

Birding Ecotours



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: SET DEPARTURE TOUR TRIP REPORT

13 - 18 MARCH 2020

By Luis Gles



*A striking **Palmchat**, the national bird of the Dominican Republic.*

Overview

This tour had been scheduled for nine days; unfortunately our client (Shailesh) decided to cut the trip short due to concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19, so the trip was quickly rerouted and sped up in an attempt to get as many of the target species as possible. The tour began in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, on the 13th of March 2020 and finished back there on the 18th of March. The rerouted tour's focus was to visit the main birding spots on the island, namely the National Botanical Garden in Santo Domingo, Los Haitises National Park, and Sierra de Bahoruco.

Despite this the tour connected with many exciting and endangered birds, such as the greatest success story on the avian side, the Critically Endangered (IUCN) **Ridgway's Hawk** (*Buteo ridgwayi*), and other amazing endemics species in the Dominican Republic, including **Ashy-faced Owl**, **White-fronted Quail-Dove**, the rare **Bay-breasted Cuckoo**, **Hispaniolan Trogon**, **Broad-billed** and **Narrow-billed Todies**, **Antillean Piculet**, **Hispaniolan Amazon** (Parrot), **Hispaniolan Parakeet**, **Flat-billed Vireo**, the declining **Golden Swallow**, **Rufous-throated Solitaire**, the rarest and highly prized **La Selle Thrush**, **Hispaniolan Crossbill**, **Antillean Euphonia**, **Western Chat-Tanager**, and the two endemic warblers **Green-tailed** and **White-winged Warblers**, along with **Hispaniolan Spindalis** and **Hispaniolan Oriole**, and the national bird of the country, **Palmchat**.

A total of 100 bird species were seen, and two additional species were heard only. The species list is at the end of this report.



*The beautiful **Black-crowned Tanager** (Palm-Tanager) is always a real treat to see.*

Detailed Report

Day 1, 13th March 2020. Santo Domingo

After arriving in a busy Santo Domingo we checked into our hotel in the old colonial district (Zona Colonial). We then decided to enjoy an evening walk through the colonial district, during which we saw the first two endemic birds, **Palmchat** and **Hispaniolan Parakeet**, and the Caribbean specialties **Antillean Palm Swift** and **Grey Kingbird**, along with other species like many **Bananaquits**, **House Sparrow**, **Brown Pelican**, **Northern Mockingbird**, and **Mourning Dove**.

Day 2, 14th March 2020. National Botanical Garden, transfer to Los Haïtises National Park

Within the first five minutes after stepping through the entrance of the National Botanical Garden we had seen huge colonies of **Palmchats** and **Antillean Palm Swifts**, followed by the first of many **Hispaniolan Woodpeckers**, **Antillean Mango**, **Common Ground Dove**, and **Mourning Dove**. **Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo** was calling all morning and making it difficult to actually see it, but eventually we had a great view. Soon afterwards the soft call of **Broad-billed Tody** caught our attention, and it showed well.



Broad-billed Tody showed well at the National Botanical Garden.

Then we found **Vervain Hummingbird**, the second-smallest bird in the world, feeding along a trail. The end of our birding the gardens delivered the main target of the morning, **West Indian Whistling Duck**, for which this is one of the best localities, along with **Green Heron**, **Snowy Egret**, **Common Gallinule**, and **Spotted Sandpiper**. Some exploration in the woods produced **Red-legged Thrush**, **Black-crowned Tanager** (Palm-Tanager), **Ovenbird**, **Black-and-white Warbler**, and **American Redstart**. After a good morning's birding and introduction to the country's birds we transferred to the Los Haitises National Park at the eastern side of the country.

After we checked into our comfortable accommodation we were able to explore the area and find the rare **Ashy-faced Owl**.

Day 3, 15th March 2020. Birding Los Haitises National Park, transfer to Puerto Escondido

We started the morning meeting up with the local guide (Juan), who has worked with the Peregrine Fund for the last 30 years and keeps tabs on **Ridgway's Hawk**. Juan showed us an active nest with two stunning adults inside the park, Los Haitises National Park is home to and the last stronghold for this country's rarest endemic and one of the most endangered Caribbean raptors, This species was close to extinction, but, although the fight is not won yet, hard work by the Peregrine Fund has seen this species' numbers start to increase in the region. Our morning's birding in the area also produced many other species, including **Limpkin, Plain Pigeon, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Antillean Mango, Greater Antillean Bullfinch, Vervain Hummingbird, Broad-billed Tody, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Antillean Piculet, Stolid Flycatcher, Black-whiskered Vireo, White-necked Crow, Palmchat, Black-crowned Tanager (Palm-Tanager), Greater Antillean Grackle**, and a variety of wintering warblers including **Northern Waterthrush, Northern Parula, and American Redstart**, among others like **Black-and-white Warbler, Western Cattle Egret (Cattle Egret), and Great Egret**. We finished birding Los Haitises National Park at noon before transferring southwestward to check into Villa Barrancolí, where we'd spend the night, before we went on a night walk, which produced a vocal **Least Poorwill (Least Pauraque)**, but unfortunately there was a celebration at the village and we couldn't track the bird.



