

Sunrise Birding LLC
JAMAICA
 November 30 – December 6, 2014
TRIP REPORT
 Photos & report by Frank Mantlik





Sunrise Birding LLC

JAMAICA Trip Report

November 30 – December 6, 2014

Cover photos left to right:
Magnificent Frigatebird,
Jamaican Tody, Jamaican
Spindalis, Jamaican Blackbird,
Happy group, best guide in
Jamaica, Red-billed
Streamertail.

Leader: Frank Mantlik and a local guide

HIGHLIGHTS: (Rarities, specialties, or simply a group favorite):

- All 29 Jamaican Endemics
- Jamaican Tody
- Jamaican Owl
- Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo
- Jamaican Spindalis
- Jamaican Blackbird
- Ocean cliffs at sunrise
- Crested Quail-Dove
- Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo
- Red-billed Streamertail
- Black-billed Streamertail
- Orangequit
- Bahama Mockingbird
- Rum punch “No problem”

30 November, Day 1 - Arrival Kingston, Jamaica

Most participants arrived at our hotel by mid-afternoon, allowing for greetings and some casual birding on the grounds. Highlights were our first Jamaican endemic, a **Red-billed Streamertail** (female), plus **Loggerhead Kingbird**, **Black-faced Grassquits**, **White-crowned Pigeons**, **White-winged Dove**, **Zenaida Dove**, **Bananaquit**, **American Redstart**, and **Palm Warbler**. The tour began with meeting our local guide Ricardo, and driver Andrew, during a sumptuous dinner at a nearby elegant restaurant.

1 December, Day 2 - Hellshire Hills to the Blue Mountains

After breakfast at sunrise, we enjoyed the morning light on the birds of the hotel grounds. Then off we drove (learning about Rastafari religion along the way) to the Hellshire Hills in search of three target birds of the coastal dry forest. Despite the heat, patience paid off as we were rewarded with great views of **Bahama Mockingbird** (pictured), **Stolid Flycatcher** (on the same tree!), and numerous **Jamaican Mango** hummingbirds. Other nice finds were **Magnificent Frigatebirds**, **Common Ground-Doves**, **Red-tailed Hawk**, **Common Gallinule**, a flock of **Blue-winged Teal**, and **Yellow, Palm, and Prairie Warblers**. Lunch at a shady local cafe brought our first taste of jerk-spiced meats. A **Peregrine Falcon** soared over the lot.



Next stop was birding at the Royal (Hope) Botanical Gardens, a 200-acre oasis near the university to look for a few more species before leaving the city. We were greeted by new birds as we stepped off the bus. We saw our first male **Red-billed Streamertail**, the tiny **Vervain Hummingbird**, a pair of **Jamaican Euphonias**, **Jamaican Woodpecker**, and **Little Blue Heron**. In the large trees we saw **White-chinned Thrush**, and a variety of

wintering **Warblers** including **Black-throated Blue**, **Prairie**, **Black-and-White**, and **Northern Parula**. We got nice views of two **Jamaican Parakeets** (a new endemic species recently split from the former **Olive-throated Parakeet**). A huge **Cane Toad** hopped under a large tree. We also snagged great scope views of a flock of **Yellow-billed Parrots**. One individual looked like a **hybrid Yellow-billed X Black-billed**; photos were obtained.

During our drive up into the Blue Mountains, we stopped at a military base to enjoy the views of Kingston harbor below and the cloud-shrouded 4000-foot mountains above. Bumping along on a two-track road, we arrived at our mountain chalet right in the heart of great birding habitat. Our driver Andrew received well deserved applause on arrival! A welcoming staff and home-cooked meal topped off a great day.

2 December, Day 3 - Blue Mountains: Silver Hill Gap

After some fresh fruit and coffee, we headed out pre-dawn to bird the lush cloud forest of Silver Hill Gap. First birds included **Ovenbird**, male **Yellow-shouldered Grassquit**, a flock of perched **Ring-tailed Pigeons**, and our first fleeting glimpses of one or two **Crested Quail-Doves** flying up-slope. Further along, most saw a **Jamaican Vireo**, a **Jamaican Elaenia**, and all saw our first adorable **Jamaican Tody**. Then there was a male **Jamaican Spindalis**, some **Greater Antillean Grackles**, and Suzanne spotted our first **Arrowhead Warbler**. Along a good stretch of forested road, we concentrated on seeing one of several **Crested Quail-Doves**; but good views eluded most. Mike spotted a **Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo**, which when it flew flushed a Quail-Dove. We returned to the lodge for a typical breakfast featuring Ackee and saltfish, fried plantain, and callaloo. Birding the lodge gardens produced **Jamaican Oriole**, **Jamaican Elaenia**, **Sad Flycatcher**, **Bananaquits**, whizzing **Antillean Palm Swifts**, and 20+ **Red-billed Streamertails** (pictured) vying for a place at the feeders. We loved the trilling sound when they flew!

