

Birds of the Greater Antilles

Puerto Rico is situated at the eastern end of the Greater Antilles and is now technically affiliated to the United States. The island is small in size and holds seventeen endemic species, one of the highest numbers in the Caribbean region. A good internal road system combined with a variety of habitat make birding on the island a joy. We have two bases: Guanica in the south-west and Hatillo on the north coast.

■ Please note this tour can be combined with Jamaica on page 86.

Day 1: Fly to San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico where we overnight. Common birds in parks and gardens of San Juan include Caribbean Martin, Greater Antillean Grackle, Zenaida and White-winged Doves and Red-legged Thrushes.

Day 2: Today we leave San Juan and drive towards the north-east coast. En route we can check an area around Fajardo which holds the endemic Puerto Rican Woodpecker, Green-throated Carib, Greater Antillean Hummingbird, Grey Kingbird and Pearly-eyed Thrashers. The coast has many old piers and jetties which attract Brown Pelican, Brown Booby, Sandwich and Royal Terns and ever-present Magnificent Frigatebirds. Next on the agenda is Humacao, a wetland area of mangroves and lagoons. The trees attract White-crowned Pigeon, Puerto Rican Flycatcher and wintering Northern Waterthrush, American Redstart and Northern Parula. In areas of open water we should locate Blue-winged Teal and other wildfowl. This area also affords us the opportunity to compare American and Caribbean Coots at close range. Any weedy fields are worth checking for Black-faced and Yellow-faced Grassquits and Smooth-billed Ani. Later in the day we head to Hatillo our base for the night. A check of the Rio Grande estuary should produce Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret and, perhaps, the localised American Oystercatcher.

Day 3: An early start is essential as we visit Cambalache State Forest, one of the few mature lowland forest patches left on the island. A variety of habitat from vine tangles to mature trees attracts a wealth of species with the forest edge often holding the intro-

Dates

Friday March 24th - Thursday March 30th 2017

Leader: Mark Finn

Group Size: 8

Birds 100-120

duced Monk Parakeet, Common Ground Dove, Black-whiskered Vireo and the endearing Puerto Rican Tody. We walk along the forest trails seeking out Key West Quail-Dove, Puerto Rican Lizard Cuckoo, Puerto Rican Spindalis, Puerto Rican Vireo, Adelaide's Warbler and the secretive Puerto Rican Bullfinch. Not far from Cambalache is an area of grasslands where we should see wintering Barn Swallows, Osprey and introduced estrildid finches. Our journey takes us to the west coast and a series of lagoons attractive to Least Grebe, White-cheeked Pintail, Blue-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck and American Wigeon. Shorebirds may include Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs and Black-necked Stilts. Transfer to the Guanica area for three nights.

Day 4: We start the day by visiting Maricao State Forest, a protected area of elfin forest, small trees and flowering plants. Any patches of mistletoe are worth checking for Antillean Euphonia whilst the flowers lure Green Mangos, Puerto Rico Tanager and Puerto Rican Spindalis. Our main target species at Maricao is Elfin Woods Warbler which was only discovered in 1971 and totals around 600 birds. Higher up the mountain, a check of flowering plants may reveal Puerto Rican Emerald and Loggerhead Kingbird, the latter being an endemic subspecies which is likely to be

split shortly as it differs in plumage and voice from other forms in the Caribbean region. Maricao is also known for Puerto Rican Oriole, one of the scarce island endemics. After lunch, we check the coast road for Caribbean Elaenias, Puerto Rican Peewee and Adelaide's Warbler. Patches of mud and mangrove habitat often have wild-fowl and waders which may include Least and Stilt Sandpipers, Grey and Semipalmated Plovers and, perhaps, rarer species in Willet and Short-billed Dowitcher. After dinner we have an option to visit Guanica Dry Forest for Puerto Rican Screech Owl.

Day 5: Today we concentrate on the dry south-western corner of the island. Our first stop is at La Parguera where flowering trees attract the endangered Yellow-shouldered Blackbird. Laguna Cartegena is an important freshwater wetland. Water levels vary from year to year and we can expect a wide range of herons, Glossy Ibis, Masked Duck, Common and American Purple Gallinules, and a chance of the rare and localised West Indian Whistling-Duck. The mangrove forests near Boqueron are worth stopping at for wintering warblers – Prairie, American Redstart, Magnolia, Northern Parula, and Northern Waterthrush. A visit to the south-western tip reveals a habitat of salt pans, mangroves, and beaches. Careful scanning should reveal the presence of Semipalmated and Stilt Sandpipers. We return to Guanica for dinner followed by a nocturnal visit for the rare Puerto Rican Nightjar.

Day 6: This morning we can revisit our favourite areas of the south-west before heading back to San Juan. We will be on the lookout for wintering Merlin and other species we may have missed earlier in the tour. Susua National Forest is a park with a creek along the main trail. Puerto Rican Vireos and Puerto Rican Flycatchers can be numerous in the hanging vines. We head back to San Juan in the afternoon for our final night on the island, making a diversion to Comerio for the scarce Plain Pigeon.

Day 7: Fly back to the UK with arrival on the following morning.



Puerto Rican Tody Photo: Neil Norvock

Prices

Ground Price: £1,600
 Single room: £100
 Deposit: £200
 *Air Fare: £650

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*