The always-stunning Hispaniolan Spindalis

Day 4, 16th March 2020. Birding Zapotén and the Sierra de Bahoruco

We started the morning around 4 a.m. and met with Rafael, a local guide and today's driver. Our intent was to arrive before sunrise in the montane forest of Zapotén in the Sierra de Bahoruco. The drive up the mountain was incredibly rough, but we were able to hear the call of **American Barn Owl** perched down by a cliff, and as soon as we arrived at Zapotén we started to hear the call of the **Hispaniolan Nightjar** many times. After we had parked the car we started the best birding day of the tour. Our first main target was the rare **La Selle Thrush**, and we enjoyed views of two birds as they were feeding one up and one down the road. Then we saw our first **Hispaniolan Emerald, Green-tailed Warbler**, and **Hispaniolan Spindalis** before enjoying an amazing view of **Hispaniolan Trogon**. **Hispaniolan Pewee** and **Greater Antillean Elaenia** were really common throughout the morning. We also had a brief view of the skittish **Rufous-throated Solitaire**, and **Narrow-billed Tody** became extremely common in the area. The elusive **Western Chat-Tanager** gave us some great, close-up views before it melted back into the bushes. Later Shailesh was photographing one of our top targets, **White-winged Warbler**, and we enjoyed some great views of **Greater Antillean Bullfinch**, while the declining **Golden Swallow** was flying over and then perched in a tree for great scope views. We also marveled at the beauty of **Red-legged Thrush** and saw **Antillean Siskin, Black-crowned Tanager** (Palm-Tanager), **Bananaquit**, and a good number of migratory warblers, such as **Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Cape May Warbler**, and **Black-throated Blue Warbler**. Endemics we found here were **Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoos, White-necked Crow**, and **Hispaniolan Parakeet**. Then one of the most important birds for Shailesh, **Bay-breasted Cuckoo**, started calling and briefly showed. Subsequently pine trees at the top of the hill delivered an exciting moment with a pair of **Red-tailed Hawks** and one **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, and we also enjoyed **Hispaniolan Crossbills** along with a number of **Pine Warblers**.

The return trip was quieter, but we did better our views of **Greater Antillean Bullfinch** and finally saw **Antillean Euphonia**. The road down the mountain provided **Stolid Flycatcher, Vervain Hummingbird**, and a few of the introduced **Olive-throated Parakeets**, and a quick stop at one of the military checkpoints produced the regional specialty, **Loggerhead Kingbird**.

Once we reached the drier woodland near the town we started working this area for a few different species. Rafael called in a **Flat-billed Vireo**, which fortunately showed well, when the rare **Bay-breasted Cuckoo** called just behind us, but we couldn't see it. However, we saw other good birds like **Smooth-billed Ani, Ovenbird, Yellow-faced Grassquit**, and **Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo**. Then we returned to Villa Barrancolí for a quick late lunch.

We went to the Rabo de Gato trail for the afternoon period, which saw us add a few more species. **White-fronted Quail-Dove** was the first of our targets we found, and after patiently scanning we spotted a **Louisiana Waterthrush** feeding by a creek. Some other species seen here included **Belted Kingfisher, Scaly-naped Pigeon, White-necked Crow, Hispaniolan Parakeet**, and **Ovenbird**.

Day 5, 17th March 2020. Villa Barrancolí to Santo Domingo

We started birding early. Once again we were briefly looking at the elusive **White-fronted Quail-Dove** on the Rabo de Gato trail, and scanning the forest floor we found a least three **Ovenbirds**. While we were focused on the soft call of **Ruddy Quail-Dove** a beautiful and really cooperative

Key West Quail-Dove showed up in the middle of the trail. After breakfast we went to the La Placa sector, the dry woodland of the Sierra Bahoruco, looking for more birds. On the tower we had amazing views of the **Antillean Piculet** and **Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo** along with many **Common Ground Doves**, **Zenaida Dove**, **White-winged Dove**, **Smooth-billed Ani**, **Grey Kingbird**, **Stolid Flycatcher**, **Black-whiskered Vireo**, **Black-crowned Tanager** (Palm-Tanager), **American Redstart**, and **Northern Parula**. We returned for lunch to Villa Barrancolí and then checked out and made our way back to Santo Domingo.



Antillean Piculet showed really well at Sierra de Bahoruco.

Day 6, 18 March 2020. Departure from Santo Domingo.

