

BIRDS CARIBBEAN BIRDWATCHING & CULTURAL TRIPS TO CUBA 2024

JOIN BIRDS CARIBBEAN AND TALENTED
CUBAN BIRD GUIDE, TANIA PIÑEIRO,
ON THE ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME

Cuba is well-known for its amazing landscapes, vibrant culture, and unique biodiversity. According to the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Cuba 2023* (and recent research), **404** birds have been recorded in Cuba, including **28** which are endemic to the island and **21** which are considered globally threatened. Due to its large land area and geographical position within the Caribbean, Cuba is also extraordinarily important for Neotropical migratory birds—more than **180** species pass through during migration or spend the winter on the island.

Our itinerary takes you to several of the best and most beautiful birding locations in Cuba, providing opportunities to see many of Cuba's endemic species and subspecies as well as many migrants. Along the way, we will meet Cuban ornithologists and guides, people in local communities, stay in Bed & Breakfast establishments (*casas particulares*) and eat in private restaurants (*paladars*), allowing you to experience Cuba's rich culture, delicious food, friendly people, and generous hospitality.



Cuban Tody (Arnaldo Toledo)

BirdsCaribbean is offering two tours in 2024: a 9-day trip in January and a 12-day trip in March. Trips are led by Andrew Dobson (Board member, BirdsCaribbean, January trip), Lisa Sorenson (Executive Director, BirdsCaribbean, March trip), and outstanding certified Cuban guide Tania Piñeiro. Traveling with us helps Caribbean birds as a portion of the proceeds from the trip supports our bird conservation programs in Cuba and the Caribbean. See some of the world's most beautiful and memorable birds, knowing you are helping ensure their welfare by supporting the people who study and protect them.

ITINERARY (9 DAY TRIP) – JANUARY 24 TO FEBRUARY 1, 2024

Day 1 (Havana, Las Terrazas & Viñales): Meet up with our Cuban bird guide, Tania Piñeiro and departure to **Viñales Valley**, the land of tobacco farms and beautiful landscapes with limestone formations called *mogotes*. Lunch at **Las Terrazas UNESCO Biosphere Reserve** and eco-village, offers close-up views of our first Cuban and regional endemics (*Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Grassquit*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, *Cuban Emerald*, *La Sagra's Flycatcher*, *Loggerhead Kingbird*) and a lovely setting for our family-style lunch on a patio.

Along the way, we will also look for the *Stygian Owl*, *Snail Kites*, and waterbirds in dams built near to the highway. Dinner and check-in at B&B (2 nights).

Day 2 (Viñales): Morning birding nearby in **Viñales National Park/Parque de Viñales** in pursuit of *Cuban Solitaire*, *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Red-legged Honeycreeper*, *Western Spindalis*, *Great Lizard Cuckoo*, *Cuban Blackbird*, *Yellow-headed Warbler*, as well as some migrant species like warblers, tanagers, and buntings. During the afternoon, visit to **Benito's Tobacco Farm**, birding in pine forest near **El Albino Reservoir** to search for the *Olive-capped Warbler* and *Yellow-headed Warbler*, **San Vicente Farm** to look for the *Scaly-naped Pigeon*, and visit at the home of **Nils Navarro**, renowned Cuban wildlife artist and naturalist and author of newly-published *Endemic Birds of Cuba: A Comprehensive Field Guide*.



Viñales Valley with *mogotes* (Carrol Henderson)

Day 3 (Orquideario de Soroa, Gustavo's Farm, Niña Bonita Reservoir, and Playa

Larga/Zapata): Early breakfast and departure to **Zapata Swamp** (5+ hours), with stops en route to pick up more endemics and migrants and enjoy the magnificent scenery. Target birds at road-side wetlands include *King Rail*, *Northern Jacana*, *Yellow-breasted Crake*. We will also have a tour at the spectacular orchid gardens **Orquideario de Soroa** where we will look for the *Cuban Oriole* and the *Giant Kingbird* with many other birds possible.

