around on horse and cart. They generally seem a happy and friendly lot, so who's to say they haven't got it right!?

The lowland swamps meant that Mosquitos were a near-continuous annoyance, possibly the worst I've known on any trip, with Tom suffering particularly. Accommodation was mixed, but improved greatly when we stayed with a very nice family in their house in Playa Larga.

Generally successful we saw most of the target birds fairly easily, though Cuban Gnatcatcher was a struggle and Gundlach's Hawk was only seen (poorly) by myself and Tom. Zapata Rail and Cuban Kite were obviously out of the equation as well as Cuban Macaw, even though, rather bizarrely, it is illustrated in the Helm guide!

Cuban Martin (a breeding endemic) wasn't seen but was also going to be difficult at this time of year as they have generally left for wherever it is they go in South America. We also failed to see the near-endemic Thick-billed Vireo and Bahama Mockingbird. The only two reliable sites we had for each of these on Caya Coco had been trashed and were in the process of being turned into hotel complexes.

We all pretty much came away with the same lists with the only birds missed by me being Yellow-billed Cuckoo (seen by everyone else more than once), and an American White Pelican seen only by Tom. This illustrates that the birding is reasonably easy with second chances to see anything found by others most of the time.

We probably had more time than was required at Playa Larga and could have cut it by a day, though myself and Tom enjoyed the extra time with an afternoon of swimming in the Caribbean and a few beers and Mojitos. We could maybe have done with an extra day at Caya Coco to look for the Vireo and Mockingbird, as well as Key West Quail Dove (also not seen in the Playa Largo area) that Tom needed.

Having seen all we were after in the La Guira/Soroa area, we spent the last half-day with a visit to Havana.

## Itinerary

24<sup>th</sup> – Gatwick to Havana

25<sup>th</sup> – Drive to Najasa/Camaguey, staying at Finca la Belen

26<sup>th</sup> – Najasa/Camaguey

27<sup>th</sup> – Drive to Caya Coco, staying at Sitio la Guira

28<sup>th</sup> – Cayo Coco  
29<sup>th</sup> – Drive to Playa Larga, staying at Hostal Oceania  
30<sup>th</sup> – Playa Larga/Zapata  
31<sup>st</sup> – Playa Larga/Zapata  
1<sup>st</sup> – Playa Larga/Zapata  
2<sup>nd</sup> – Drive to La Guira, staying in Mirador de San Diego  
3<sup>rd</sup> – Havana and flight to Gatwick

## Weather

Hot and humid with temperatures mostly over 30°C. Most days also had heavy thundery showers in the afternoon or early evening.

## Birds

**Helmeted Guineafowl** – four on the track out of Finca la Belen

**West Indian Whistling-duck** – two on Caya Coco Lagoon and a single near Cueva del Jabali

**Northern Shoveler**

**Blue-winged Teal**

**American Flamingo** – surprisingly missed at Caya Coco but seen at the Las Salinas on the Bay of Pigs

**Rock Dove**

**Eurasian Collared-dove**

**White-crowned Pigeon**

**Scaly-naped Pigeon**

**Plain Pigeon**

**Blue-headed Quail-dove** – seven at the restaurant at Cueva de los Peces

**Grey-headed Quail-dove** – Soplillar and Zapata

**Ruddy Quail-dove** – Zapata

**White-winged Dove** – just one on Caya Coco

**Zenaida Dove**

**Mourning Dove**

**Common Ground-dove**

**Nighthawk sp.** – singles seen in Havana on the first night and at Caya Coco on 27<sup>th</sup> were either Common or Antillean

**Cuban Nightjar** – one at our hotel in Caya Coco; seen well for a few minutes before we ran from the mosquitos!

**Chimney Swift** – two with Palm-swifts seen from the pool on our last evening

**Antillean Palm-swift**

**Cuban Emerald**

**Bee Hummingbird** – we may have struggled for this if it wasn't for the the Palpite Hummngbird Garden where they were obviously seen easily

**Smooth-billed Ani**

**Mangrove Cuckoo**

**Cuban Lizard-cuckoo**

**Spotted Rail** – heard and very nearly seen (movement) near Playa Larga crocodile farm

**Sora** – one near Playa Larga crocodile farm

**Purple Gallinule** – one at Playa Larga crocodile farm

**Limpkin**

**White Ibis**

**Black-crowned Night-heron** – one near Playa Larga crocodile farm

**Green-backed Heron**

**Cattle Egret**

**Great Blue Heron** – several, including a white-morph adult at Caya Coco

**Great White Egret**

**Reddish Egret**

**Tricolored Heron**

**Little Blue Heron**

**Snowy Egret**

**Brown Pelican**

**American White Pelican**

**Magnificent Frigatebird**

**Double-crested Cormorant**

**Neotropical Cormorant**

**American Oystercatcher**

**American Avocet**

**Black-winged Stilt**

**Grey Plover**

**Killdeer**

**Piping Plover** – four at Playa Colorado, Caya Coco

**Northern Jacana**

**Ruddy Turnstone**

**Stilt Sandpiper**

**Sanderling**

**Short-billed Dowitcher**

**Solitary Sandpiper**

**Willet**

**Greater Yellowlegs**

**Laughing Gull**

**Caspian Tern**

**Sandwich Tern**

**Royal Tern**

**Common Barn-owl** – two of the American group at Finca la Belen

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

**Stygian Owl** – seen well in the grounds of the Playa Larga Hotel

**Bare-legged Screech-owl** – unlike most birders who see this poorly, poking out of a daytime roost, we obtained good views of a bird in the evening at Finca la Belen

