

Endemic birds of Jamaica and the Caribbean

The island of Jamaica is the third largest in the Greater Antilles and located to the south of Cuba. The island has a wide range of habitats from the cool rolling hills of Central Jamaica to coastal mangrove habitats and scrub. Due to Jamaica's isolation, its birds have evolved into twenty-eight endemic species and seventeen unique sub-species which may in time be elevated to full species. Our tour visits freshwater marshes where the endangered West Indian Whistling Duck occurs. The Cockpit Country is renowned for endemic species and includes Yellow-billed and Black-billed Parrots, Jamaican Tody and the localised Ring-tailed Pigeon. The remote Blue and John Crow Mountain National Park offers you several more endemic birds including the scarce Crested Quail Dove, Rufous-throated Solitaire and the endangered and declining Jamaican Blackbird. This is an opportunity to see some of the Caribbean's unique endemic birds in beautiful surroundings. The Jamaican people are hospitable and welcoming, making the tour a joy to participate in.

■ Please note it is possible to combine this tour with Puerto Rico on page 92.

Day 1: We have a flight to Jamaica. On arrival, we transfer to Kingston with Brown Pelican, Laughing Gull, Osprey, Royal and Sandwich Terns and wintering shorebirds in and around the harbour. As dusk falls, we watch the endemic Red-billed Streamertails vying for territory. Two nights in Kingston.

Day 2: An early start with a visit to Hellshire Hills for the localised Bahama Mockingbird and two Jamaican specialties: Stolid Flycatcher and Jamaican Mango. We should also encounter Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Peregrine Falcon, Osprey, Cave Swallow, Vervain Hummingbird, Prairie and Yellow Warblers, Black-faced Grassquit, Mourning Dove and White-winged Doves. The remainder of the morning is spent visiting Kingston's sewage works for egrets, Glossy Ibis and waders including Spotted and Least Sandpipers, Lesser Yellowlegs and Black-necked Stilts. Northern Jacanas and Common Gallinules lurk in the vegetated fringes and wintering Blue-winged Teal are also possible. North of Portmore, another set of ponds may have Green Heron, Western Sandpiper and Wilson's Plover and possibly a vagrant Ruff. At Hope Botanical Gardens, we may locate Olive-throated Parakeet, Yellow-billed Parrot, Jamaican Woodpecker, White-chinned Thrush and Antillean Palm Swift. Fruiting trees lure war-

Dates

Friday March 17th - Friday March 24th 2017

Leader: Mark Finn and Ricardo Miller

Group size: 8

Species: 115-135

blers which may include Cape May, Prairie and Black-throated Blue Warblers, American Redstart and Northern Parula. A check of the older trees may reveal Northern Potoos.

Days 3-4: Steep slopes, hairpin bends, precipitous drops and spectacular views make up the habitat as we ascend the Blue Mountains. At our first stop we search for the delightful Jamaican Tody and Ring-tailed Pigeons plus singing Rufous-throated Solitaire. The mountains are also home to several Jamaican endemics including the beautiful Crested Quail Dove, Yellow-shouldered Grassquit, skulking Jamaican Lizard Cuckoos, Sad and Rufous-tailed Flycatchers and Jamaican Becards. Other species present in the mountains include Arrow-headed Warbler, Jamaican, Blue Mountain and Black-whiskered Vireos, Orangequit, Greater Antillean Bullfinch, Jamaican Spindalis and Jamaican Euphonia. Migrant wood warblers occur on



Jamaican Tody Photo: Barry Lancaster

a regular basis; Black-throated Green, Black-and-white and American Redstart. At Hardwar Gap we can look for White-eyed Thrush, Jamaican Blackbird and Jamaican Pewee. Starlight Chalet is our base where the feeders attract Bananaquit and Jamaican Oriole. At dusk we should encounter flocks of White-collared and Black Swifts. Nights at Starlight Chalet

Day 5: An early start is necessary to visit the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park. The area is famous for coffee production but our interest lies in the lush habitats of the steep slopes. Here we search for two of Jamaica's most difficult birds - Jamaican Blackbird and Crested Quail Dove. At Hardwar Gap we may locate White-eyed Thrush, Blue Mountain Vireo and Arrow-headed Warbler. Other species in the area include Caribbean endemics - White-crowned Pigeon, Zenaida and Caribbean Doves and Black-faced Grassquit. We may also find migrant American wood warblers with Black-throated Green, Cape May, Prairie, Black-and-White and Northern Parula all being possible.

Day 6: This morning we head back to Kingston and visit the Green Castle Estate for waders and other winter migrants and a possibility of the rare West Indian Whistling Duck. Palm plantations en route often have Antillean Palm Swifts and White-collared Swifts hawking for insects. The coast road may have the Atlantic race of White-tailed Tropicbirds which patrol offshore waters. Cockpit County is an area of limestone-

mountains traversed by valleys. Our main interest is locating the two endemic parrots, Yellow-billed and Black-billed, feeding in roadside trees. Also present are Ring-tailed Pigeon, Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo, Jamaican Vireo and Greater Antillean Bullfinch. In the afternoon, we search for daytime roosting Northern Potoos. As dusk falls, we should have close views of the endemic Jamaican Owl. Night at Goblin Hill

Day 7: We set off early from Goblin Hill to reach Hector's River in time for the peak activity of White-tailed Tropicbirds which breed there. The eastern tip of the island holds American Kestrel, Belted Kingfisher and Mourning Doves. We stop at Yallah's Lagoon for Saffron Finch and Semipalmated Sandpiper. Other birds present include Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted and Least Sandpipers, Black-necked Stilt, Royal Tern, Laughing Gull, Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird and Prairie and Yellow Warblers.

Day 8: Today, we head back to Kingston. A small village with mangrove-fringed lagoons often holds Short-billed Dowitcher, Willet, Killdeer and Wilson's Plovers. Further along the road, more lagoons hold wintering Northern Shoveler, American and Caribbean Coots, Belted Kingfisher and a wide selection of the commoner waders and ducks. Transfer to Kingston airport for the flight back to England, arrival being the following morning.

Prices

Ground Price: £2,200
 Single room: £250
 Deposit: £200
 *Air Fare: £675

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature and any relevant fuel surcharges.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*