Lunch at **Gustavo's Bee Farm** to learn about his unique non-stinging "earth bees" and the chance to taste some delicious honey as well as spot nesting *Fernandina's Flicker*. Afternoon stop at **Niña Bonita Reservoir** to pick up migratory ducks and other waterbirds. By late afternoon we reach **Playa Larga**, a lovely little beach town on the **Bay of Pigs** on the Zapata Peninsula. **Zapata Swamp** is the third largest wetland in the Americas and the region offers the best birding in Cuba. About **254** species have been recorded for Zapata. It is a Biosphere Reserve and a Ramsar Site, where it is possible to see more than 20 Cuban endemics. Check-in at B&B (3 nights) and dinner.

Day 4 (Zapata: Santo Tomas and Los Hondones): Early breakfast and departure for **Santo Tomas** (45 minutes) where we will have a lovely and peaceful ride into the swamp via pole-powered boats. Santo Tomas, with its sawgrass tussocks, is the type locality for Zapata Swamp and a classical place to see the *Zapata Sparrow* and *Zapata Wren*, among Cuba's most limited range endemic birds. It's a great location also to see *Gray-fronted Quail-Dove*, *Cuban Pygmy-Owl*, *Cuban Parrot*, *Cuban Parakeet*, *White-crowned Pigeon*, *Cuban Pewee*, *Great Lizard Cuckoo*, *Smooth-billed Ani*, *Cuban Tody*, and *Cuban Bullfinch*, as well as migratory warblers.

In the afternoon we will visit **Cueva de los Peces**, Cuba's largest underwater saltwater cave; optional swimming and snorkeling at the lovely reef just off the beach. Also a great place to bird for those who prefer not to swim. And we will visit **Los Hondones**, a lovely eco-village

where the community is developing organic farming and planting fruit and native trees—great attractions for many endemic birds, such as the *Bee Hummingbird* (smallest bird in the world!), *Blue-headed Quail-Dove*, *Cuban Parrot*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Pewee*, *Great Lizard Cuckoo*, *Cuban Emerald*, *Tawny-shouldered Blackbird*, *Cuban Blackbird*, *Yellow-faced Grassquit*, and many migrant warblers. Evening birdwatching for *Bare-legged Owl* and the *Cuban Nightjar*.

Day 5 (Zapata: Las Salinas, San Blas wetland, and Casa Ana Birding): Morning birding at **Las Salinas Refuge** (nearby flat, dry-dirt roadway 1+ miles). Habitat varies among low, dense forest, mangrove, marsh, and open wetlands. Here we are likely to encounter the endemic *Cuban Black Hawk* as well as numerous shorebird, seabird, and waterbird species, including many *American Flamingo*, *Roseate Spoonbills*, *White Ibis*, *Reddish Egret*, *Wood Stork*, and *Clapper Rail*.

In the afternoon we will visit **San Blas wetland** to look for the *Red-shouldered Blackbird*, the **Bay of Pigs Museum**, and **Casa Ana Birding gardens** for fabulous close-up views of the *Bee Hummingbird*, *Cuban Emerald*, *Cuban Pygmy Owl*, and dozens of warblers.

Day 6 (Zapata to Havana): Morning departure to Havana with a stop at **Finca Vigía** (Lookout Farm) to tour Ernest Hemingway’s home, located in the town of San Francisco de Paula, 10 miles east of Havana. Hemingway purchased the property in 1940 and lived there for 20 years. This is where he wrote his celebrated novels: *The Old Man and the Sea* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The beautiful house and property, restored by the Cuban government, is now a museum, with Hemingway’s furniture, books, paintings, animal trophies, and other collectibles from his travels around the world on display.



Bee Hummingbird, Cuba’s most adorable bird and smallest bird in the world. (Ernesto Reyes)

The house is listed as one of the 11 Most Endangered Places by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and on the World Monuments Fund’s list of 100 Most Endangered sites. Visiting Finca Vigía is a must for Hemingway fans and great for non-fans as well as it also offers excellent birding on the property!

Check into our B&Bs (2 nights), followed by dinner and music/dancing (optional) into the evening in Havana.

Day 7 & 8 (Havana): Two full days in Havana with diverse cultural activities including a walking tour of Old Havana, old-fashioned car ride, visits to art galleries and museums, historical buildings and monuments, central park, walk on Malecón, shooting of canon at Cabaña Fort, street markets, etc. We will also visit the Botanical Gardens in Havana, a lovely place to bird and enjoy native tropical plants. And we will visit with Orlando Garrido, greatly respected retired naturalist and author of the *Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba* to see

his private ornithological collection and chat about the history of Cuban ornithology of which Orlando is a colorful and prominent figure. Final dinner at a nice restaurant and live Cuban music and dancing into the evening (optional).