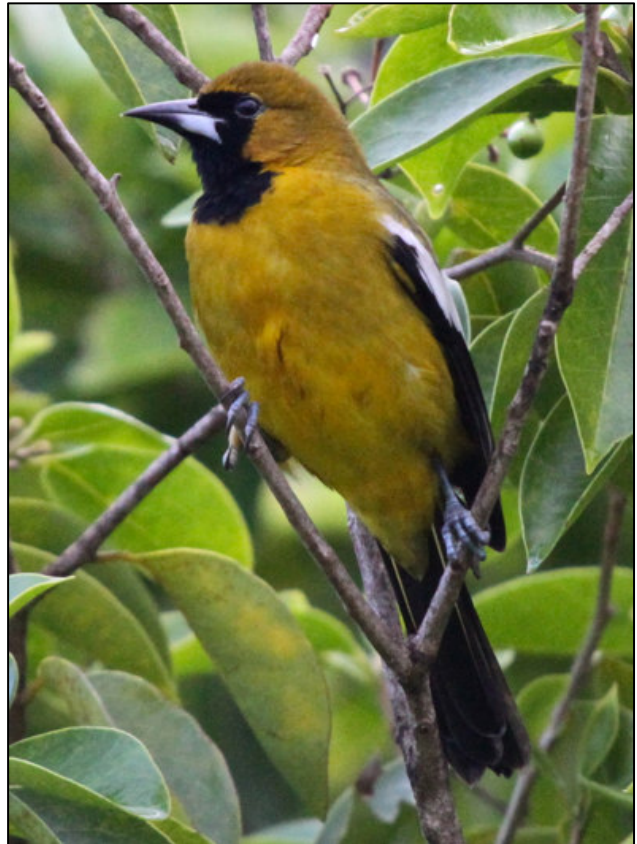


We headed back out to bird a different stretch of road, but were met with drizzle, fog, and occasional rain. Despite this, we had superb close views of a **Jamaican Tody**. Cameras clicked at the little beauty which the locals call “Rasta Bird”. We had quick views of two fly-by **Ruddy Quail-Doves**. In addition, Ricardo pulled in a **Blue Mountain Vireo** and we had lengthy looks at a cooperative **White-eyed Thrush**. From the bus we saw a large flock of **Orangequits** and **Bananaquits** feeding on a flowering Mimosa tree. After dinner, we ventured out in the fog in search of night birds - owl and potoo. We listened to the calls of **Whistling Frogs**. Excitement gripped us as we heard and

then had point-blank views of a **Jamaican Owl** perched on a low limb along the side of the road! We exchanged numerous high-fives for seeing this endemic that can be very difficult to see, let alone see well. The tally was now 23 of the 29 endemics seen.

3 December, Day 4 - Blue Mountains: Woodside & Hardwar Gap

Following a delicious pre-dawn breakfast, Ricardo alerted us to our first **Rufous-tailed Flycatcher** in the garden. Andrew drove us to a section of Silver Hill Gap to search again for **Crested Quail-Dove**. With quiet patience, all got to see one perched in a tree up the slope. Eureka! We then drove to a side road, Woodside, where Ricardo had permission to enter. It seemed quiet at first. But when we reached some open forest, the birding was fast and furious! Highlights were a pair of **Jamaican Becards** near their nest, a **Rufous-throated Solitaire** (seen and heard), **Greater Antillean Bullfinch**, **Jamaican Euphonia**, **Jamaican Pewee**, **Jamaican Oriole** (pictured), **Arrowhead Warbler**, **Jamaican Tody**, **Orangequits**, **Jamaican Spindalis**, at least three **Greater Antillean Elaenias**, and **White-chinned Thrushes**. Ricardo spotted our day's target bird, a **Jamaican Blackbird**, in a tree above us. It then flew to a tree trunk to characteristically forage along the bark, providing great scope views. Yay, another potentially tough endemic goes down! Suzanne then spotted an adult **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, to the delight of Ricardo who has only seen a handful in Jamaica.



Next we birded a stretch of forest along Hardwar Gap, a relatively level pass through the mountains. It was a pleasant walk along the road, with sightings of another **Arrowhead Warbler**, plus **Zebra Heliconian** and **Jamaican Satyr** butterflies. Frank and Suzanne had good looks at a **White-eyed Thrush**. We heard the distinctive call of a **Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo**, but it remained hidden. We then had great looks at two more **Jamaican Blackbirds**, characteristically foraging in bromeliads. In the village of Section, many bought bags of fresh-roasted coffee from the dreadlocked farmer.