**Turkey Vulture**

**Osprey**

**Gundlach's Hawk** – one at close range but briefly at La Guira

**Cuban Black Hawk** – fairly common in the right habitat

**Broad-winged Hawk** – single on last morning

**Red-tailed Hawk**

**Cuban Trogon** – fairly easy for a Trogon

**Cuban Tody** – fairly common in the right habitat

**Belted Kingfisher**

**Fernandina's Flicker** – a single bird at Finca la Belen

**Yellow-shafted Flicker** – sometimes split as Cuban Flicker, a single seen at Sopillar

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** – one at Playa Larga Hotel

**Cuban Green Woodpecker** – fairly common

**West Indian Woodpecker** – fairly common

**Crested Caracara**

**American Kestrel** – both pale morphs and dark morphs of these endemic subspecies were seen, though only pale morphs were present east of Havana

**Merlin**

**Peregrine Falcon**

**Cuban Amazon** – just two sightings: Finca la Belen and Playa Larga Hotel

**Cuban Parakeet** – a single sighting of a flock at Finca la Belen saved the day

**Loggerhead Kingbird**

**Giant Kingbird** – fairly easy at Finca la Belen

**La Sagra's Flycatcher** – it took us a few days before we saw this but not too difficult to find

**Eastern Wood-pewee**

**Cuban Pewee** – similar to La Sagra's, it was a few days before seeing our first, but easy after that

**Yellow-throated Vireo** – single at Soplillar

**White-eyed Vireo** – single at Cueva del Jabali

**Cuban Vireo** – the commonest Vireo

**Cuban Crow**

**Palm Crow**

**Cliff Swallow**

**Blue-grey Gnatcatcher**

**Cuban Gnatcatcher** – struggled with this until a pair eventually showed very well at Cueva del Jabali

**Zapata Wren** – only one bird seen, but very well and without too much difficulty

**Grey Catbird**

**Northern Mockingbird**

**Cuban Solitaire** – a single bird found fairly easily at La Guira

**Western Red-legged Thrush** - common

**Scaly-breasted Munia** – a pair found nesting at Najasa

**House Sparrow**

**Zapata Sparrow** – both races seen

**Yellow-headed Warbler**

**Oriente Warbler** – common where present

**Eastern Meadowlark** – several sightings of this potential split

**Cuban Oriole** – fairly easy to find

**Tawny-shouldered Blackbird** – roadside near Playa Larga crocodile farm

**Red-shouldered Blackbird** – roadside near Playa Larga crocodile farm

**Cuban Blackbird** – common

**Greater Antillean Grackle** – common

**Ovenbird** – some incredible views of this and other enigmatic American Warblers

**Worm-eating Warbler** – two good sightings

**Louisiana Waterthrush** – the first Waterthrush seen on the first day birding, but the only sighting

**Northern Waterthrush** – common in places, particularly around Zapata

**Black-and-white Warbler**

**Tennessee Warbler** – a single sighting at Finca la Belen

**Common Yellowthroat**

**Hooded Warbler** – a single sighting at Soplillar

**American Redstart**

**Cape May Warbler**

## **Northern Parula**

**Magnolia Warbler** – a single sighting at Soplillar

**American Yellow Warbler**

**Black-throated Blue Warbler**

**Palm Warbler** – the commonest of the Warblers

**Olive-capped Warbler** – easy in pines at La Guira

**Yellow-throated Warbler** - common

**Prairie Warbler**

**Black-throated Green Warbler**

**Western Spindalis** – three birds together including a male at Sita la Guira

**Indigo Bunting**

**Yellow-faced Grassquit**

**Cuban Bullfinch** – seen on three days

**Cuban Grassquit** – easy at Las Terrazas Feeding Station

## Checklist

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/b3tn79TiV4pkD5Ty7>

## Photos

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/qA7pLPkEvYRzBw6E7>

## Daily Lists

24<sup>th</sup> – Havana – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452617>

25<sup>th</sup> – Finca la Belen– <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452613>

26<sup>th</sup> – Finca la Belen – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452612>

27<sup>th</sup> – Najasa – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452611>

27<sup>th</sup> – Caya Coco Causeway – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452610>

27<sup>th</sup> – Cueva del Jabali – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452616>

27<sup>th</sup> – Sita la Guira – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452615>

28<sup>th</sup> – Sita la Guira – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452605>

28<sup>th</sup> – Playa Colorado – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452604>

28<sup>th</sup> – Faro Paredón Grande – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452590>

28<sup>th</sup> – Caya Coco Lagoon – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452589>

29<sup>th</sup> – Cueva del Jabali – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452587>

29<sup>th</sup> – Palpite Hummingbird Garden – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452366>

30<sup>th</sup> – Zapata Swamp– <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452603>

30<sup>th</sup> – Soplillar – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452602>

30<sup>th</sup> – Cueva de los Peces – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452365>

30<sup>th</sup> – Palpite Hummingbird Garden – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452364>

30<sup>th</sup> – Criadero de Cocodrilos – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452601>

30<sup>th</sup> – Playa Larga – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452363>

31<sup>st</sup> – Soplillar – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452600>

31<sup>st</sup> – Bay of Pigs Salinas – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452597>

31<sup>st</sup> – Playa Larga – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452598>

31<sup>st</sup> – Playa Larga – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452361>

1<sup>st</sup> – Zapata Swamp – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452596>

- 1<sup>st</sup> – Criadero de Cocodrilos – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452594>
- 2<sup>nd</sup> – Las Terrazas Feeding Station – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452593>
- 2<sup>nd</sup> – La Guira – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452592>
- 2<sup>nd</sup> – San Diego de Los Banos – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452591>
- 3<sup>rd</sup> – San Diego de Los Banos – <https://ebird.org/checklist/S61452588>