Finally we concluded an amazing tour, even with the all the concern about COVID-19 around the world. We enjoyed the three main birding spots on the island and found all the main targets for Shailesh. As a result we have great memories of another successful Birding Ecotours tour.

Bird List – Following IOC (10.1)

Clements common names, where different, are added in parentheses.

Birds 'heard only' are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen.

The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: CE = Critically Endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened. Hispaniolan endemics are bolded.

| Common Name | Scientific Name |
|---|--|
| Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl (Anatidae) | |
| West Indian Whistling Duck - NT | <i>Dendrocygna arborea</i> |
| Nightjars (Caprimulgidae) | |
| Least Poorwill (Least Pauraque) - NT | <i>Siphonorhis brewsteri</i> |
| Hispaniolan Nightjar (H) | <i>Antrostomus ekmani</i> |
| Swifts (Apodidae) | |
| Antillean Palm Swift | <i>Tachornis phoenicobia</i> |
| Hummingbirds (Trochilidae) | |
| Antillean Mango | <i>Anthracothorax dominicus</i> |
| Hispaniolan Emerald | <i>Chlorostilbon swainsonii</i> |
| Vervain Hummingbird | <i>Mellisuga minima</i> |
| Cuckoos (Cuculidae) | |
| Smooth-billed Ani | <i>Crotophaga ani</i> |
| Yellow-billed Cuckoo | <i>Coccyzus americanus</i> |
| Bay-breasted Cuckoo - EN | <i>Coccyzus ruficularis</i> |
| Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo | <i>Coccyzus longirostris</i> |
| Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae) | |
| Rock Dove | <i>Columba livia</i> |
| Scaly-naped Pigeon | <i>Patagioenas squamosa</i> |
| Plain Pigeon - NT | <i>Patagioenas inornata</i> |
| Eurasian Collared Dove | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> |
| Common Ground Dove | <i>Columbina passerina</i> |
| Ruddy Quail-Dove | <i>Geotrygon montana</i> |

| Common Name | Scientific Name |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| White-fronted Quail-Dove - EN | <i>Geotrygon leucometopia</i> |
| Key West Quail-Dove | <i>Geotrygon chrysia</i> |
| Mourning Dove | <i>Zenaida macroura</i> |
| Zenaida Dove | <i>Zenaida aurita</i> |
| White-winged Dove | <i>Zenaida asiatica</i> |
| Rails, Crakes and Coots (Rallidae) | |
| Common Gallinule | <i>Gallinula galeata</i> |
| Limpkin (Aramidae) | |
| Limpkin | <i>Aramus guarauna</i> |
| Grebes (Podicipedidae) | |
| Least Grebe | <i>Tachybaptus dominicus</i> |
| Flamingos (Phoenicopteridae) | |
| American Flamingo | <i>Phoenicopus ruber</i> |
| Plovers (Charadriidae) | |
| Killdeer | <i>Charadrius vociferus</i> |
| Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae) | |
| Least Sandpiper | <i>Calidris minutilla</i> |
| Spotted Sandpiper | <i>Actitis macularius</i> |
| Solitary Sandpiper | <i>Tringa solitaria</i> |
| Lesser Yellowlegs | <i>Tringa flavipes</i> |
| Greater Yellowlegs | <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i> |
| Gulls, Terns, Skimmers (Laridae) | |
| Royal Tern | <i>Thalasseus maximus</i> |
| Frigatebirds (Fregatidae) | |
| Magnificent Frigatebird | <i>Fregata magnificens</i> |
| Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae) | |
| Green Heron | <i>Butorides virescens</i> |
| Western Cattle Egret (Cattle Egret) | <i>Bubulcus ibis</i> |

| Common Name | Scientific Name |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Great Egret | <i>Ardea alba</i> |
| Tricolored Heron | <i>Egretta tricolor</i> |
| Little Blue Heron | <i>Egretta caerulea</i> |
| Snowy Egret | <i>Egretta thula</i> |
| Pelicans (Pelecanidae) | |
| Brown Pelican | <i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i> |
| New World Vultures (Cathartidae) | |
| Turkey Vulture | <i>Cathartes aura</i> |
| Ospreys (Pandionidae) | |
| Western Osprey | <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> |
| Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae) | |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | <i>Accipiter striatus</i> |
| Ridgway's Hawk - CR | <i>Buteo ridgwayi</i> |
| Red-tailed Hawk | <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i> |
| Barn Owls (Tytonidae) | |
| American Barn Owl (H) | <i>Tyto furcata</i> |
| Ashy-faced Owl | <i>Tyto glaucops</i> |
| Owls (Strigidae) | |
| Burrowing Owl | <i>Athene cunicularia</i> |
| Trogons (Trogonidae) | |
| Hispaniolan Trogon | <i>Priotelus roseigaster</i> |
| Kingfishers (Alcedinidae) | |
| Belted Kingfisher | <i>Megaceryle alcyon</i> |
| Todies (Todidae) | |
| Broad-billed Tody | <i>Todus subulatus</i> |
| Narrow-billed Tody | <i>Todus angustirostris</i> |
| Woodpeckers (Picidae) | |

