

## **Cuba Caribbean Endemic Birding Trip Itinerary**

### **Day 1: Arrival in Havana and Trip Orientation**

Trip participants can arrive at any time today. Upon arrival, you will be taken to a nice bed and breakfast type lodging in Havana.

This is really an arrival day, and we anticipate most clients will get in during the afternoon (better) or evening.

Note 1 for Early Arrivals: If clients arrive earlier in the day, we can arrange for a tour of the old and historic Havana area (about 20 minutes from the guest house) with a local guide. Maybe estimate \$100 total for guide and vehicle, and much less depending upon group size.

Note 2 for Early Arrivals: Birding would be a possibility, but species found in Havana are mostly the same as found in Florida or elsewhere on the coasts of the southern United States. Any birds found today will most certainly be found (many times) the rest of the trip. See Day 12 for details on Havana birding.

We will try to get to bed early for an early start the next morning.

Lodging tonight will be in a nice house in Havana about 20 minutes from the old and historical Havana area.

## **Day 2: Early AM Transfer to Zapata and Bird Rest of Day in Zapata**

After breakfast, you depart to the Zapata Peninsula at 7:00 AM sharp. Please be packed and ready to go by about 6:45 AM, so you can load the van.

The drive will take up most of the rest of the morning, but you will break up the drive with several brief birding stops. You will also stop for lunch on the way.

By late afternoon, you should reach the Zapata Peninsula, and you can start with some late afternoon birding here. You will spend the next three full days here birding, with an opportunity to find nearly all of Cuba's endemic bird species. Today you will take a try for Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Red-shouldered Blackbird and Yellow-throated Warbler.



The Zapata Peninsula is, undoubtedly, the best bird watching area in Cuba, and possibly the entire Caribbean region. It supports all but three of Cuba's 23 avian endemics. The area has had over 260 bird species reported. Besides the endemics, this is a great place to find many other native species, both winter residents and transients, along with several summer and spring visitors (which breed in Cuba but return south in fall).

You will overnight in one of the nicest guest houses in Zapata tonight and the following two nights.

Each evening after birding, Arturo will review with you the bird checklist for the day. Birding plans for the following day, including morning wake up plans, will be confirmed.



### **Day 3: Great Start for Zapata: Full Day Birding Bermeja**

You will have breakfast early, and then depart for Bermeja for some of your best morning birding so far for the trip.

Bermeja is a fauna refuge with national significance. It is an open area with Royal Palms, bushes and shrubbery. It is a short drive north of Playa Girón. This is the best place to look for Fernandina's Flicker, Cuba's two endemic owls, Cuban Nightjar, Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Trogon, and Cuban Tody. You can find all four quail-dove species here and the two rarer species are frequently encountered here. This is also a good place to find many Nearctic warblers.

After a great morning of birding, you will have lunch back at your nice guest house. In the afternoon, you will continue to bird the Bermeja area.

By supper time, you will return to your guest house and again finish the bird checklist for the day. Birding plans for the next day, including morning wake up plans, will also be confirmed.

### **Day 4: Full Day Birding in Zapata: AM Marsh Habitat at La Turba; PM Continue Birding in the Area**

You will again have an early breakfast to support a full morning of birding. You will focus birding this morning on marsh habitat at La Turba. You will be looking for Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow and Red-shouldered Blackbird.

Lunch today depends upon your exact birding plans.

After lunch you will focus on any species you may have missed in the marshy area, or you will begin to focus on new species in the greater Zapata area in the later afternoon (after it cools down).

You will likely get back to the guest house a bit later today to support your late afternoon birding. You will again have supper at your nice guest house and complete the bird checklist, review plans for the following day, and then head for bed.



### **Day 5: AM Birding in Zapata (as needed); PM Off to Camagüey**

You may have some time for some final birding in the Zapata area. However, we anticipate a long drive today to reach Camagüey (about 5 hours with no birding).