Day 9: Breakfast, check-out and transfer to the Havana Intl Airport for the one-hour flight to Miami.

Number of Travelers: 8 to 12 plus guides.

Possible Cuban endemic birds to see on this trip include: Cuban Black-Hawk, Gundlach's Hawk, Blue-headed Quail-Dove, Gray-fronted Quail-Dove, Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Tody, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Fernandina's Flicker, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Vireo, Zapata Wren, Cuban Solitaire, Yellow-headed Warbler, Cuban Grassquit, Zapata Sparrow, Red-shouldered Blackbird, Cuban Blackbird, Cuban Oriole, Cuban Bullfinch, Cuban Nightjar.



Cuban Trogon (Nils Navarro)

Other species of interest (including regional endemics and Caribbean specialties) include: Great Lizard-Cuckoo, Cuban Parrot, West-Indian Woodpecker, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Cuban Pewee, Giant Kingbird, Loggerhead Kingbird, Cuban Crow, Red-legged Thrush, Olive-capped Warbler, Western Spindalis, Key West Quail-Dove, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Zenaida Dove, Plain Pigeon, Stygian Owl, American Kestrel (Cuban race), Antillean Palm Swift, Thick-billed Vireo, Cuban Emerald, Greater Antillean Grackle, Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark (Cuban race), American Flamingo, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, a great variety of waterbirds, and numerous other migratory and resident species.

The cost of the 9-day trip is \$3,695 (based on 10-12 participants). This covers the following:

- Airfare from Miami to Havana and return (\$200 credit)
- Cuban Visa (\$100)
- Health insurance while in Cuba
- In-country transportation and driver through duration of trip
- Professional bilingual specialized bird guide (Tania Piñeiro)
- Group leader (Andrew Dobson)
- All lodging
- All meals and non-alcoholic beverages while in Cuba, tips at restaurants
- Admission fees (itinerary locations only)

Not included:

- Airfare to Miami and overnight in this city (January 23) to be in position to depart for Havana on the morning of January 24; we will travel as a group.

- Tips for housekeeping, bird guide and driver, alcoholic beverages \$1-\$3
- Luggage fees and airport departure tax
- Single supplement (may not always be available) – add US\$300

We are traveling to Cuba under a group “Support for the Cuban people” license. Support for the Cuban people programs are licensed by the OFAC Department of Treasury. We will have a fulltime schedule of activities that enhances contact with Cuban people, provides support for private businesses and independent activities of Cuban people, and strengthens civil society in Cuba.

To reserve your spot on the trip, fill out the registration form at this link bit.ly/Jan24Cuba and submit your deposit of **\$500** as soon as possible but by **October 15th, 2023** latest. Balance can be paid in installments, with final payment due on **December 31st, 2023**. Any questions, please contact Lisa Sorenson (Lisa.Sorenson@BirdsCaribbean.org).

The tour deposit and installments (or balance) can be paid via US check or money order made payable to BirdsCaribbean or send payment via Venmo (@BirdsCaribbean) or Zelle (Lisa.sorenson@birdscaribbean.org). Mail your check or money order to:

BirdsCaribbean
841 Worcester St. #130
Natick, MA 01760 USA

If you wish to pay via credit card, click here to pay online with PayPal (PayPal account not required):

bit.ly/CubaTour2024

About our Guides:

Tania Piñero is a Geographic Information System (GIS) specialist who has worked since 1995 in the most important birding site in Cuba, Zapata Swamp, as a conservationist and protected areas planner. Since 1999, she has been on the team working to highlight Cuba as a natural tourism destination for Cuba’s National System of Protected Areas (SNAP). Tania has been organizing and leading birdwatching tours since 2015. She has developed a reputation as one of Cuba’s outstanding guides with a keen ability to find and share Cuba’s amazing birds and biodiversity. She is also a warm and generous person, taking great care to ensure that everyone enjoys the trip, with much kindness and good humor. Tania received certification as a Level 5 (highest level) Caribbean Birding Trail guide, having completed BirdsCaribbean’s Interpretive Bird Guide Training Workshop in Cuba (October 2017). [Tania’s eBird Caribbean profile](#); [Facebook Birding in Cuba Tania](#); [Tania’s Instagram Birding_Cuba_Tania](#).



