



Natural Selections

BIRDING, WILDLIFE, AND PHOTO TOURS



Cuban Tody

Birding Cuba: The Wild Western Peninsula, Western Mountains, Zapata Peninsula and more

You are invited to join Natural Selections Tours on an exclusive, U.S. led and managed birding program to Cuba! Our US and Cuba-based team will include a bilingual Cuban guide and local naturalists in 4 different birding regions. Along with our tour leader, they will guide you through some of the best bird habitat in Cuba, the Caribbean's largest and most ecologically diverse island nation.

This itinerary is designed to take you to Cuba's finest bird habitats, most beautiful national parks, diverse biosphere reserves, and unique natural areas. We will interact with local scientists and naturalists who work in research and conservation. In addition to birding, we will learn about the ecology and history of regions we visit. Finally, and especially given the ongoing changes in U.S. – Cuban relations, we can expect some degree of inquiry into fascinating aspects of Cuban culture, history, and daily living during our visit.

9 Nights/10 Days

Cuba's Birds

According to BirdLife International, which has designated 28 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Cuba, "Over 370 bird species have been recorded in Cuba, including 27 which are endemic to the island and 29 considered globally threatened. Due to its large land area and geographical position within the Caribbean, Cuba represents one of the most important countries for Neotropical migratory birds – both birds passing through on their way south (75 species) and those spending the winter on the island (86 species)."

Our itinerary provides opportunities to see many of Cuba's endemic species and subspecies, as listed below. This trip will also focus on the many neotropical migrant species that migrate south to Cuba in the fall (endemic species and endemic subspecies in italics): Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Oriole, Bee Hummingbird, Blue-headed Quail-Dove, Gray-fronted Quail-Dove, Cuban Black Hawk, Cuban Blackbird, Cuban Bullfinch, Cuban Gnatcatcher, Cuban Grassquit,

Gray-fronted Quail-Dove



Bee Hummingbird

Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Parrot, Cuban Pewee, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Cuban Solitaire, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Vireo, Fernandina's Flicker, Giant Kingbird, Gundlach's Hawk, Eastern Meadowlark, Cuban Nightjar, Red-shouldered Blackbird, Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, Oriente Warbler, Yellow-headed Warbler, Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Cuban Crow, Palm Crow, Cuban Emerald, Bahama Mockingbird, Thick-billed Vireo, & Western Spindalis.

Other species of interest include: Great Lizard-Cuckoo, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Loggerhead Kingbird, Olive-capped Warbler, Key West Quail-Dove, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Zenaida Dove, Stygian Owl, West Indian Whistling Duck, American Flamingo, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, and a great variety of wading birds, and numerous other migratory and resident species.

Where We Travel

Our Cuba Bird Survey begins in the forests surrounding Las Terrazas

Community, established in 1968 as a re-forestation and community integrated development project. In Cuba's post-revolutionary history, the community has blossomed as a model of sustainability, and is currently a prime destination for ecologically based tourism.

Cuba's Western Mountains include two of the country's most diverse and dramatic ranges: the Sierra de la Rosario, and Sierra de los

Organos. We will explore an area common to both ranges in search of western range endemic species such as the Cuban Solitaire. A highlight of the trip, we will visit the magical, unusually beautiful karstic landscape of western Cuba, which features towering, lushly vegetated, flat-top limestone monoliths and extensive cave systems. This is the only region in which we will likely see the Cuban Solitaire, Cuban Grassquit, Giant Kingbird, & Olive-



West Indian Woodpecker

capped Warbler. Other potential endemic species for western Cuba include Cuban Oriole, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Pewee, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Vireo, & Yellow-headed Warbler.