Based on the good judgment of your expert local guide, you may try a bit more birding in Zapata before leaving.

You may have a few hours to try several sites today in the Zapata area, which are more reliable for some of the species you may have missed. You will focus on several key habitats and focus on finding those endemic species you may have missed in this area.

- You will likely get an early start for La Salina. La Salina has ideal feeding conditions for many waterbirds (flamingos, egrets, ducks, shorebirds), which come to feast on the fish, crustaceans, and other invertebrates. You will hope to find Cuban Black Hawk, 'Mangrove' Yellow Warbler, 'Northern' Crested

Caracara, Cuban Martin, Cuban Bullfinch, American Flamingo, and maybe a Clapper Rail.

- You may have time in the late morning for a trip to the Hatiguanico River and/or other destination before it gets hot at mid-day. However, it may make more sense to get on the way to Camagüey. Arturo will have the best plan, as makes sense for bird finding.

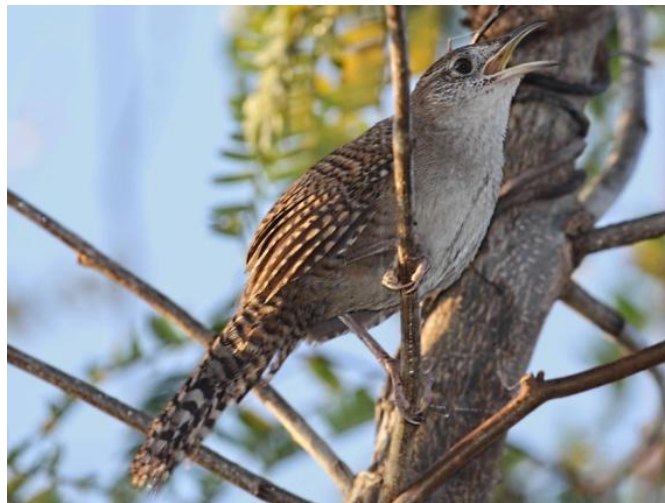
At mid-day (and perhaps before), you will have a box lunch and likely start the drive to Camagüey

The group will stop a few times throughout the afternoon for birding (likely limited) and brief rest stops.

The group will reach Camagüey city by around 5:00 PM.

You will check into your local lodging and have supper there.

Arturo will review plans for the next day, and review the day's bird sightings for your checklist.



### **Day 6: AM Birding Najasa; PM Birding Cayo Coco**

Another early breakfast will be in order to support birding at Najasa, just over one hour away.

Everyone will enjoy a good morning of birding at Najasa. This is a protected area of open country with many palm groves and with a mixture of semi-deciduous woods in the

foothills at lower elevations. About 120 species of birds have been reported here, and you will focus on finding Plain Pigeon, Cuban Parakeet, Rose-throated Parrot, Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Cuban Palm Crow, three species of woodpeckers (Cuban Green Woodpecker, West Indian Woodpecker, and Fernandina's Flicker) and Giant Kingbird.

Once it warms up and becomes nearly too hot for birding, you will continue your travels on to Cayo Coco. You will have lunch along the way here.



Most of the afternoon will be spent birding Cayo Coco. Cayo Coco is the second-largest key in Cuba (recently connected to the mainland by a rock-filled road). It is located a long hour's drive northwest of Morón. The area is mostly covered by semideciduous forests and also has a good mix of other habitats to support birding. Besides the forest area, you will be birding mangroves, coastal shrubs, patches of grass, and lagoons. A total of over 200 species has been reported, including many Cuban rarities. You will add several new birds to the trip list, including Cuban Gnatcatcher, a race of Zapata Sparrow and Oriente Warbler. You should also find Western Spindalis and Cuban Bullfinch. There are many waders here. All birders will enjoy the large group of American Flamingo. In fall, Merlin and Peregrine Falcon are reliable, and Piping Plover is a winter resident on these keys.