| Common Name | Scientific Name |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Antillean Piculet | <i>Nesocittes micromegas</i> |
| Hispaniolan Woodpecker | <i>Melanerpes striatus</i> |
| Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae) | |
| American Kestrel | <i>Falco sparverius</i> |
| African and New World Parrots (Psittacidae) | |
| Hispaniolan Amazon (Parrot) - VU | <i>Amazona ventralis</i> |
| Olive-throated Parakeet | <i>Eupsittula nana</i> |
| Hispaniolan Parakeet - VU | <i>Psittacara chloropterus</i> |
| Tyrant Flycatchers, Calyptura (Tyrannidae) | |
| Greater Antillean Elaenia | <i>Elaenia fallax</i> |
| Hispaniolan Pewee | <i>Contopus hispaniolensis</i> |
| Grey Kingbird | <i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i> |
| Loggerhead Kingbird | <i>Tyrannus caudifasciatus</i> |
| Stolid Flycatcher | <i>Myiarchus stolidus</i> |
| Vireos, Greenlets, Shrike-babblers (Vireonidae) | |
| Flat-billed Vireo | <i>Vireo nanus</i> |
| Black-whiskered Vireo | <i>Vireo altiloquus</i> |
| Crows, Jays (Corvidae) | |
| White-necked Crow - VU | <i>Corvus leucognaphalus</i> |
| Palmchat (Dulidae) | |
| Palmchat | <i>Dulus dominicus</i> |
| Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae) | |
| Golden Swallow - VU | <i>Tachycineta euchrysea</i> |
| Caribbean Martin | <i>Progne dominicensis</i> |
| Mockingbirds, Thrashers (Mimidae) | |
| Northern Mockingbird | <i>Mimus polyglottos</i> |
| Thrushes (Turdidae) | |
| Rufous-throated Solitaire | <i>Myadestes genibarbis</i> |

| Common Name | Scientific Name |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Bicknell's Thrush - VU | <i>Catharus bicknelli</i> |
| La Selle Thrush - VU | <i>Turdus swalesi</i> |
| Red-legged Thrush | <i>Turdus plumbeus</i> |
| Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae) | |
| House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> |
| Weavers, Widowbirds (Ploceidae) | |
| Village Weaver | <i>Ploceus cucullatus</i> |
| Finches, Euphonias (Fringillidae) | |
| Hispaniolan Crossbill - EN | <i>Loxia megaplaga</i> |
| Antillean Siskin | <i>Spinus dominicensis</i> |
| Antillean Euphonia | <i>Euphonia musica</i> |
| Chat-tanagers (Calyptophilidae) | |
| Western Chat-Tanager - VU | <i>Calyptophilus tertius</i> |
| Hispaniolan Tanagers (Phaenicophilidae) | |
| Black-crowned Tanager (Palm-Tanager) | <i>Phaenicophilus palmarum</i> |
| Green-tailed Warbler | <i>Microligea palustris</i> |
| White-winged Warbler - VU | <i>Xenoligea montana</i> |
| Spindalises (Spindalidae) | |
| Hispaniolan Spindalis | <i>Spindalis dominicensis</i> |
| Oropendolas, Orioles, Blackbirds (Icteridae) | |
| Hispaniolan Oriole | <i>Icterus dominicensis</i> |
| Greater Antillean Grackle | <i>Quiscalus niger</i> |
| New World Warblers (Parulidae) | |
| Ovenbird | <i>Seiurus aurocapilla</i> |
| Louisiana Waterthrush | <i>Parkesia motacilla</i> |
| Northern Waterthrush | <i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i> |
| Black-and-white Warbler | <i>Mniotilta varia</i> |
| American Redstart | <i>Setophaga ruticilla</i> |

| Common Name | Scientific Name |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Cape May Warbler | <i>Setophaga tigrina</i> |
| Northern Parula | <i>Setophaga americana</i> |
| Mangrove Warbler | <i>Setophaga petechia</i> |
| Black-throated Blue Warbler | <i>Setophaga caerulescens</i> |
| Pine Warbler | <i>Setophaga pinus</i> |
| Prairie Warbler | <i>Setophaga discolor</i> |
| | |
| Tanagers and Allies (Thraupidae) | |
| Bananaquit | <i>Coereba flaveola</i> |
| Yellow-faced Grassquit | <i>Tiaris olivaceus</i> |
| Black-faced Grassquit | <i>Tiaris bicolor</i> |
| Greater Antillean Bullfinch | <i>Loxigilla violacea</i> |

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|-------------------|------------|
| Total Seen | 100 |
| Total heard only | 2 |
| Total recorded | 102 |