After lunch at the lodge, there was personal time to bird the gardens, photograph, read, whatever. There were very photogenic female **Black-throated Blue Warblers**, **Sad Flycatchers**, and of course the **Streamertails**. We regrouped and leisurely walked down the road, seeing one fig tree with 6 **Jamaican Spindalis**. A shrub had several **Orangequits**. But soon the dense fog and rain sent us back "home". As usual, we recorded the day's sightings prior to a tasty dinner prepared by Peter, Rachel, and Marlene. An evening search for a Potoo was unsuccessful.

4 December, Day 5 - Section to Port Antonio, Ecclesdown Road

After breakfast, we took a group photo and bid farewell to our delightful hosts in the mountains. We birded the road below Section. Upon stepping out of the bus, Suzanne spotted a close **Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo**; all had good looks as it worked its way through the forest tangles. Tick! Other highlights were decent views of two **Caribbean Doves**, a **Jamaican Euphonia**, and our best looks at a flock of **Orangequits** feeding on the flowers of a Blue Mahoe tree. We stopped to admire the waterfall below Cascade then descended the mountains traveling along an aquamarine river. We hit the Caribbean coast at Buff Bay and traveled east to Port Antonio. Stops at a few river mouths netted us some water birds: **Royal Terns**, **Snowy** and **Great Egrets**, **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron**, **American Coot**, **Common Gallinules**, **Lesser Scaup**, **Ring-necked Duck**, **Pied-billed Grebe**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, and the like. A large flock of **White-collared Swifts** soared above some **Turkey Vultures**. We passed Navy Island, a place where actor Errol Flynn had an estate, followed by lunch during a thunderstorm at Woody's Burgers, a local favorite. His homemade ginger beer is the real deal!

We arrived at our last lodge, a gorgeous place with palm trees and a view of the Caribbean. There to greet us was another endemic: **Black-billed Streamertail**. The setting of the movie "Blue Lagoon" was nearby. We had enough daylight for a quick birding jaunt to Ecclesdown Road, long famous among birders. This lower elevation served us very warm and humid conditions. Here we ticked our last two endemics. A flock of 7 **Jamaican Crows** flew over. Then flocks of **Black-billed Parrots** flew up the forested valley, landing long enough for good scope views. Yahoo! A **Ruddy Quail-Dove** flew right past us and up the road. A family of bleating goats reunited before us. Along the way, we encountered another birding guide. When he and Ricardo exchanged names, and the other said he'd heard of Ricardo, Irving quipped to the other, "Now you must bow". We all laughed. A family-style dinner was prepared and served on the patio of one of our villas. We sat back and delighted in the fact that we had seen all 29 Jamaican endemics with a full day to spare.



5 December, Day 6 - Tropicbird Watch & Ecclesdown Road

We departed very early (4:30) to reach a coastal site by first light, in hopes of seeing White-tailed Tropicbirds leaving their nesting cliffs. While sunrise on the cliffs and the ocean waves were dramatic, there was no sign of our target birds. A false alarm proved to be **Royal**



Terns, and we saw **Osprey**, **American Kestrel**, and **Turkey Vultures** gliding past at eye level. We returned to bird sections of Ecclesdown Road. Highlights were closer views of four **Black-billed Parrots**, two perched **Jamaican Crows**, **American Kestrels**, and several **Chestnut-bellied Cuckoos**. A **Jamaican Lizard- Cuckoo** called. **Worm-eating Warblers** (2) were a sought-after lifer for Suzanne. A fallen tree blocking the road allowed us to see a local farmer in action, as he made quick work of it with his machete.

We enjoyed a free afternoon to bird, photograph, read, relax, or swim in the pool. Frank and Mike had close views of a female **Jamaican Becard** feeding on palm fruits. Celebratory cocktails at the tree bar allowed time to socialize prior to dinner.

6 December, Day 7 - Port Antonio to Kingston

Ricardo and Frank led a pre-breakfast walk around the hotel area. We had great looks at **Ring-tailed Pigeons**, **Jamaican Woodpecker**, **Jamaican Mango**, **Rufous-tailed Flycatcher**, **Loggerhead Kingbirds**, **American Redstart**, **Ovenbird**, **Orangequits**, and **Jamaican Oriole**; and more fleeting looks at flyby **Ruddy Quail-Doves**. Each person voiced their favorite sightings of the trip. Following breakfast, we packed and drove back to Kingston for departing flights or extended stays. It was truly great birding in Jamaica with old and new friends. Many thanks to local guide Ricardo, able driver Andrew, and all of the tour participants.

Sincerely,
Frank Mantlik



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Photos: Black-billed x Yellow-billed Parrot,
Zenaida Dove, Loggerhead Kingbird.