We will also explore the diverse wetland region of the **Zapata Peninsula**, Cuba's richest and most important birding destination located in the historic Bay of Pigs. This peninsula is a Ramsar Convention (international conservation treaty) designated site, and is among the most important wetlands in the West Indies. Here, the best local guides will lead us through protected areas in Ciénaga de Zapata National Park and other natural sites off the beaten track. The Zapata Peninsula covers more than 2800 square miles and features easily accessible, everglades-like ecology and habitat. Framed by the pristine Caribbean coastal environment of

the Bay of Pigs, the peninsula features vast open swamp land, low coastal forests, sparkling white sand beaches, healthy and accessible coral reefs, and refreshing natural limestone pools called cenotes. Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Black Hawk, Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Fernandina's Flicker, Bare-legged Owl, Tawny-shouldered and Blue-headed and Grey-fronted Quail Doves, Red-shouldered Blackbird are among the many birds we will hope to find.

Cuba's **Atlantic Archipelago** provide excellent birding opportunities on Cuba's Atlantic coast. These previously uninhabited and relatively unexplored islands were connected to the mainland by an 18+ mile causeway completed in 1989. Cuba's academy of sciences (CITMA) maintains a research facility here. These barrier islands and keys provide unique opportunities for: Cuban Gnatcatcher, Oriente Warbler, Thick-billed Vireo, West Indian

Whistling Duck, as well as numerous shorebirds and aquatic birds. This region also provides additional opportunities to see rare endemics such as Zapata Sparrow & Gundlach's Hawk.

Accommodations are in a privately owned tourist accommodation on the mainland.

Escambray Valley Caribbean Coast

We return to the Caribbean coast as we move south and west from Cuba's Atlantic coast. This scenic route includes lush valleys and foothills of the Sierra de Escambray Mountains. From here we will bird the Escambray Valley, bordered on the north by dramatic vistas of Cuba's third largest mountain range. As we travel, we will search prime habitat for Palm Crow and other resident birds en route to our final destination in Havana.

Cuban Emerald



Tour Overview

Day 1: Arrive Havana (HAV)
Day 2: San Diego de los Banos
Day 3: Sierra de la Rosario
Biosphere Reserve to Zapata
Peninsula
Day 4: Zapata Peninsula
Day 5: Zapata Peninsula
Day 6: Zapata to the Atlantic Coast
Day 7: Cayo Coco
Day 8: Atlantic Coast to Havana
Day 9: Havana
Day 10: Depart Havana (HAV) for
home.

9 Night/10 Day Itinerary:

Day 1, Arrive Havana:

This afternoon we'll arrive Havana and transfer to Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve, nestled in the forest and foothills of the Sierra de la Rosario mountains 1 hour west of Havana for accommodation and dinner. Arrival time in Havana is late afternoon.

Cuban Trogon



Great Lizard-Cuckoo

Meals: Dinner
Lodging near Soroa

Day 2, Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve to San Diego de los Banos:

We'll make an early departure with morning birding within La Guira National Park (1+ hour). Cuban Solitaire, Cuban, Yellow-headed Warbler, Cuban Vireo, Cuban Oriole, and a range of regional endemic birds such as Giant Kingbird, Olive-capped Warbler, and Red-legged Honeycreeper will be top priorities. A highlight is Cueva Portales, an

enchanted and historic site where Cuba's Western Army sheltered during the Missile Crisis of 1962. Lunch followed by birding to the south near wetlands and fish farms. Snail Kite and various wading and aquatic birds are typically abundant here.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at near Soroa

Day 3, Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve to Zapata Peninsula:

Morning birding nearby within the reserve. Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Tody, Cuba Trogon, Cuban Bullfinch, Fernandina's Flicker, Cuban Pewee, Great Lizard Cuckoo, and Red-legged Thrush (endemic subspecies) are likely species to encounter. Lunch at Cafetal Buena Vista, a restored 19th century coffee plantation, offering sweeping views of the mountains, plains and coast. Departure east to the Zapata Peninsula (4 + hours). Birding stops along the way as opportunity permits. Our accommodations here will be a B&B style private home in Playa Larga on the picturesque Bay of Pigs. This region contains the largest wetland complex in the West Indies, and is Cuba's most prolific birding region. Here we have access to excellent local guides, as well as to protected areas and birding locations off the beaten track.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging in Playa Larga



Cuban Black Hawk

Day 4, Zapata Peninsula:

Early breakfast and a morning of birding in a nature preserve adjacent to the small village of Bermejas. Here is our best opportunity to see the endemic Bee Hummingbird (world's smallest bird), Fernandina's Flicker, Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Parrot, Blue-headed and Gray-fronted Quail-Doves, Key West and Ruddy Quail Doves. Lunch at Caleta Buena, a beautiful limestone rimmed inlet abundant with fish and excellent snorkeling opportunities. The historic Bay of Pigs Museum is nearby. Afternoon birding in Bermejas, dinner/accommodation in Playa Larga.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging in Playa Larga

Day 5, Zapata Peninsula:

Early breakfast and departure for birding within Zapata National Park and a morning walk along a dry roadway in the swamp at La Turba. This is our best opportunity for

Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Red-shouldered Blackbird and Tawny-shouldered Blackbird and a variety of warblers and other migrants. Lunch and a trip to Las Salinas Wildlife Refuge, with numerous shorebirds, Reddish Egrets, Wood Storks, Spoonbills, Flamingos and endemic Cuban Black-Hawk. All walking is on dry, flat terrain (less than 2 miles total). Dinner at a private restaurant in the village.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging in Playa Larga

Day 6, Zapata to the Atlantic Coast:

Breakfast, check out, and birding options at our leader's discretion. Departure east and north towards Moron (5 + hours) just south of Cuba's Atlantic archipelago, the setting for Hemingway's Islands in the Stream. The 'keys' offer excellent birding, scenery and variety of species.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging in Moron

Day 7, Cayo Coco:

Morning Birding on Cayo Paredon Grande, the northeastern-most key in the Cayo Coco archipelago, which is one of Cuba's most important migratory landfalls. Cuban Gnatcatcher, Oriente Warbler, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Thick-billed Vireo and possibly a subspecies of Zapata Sparrow and the locally endangered Bahama Mockingbird are target birds for the day. Lunch will be followed by afternoon birding on Cayo Guillermo in mixed habitat including coastal forest, mangrove flats, low coastal scrub, and pristine white sand shoreline (roadside, flat walking). Shorebirds, aquatic, and wading birds abound.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging in Moron

Day 8, Atlantic Coast to Havana:

Relaxed morning departure with nearby birding before heading south towards the Caribbean Coast. Our route is to the south and west through the scenic Escambray Valley in search of Palm Crow, and if previously missed, Giant Kingbird, both future endemics. Departure to the south and west towards Havana, with birding stops and lunch enroute (6 + hours), followed by dinner and accommodation in Havana.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging in Havana



Stygian Owl

Day 9, Havana:

Morning visit with Orlando Garrido, Cuba’s most prolific living naturalist. Orlando is Cuba’s most distinguished and accomplished former curator of ornithology and co-founder the National Museum of Natural History. In the afternoon we’ll embark on a city tour, including a walking tour of historic Old Havana with lunch, followed by unstructured time to explore the old city or rest ahead of the Havana Jazz Festival opening ceremonies.

*Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging in Havana*

Day 10, Depart Havana:

Breakfast and transfer to Jose Marti International Airport for your return flight to the U.S.

Meals: Breakfast

Included for the duration of this itinerary:

All accommodations, all meals in Cuba beginning with dinner on day 1, ending with breakfast on the last day of the program, guide services, airport/hotel transfers, ground transportation, bottled water, soft drinks at meals, admission fees, U.S. Department of Treasury authorization documents, and program management services which include the provision of all pre- and post-program materials, a full-time Cuban bilingual guide, bilingual Cuban naturalists, and a fulltime driver. Program fees help support Caribbean Conservation Trust’s bird conservation efforts in Cuba.

Not Included:

International flights, Cuban Visa (\$ 85 approx.), Cuban health insurance (required by law and \$3 per day approx.), items of a personal nature, laundry, souvenirs, alcoholic beverages, medical care if needed, emergency evacuation insurance, gratuity or tips.

Travel insurance:

We highly recommend purchasing travel insurance. In the event that you need to cancel your trip due to medical or other reasons, this insurance will protect you.



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