Andrew Dobson is the Past President and Board member of BirdsCaribbean. Based in Bermuda from 1989–2018, he led numerous field trips and bird camps with the Bermuda Audubon Society. He has written a book on Bermuda’s birds and since 1995 he has been co-editor for the ‘West Indies and Bermuda’ region in the journal *North American Birds*. He first

visited Cuba in 2001 while attending a BirdsCaribbean conference and has led this Cuba trip several times in the past. Andrew has travelled extensively in the Caribbean to study and photograph the region's fabulous birdlife. A retired teacher and now living in the UK, Andrew loves to be able to share his passion and knowledge of birds with others. His easy-going positive nature, keen sense of humor, and kindness will keep you smiling throughout the trip.



Recommended Field Guides:

Endemic Birds of Cuba: A Comprehensive Field Guide, including West Indian Endemics Residing in Cuba, by Nils Navarro. 2015.

Ediciones Nuevos Mundos, 168 pp. Can be purchased on our website: bit.ly/CubaEndemicBirdsBook

Birds of the West Indies (paperback) by Herb Raffaele, et al. 2020. Second Edition. Princeton University Press, 288 pp. Covers all the birds of the West Indies, including endemics, residents and migrants. bit.ly/BirdsWestIndies

Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba, by O. Garrido and A. Kirkconnell. 2000. Comstock Publishing Associates, Ithaca, NY, 253 pp.

Who is BirdsCaribbean

We are a vibrant network of members and partners committed to conserving Caribbean birds and their habitats in the insular Caribbean through education, conservation, science, and action. As the leading 501(c)3 **nonprofit** conservation organization in the Caribbean, we are the “hub” for all things “Caribbean Birds.” Learn more at: www.BirdsCaribbean.org or find BirdsCaribbean on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (@BirdsCaribbean). A portion of the proceeds from this trip will help support our conservation programs in Cuba and the Caribbean. After the trip, you will receive a receipt for the “donation” portion of your trip payment which can be used for a tax deduction (past trips have been ~\$500).

What is the Caribbean Birding Trail

The Caribbean Birding Trail is being developed to raise global awareness of the unique birds and biodiversity of the Caribbean and to create a sustainable economy around these rare species, in an effort to protect them. This project is an initiative of BirdsCaribbean. We have partnered with and/or trained local tour companies and guides, have first-hand knowledge of the best birding and heritage sites to visit, and know the communities and NGOs that are working to conserve Caribbean birds and nature. Our tours are well-suited for birdwatchers, nature lovers, wildlife photographers, and anyone looking for authentic, unique, and revelatory experiences. Travel with us and know that your tourism dollars will bring benefits to the organizations, communities, and people that will put it to the best use. Learn more at www.CaribbeanBirdingTrail.org.

To see a report and photos from some of our previous trips, click here:

eBird Trip Report March 2023 Bird Tour:
bit.ly/eBirdMarch2023

<http://www.birdscaribbean.org/2016/04/on-the-caribbean-birding-trail-in-cuba/>

<http://www.birdscaribbean.org/2017/08/havana-zapata-express-memories-from-the-birdscaribbean-pre-conference-field-trip/>

Additional details:

Once you have registered to go on the trip you will receive more information, including what to bring, what to wear, bird checklist, and travel in Cuba, which is an inimitable experience and part of the fun!