Around supper time, you will again finish the bird checklist for the day. Birding plans for the next day, including morning wake up plans, will be confirmed.



### **Day 7: AM Birding Cayo Paredón Grande; PM Birding Cayo Guillermo**

You will have a later breakfast than usual, but you will have a full morning of birding at Paredón Grande.

Cayo Paredón Grande will become recognizable in the distance shortly after you start your morning drive, as you will see its black and yellow painted lighthouse. The main habitat here is sandy coast vegetation and mangroves. Well over 100 bird species have been reported in the area, including Thick-billed Vireo (of the recently described endemic subspecies *cubensis*) and Bahama Mockingbird (a difficult to find bird in Cuba). If you are birding here during fall migration, the lighthouse is an excellent spot for finding North American warblers. It is also an excellent area to find Mangrove Cuckoo, Cuban Gnatcatcher and Oriente Warbler.

In the hot part of the day, you will have lunch back at the hotel, and then depart for Cayo Guillermo for late afternoon birding.

Cayo Guillermo is situated less than an hour northwest of Cayo Coco. This is a sandy key with xerophitic vegetation and lots of palms. This will be your best opportunity to find Bahama Mockingbird, and a nice place to wrap up your birding in the area.

Around supper time, you will again finish the bird checklist for the day. Birding plans for the next day, including morning wake up plans, will be confirmed.



### **Day 8: AM Birding Cayo Coco or Other Coastal; Most Day Driving with Few Birding Stops to Havana**

Today, you will focus on any species you may have missed. Though you will spend most of the day driving to Havana, you will have a final morning to bird any sites in the Cayo Coco area. You will also have a chance for some coastal birding stops on the way to Havana, especially in the morning and the late afternoon. You can count on the expertise of your premier local guides to slip in any additional birding, which may yield a look (or a better look) at any species you may have missed thus far.

Tonight you spend the night back in Havana at a private home (bed and breakfast).

Around supper time, you will again finish the bird checklist for the day. Birding plans for the next day, including morning wake up plans, will be confirmed.

### **Day 9: AM Birding at Las Terrazas and La Guira on Way to Viñales; PM Birding Viñales**

After breakfast and at about 7:00 AM, you will depart for Viñales, about 2 to 3 hours away. Arturo will very likely come by at about 6:45 AM to make sure the group is on the road by 7:00 AM.

You will have several birding stops along the way, including Las Terrazas and La Guira. This morning you will hope to find Black-whiskered Vireo, Cuban Tody, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Cuban Pewee, Loggerhead Kingbird, Cuban Emerald, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Cape May Warbler, Western Spindalis, and Red-legged Honeycreeper. You will have lunch in Viñales.



By mid-day, you should reach Viñales. Viñales is a delightful small town situated in Sierra de los Oreganos in a beautiful valley with distinctive landscapes. Everyone loves the steep-sided limestone mogotes.

Later in the afternoon, you can start birding in the Viñales area. About 130 species have been reported from the area, and you will focus on Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Solitaire, Olive-capped Warbler and a few other Cuban and Caribbean endemics which are found here.

After birding is completed, Arturo will review the bird checklist for the day. Birding plans for the following day, including morning wake up plans, will be confirmed.



### **Day 10: AM Birding Viñales; Birding as Return to Havana**

You should have some time for some early morning birding in the Viñales area, especially if you have missed any of the key species the day before.

Arturo will have discussed birds seen several days before, and he will know the best way to focus birding on any species missed. You can spend most of the remainder of the day focused on any species you may have missed, and then in the late part of the afternoon you drive back to Havana.

As usual, this evening Arturo will help you complete the day's bird checklist. Arturo will spend some time with the group reviewing the departure plans for the next day. Arturo will cover getting to the airport in Havana, and answer any departure questions.



### **Day 11: Flights Home Today**

No matter your plans, we will arrange a transfer to the airport.

As you travel home today, you can reflect on the beauty of Cuban birds and the wonderful opportunity to see Cuba.