Rules, Terms and Legal Conditions:

- Participants agree to indemnify BirdsCaribbean and its representatives, from any and all third-party liability for any injuries, loss, claim, action, demand or damage of any kind arising from or in connection with participating in one of our field trips. Participants are required to sign a liability release form.
- BirdsCaribbean reserves the right to adjust the price of the tour if there is an unexpected increase in costs, or if the tour is not filled to a minimum capacity.
- BirdsCaribbean reserves the right to adjust the tour itinerary if unexpected circumstances warrant a change. Every effort will be made to provide a similar high-quality experience.
- In case of cancellation by BirdsCaribbean, all deposits and payments will be refunded (less a \$50 processing fee).
- Because we need to book flights that are nonrefundable, your deposit is nonrefundable.
- If you cancel your reservation more than 30 days prior to the tour (by December 25, 2023), you will receive a 50% refund of fees paid over the deposit. If you cancel less than 30 days prior to the tour, all deposits and payments are non-refundable, unless you can fill your space with another participant.
- We **strongly advise that you purchase trip insurance** in case of emergency or if you need to cancel your trip before or during the tour.
- **COVID-19:** We want to do everything we can to reduce the risk to travelers, guides, and the communities we visit. All participants will be **required to provide proof of full vaccination by December 31st, 2023**. Participants will adhere to safety protocols that will be updated and distributed prior to departure.

Assumption of Risk and Liability Release Form – must be filled out to register for this trip.
Download it here: bit.ly/BCLiabilityForm



Bare-legged Owl in Bermejas, Zapata Swamp (Garry Donaldson)

Testimonials from past tour participants:

The trip was well-organized and every moment was memorable. We, of course, enjoyed the birds foremost. We enjoyed meeting Nils, walking the streets of Viñales, seeing local art and landscapes, eating local food. The customs and habits of the locals were fascinating to us. It was like a time warp to a time even prior to when we were born. We always felt safe. Walking after dark through Playa Larga and late at night around old Havana never made us uncomfortable. We enjoyed meeting and getting to know every fellow traveler. – *Don and Dena McKee*

Fabulous birding tour with most of the endemics seen in a very short time. The landscape was impressive, the people fascinating to see and talk to, and the food was delicious and abundant. Staying in the *casas particulares* was a good experience to be able to assist the local people in their economy. Excellently organized and well-rounded tour with fantastic guides of the highest standard. I will return to Cuba. - *Coppelia Hayes*

Our bird guides, Ernesto Reyes and Tania Piñeiro, were very kind and patient. They are both excellent birders with an amazing ear. It was wonderful to also meet the local experts, like Nils Navarro, Orlando Garrido, Rosendo Martinez and Lourdes Mugica. They were all personable, generous and added much to our experience. – *Carrie Dortch*

It was a pleasure to be on a trip where one was able to enjoy the cultural aspects of the country and learn something of its history and yet even though time was devoted to that, we didn't miss out on birds, a variety of birding locations, and sightings of Cuban endemics and near endemics. We had great view of very special birds, like the Cuban Trogon, Cuba Tody, Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Oriole, Cuban Pygmy Owl and many more. Every day as well as overall seemed to be an excellent balance between birding and/or bird-associated activities and other cultural and historical pursuits. A very well-rounded trip with outstanding guides and trip leaders and many memorable experiences! – *Philippa Randall*

I have been on a number of birding tours both in the US and in other countries. This tour ranks way up at the top of the list. The number of birds seen and the quality of the sightings was superior but our leaders' in-depth knowledge of the country's history, culture, geology, government, and people made it a first-class experience. – *Barbara Males*

BirdsCaribbean Birdwatching and Cultural Trip to Cuba is the perfect trip for birders seeking endemics and a window into the culture and history of an island that has been off limits to US citizens for 50 years. Birding takes you to the countryside and the sea. The leaders take you to the small cities, the places of interest that highlight modern Cuba's agricultural aspects and they help interpret the history as well as Cuba's hopes and aspirations. What tips the balance in making the trip special is that proceeds go to conservation in Cuba and other Caribbean Islands. – *Anne Brooks*

The experience in Cuba far exceeded my expectations in terms of wildlife, culture and an interesting and congenial group of participants and leaders. – *Carl Gerhardt*

The trip was superb. In addition to seeing the amazing Cuban endemic birds, we met some extraordinary environmentalists and ornithologists, and had the opportunity to see Cuba as it is now. The sensitivity and thoughtfulness behind the planning of this BirdsCaribbean trip made it a uniquely varied and rewarding experience. – *Gale Page*



Waterbirds feeding at Las Salinas, Zapata Swamp (Garry Donaldson)



Boat ride in search of the Zapata Sparrow and Zapata Wren
Santo Tomas, Zapata Swamp (Garry Donaldson)