



CUBA BIRD SURVEY

February 20 – March 3, 2017

Cuba's Western Mountains, Zapata Swamp, Atlantic Archipelago, Eastern Endemic Range, and Colonial Havana

The **Ohio Ornithological Society (OOS)** is promoting an exclusive, U.S. led and managed birding program to Cuba! The program is managed by the **Caribbean Conservation Trust, Inc. (CCT)**, which is based in Connecticut. In early 2016 CCT staff began their **20th year** of managing bird conservation and natural history programs in Cuba. Along with **OOS leader Randy Rogers**, our team will include one of CCT's talented full time Cuban naturalists, a bilingual Cuban tour leader and local naturalists in 4 different birding regions. They will guide you through some of the best birding habitat in Cuba, the Caribbean's largest and most ecologically diverse island nation.

Our Cuba Bird Survey begins and ends in Havana, one of the most authentic colonial cities in the Americas. We will arrive in Havana from Miami and depart for Cuba's rural provinces and magnificent birding areas. Upon our return to Havana at the end of the birding program, we will spend 2 nights **in Havana**, one of Latin America's best preserved and most compelling colonial cities. Here we will visit Ernest Hemingway's former home at Finca Vigia, as well as other sites within **Habana Vieja (Old Havana)** declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987. Old Havana is like a living museum, and is currently undergoing rapid, energetic change. Our time there will also include an interpretive tour of the city's 4 historic plazas, dating back to the 16th century.

CCT designed this itinerary 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, we can expect some degree of indulgence in the richness of Cuban culture, architecture, and history.

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, 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.



Cuban Gnatcatcher

Cuban Oriole

Smooth-billed Ani

Cuban Tody

Red-legged Thrush

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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

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 mogotes-- the towering, lushly vegetated, flat-top limestone monoliths that dominate the Organos Mountains. This is the only region in which we will likely see the *Cuban Solitaire*, *Cuban Grassquit*, *Giant Kingbird*, & *Olive-capped Warbler*. Other potential endemic species for western Cuba include *Cuban Oriole*, *Cuban Blackbird*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, *Cuban Pewee*, *Cuban Pygmy-Owl*, *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Vireo*, & *Yellow-headed Warbler*. (2 nights)



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 *Red-shouldered Blackbird* are among the many birds we will hope to find (3 nights).



Cayo Coco and Cuba's Atlantic Archipelago provides excellent birding opportunities on Cuba's Atlantic coast.



These previously uninhabited and relatively unexplored offshore 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 provide unique opportunities for:** *Cuban Gnatcatcher*, *Oriente Warbler*, *Thick-billed Vireo*, *Bahama Mockingbird*, *West Indian Whistling Duck*, as well as numerous shorebirds and aquatic birds. This region provides additional opportunities to see rare endemics such as *Zapata Sparrow* & *Gundlach's Hawk*. Accommodations are in a modern beachfront resort (2 nights).

THE CONSERVATION PROJECT

The U.S. Department of Treasury has provided a license for conducting bird conservation work in Cuba to the **Caribbean Conservation Trust, Inc. (CCT)**, a U.S. based organization committed to the conservation of endemic and migratory birds and their habitats in the greater Caribbean region. The primary objective of CCT is to enhance the ability of North American and Caribbean ornithologists, naturalists, resource managers, conservation organizations, institutions, and local citizens to conduct research and initiate programs to help conserve the birds of the Caribbean and their habitats. CCT is dedicated to bird and habitat conservation through education and relationship building and, is in compliance with U.S. Treasury licensure for travel to Cuba.

For a glimpse of our program in action, go to: <http://video.pbs.org/program/counting-birds/> for a link to the film **COUNTING ON BIRDS**, a 2013 Public Broadcasting System (www.pbs.org) production which describes the history of the Christmas Bird Count and features a segment on our program in Cuba as an example how birders can contribute to 'citizen science' based bird conservation efforts.

Program Leadership

Our program is designed and managed in the United States and is professionally staffed and field tested over 19 years in Cuba. We are dedicated to providing participants with informative nature oriented experiences with the help of our highly skilled local leaders.



Randy Rogers is a founding member of the OOS and has served as the recording secretary since 2011, and served on the conservation committee. He holds a B.S. from Ohio University in Recreation Science and has chased both birds and Hemingway around the world. He has previously visited Cuba to study the Spanish American War, and is really looking forward to seeing the Bee Hummingbird!

Our Cuban Naturalists

We work with a very competent team of professional biologists, museum curators and general naturalists in Cuba. Our full time Cuban biologist and primary Cuban birding guide will be with us throughout the program in the field and will assist in finding and identifying birds, as well as providing a broad overview of Cuban natural history. He may share specific information relative to the flora, fauna, geology and other natural features of the environments we visit. Additionally, we will work with regional naturalists from the national parks and biosphere reserves that we visit around the country.

A Bilingual Cuban Guide will be at our service throughout the program. Along with a professional driver, he or she will be with the group each day to tell us about Cuban history, culture, arts and lifestyle. He/she will also deal with logistics, meals, translation, and other nuts-and-bolts aspects of the travel experience.

Accommodations

Accommodations feature hotels in Havana and 4 additional provinces. Our accommodations in Cuba are staffed by friendly hosts and represent the best Cuba has to offer in the regions we visit, and may include refurbished vintage 4 star hotels, modest 3 star facilities, and comfortable tourist ministry approved private home stays. All accommodations are safe, clean, air conditioned tourist facilities. It should be noted that standards in Cuba differ from those in the U.S. and other developed countries.

Additional Details

Following program registration, we will provide all participants with a bird list as well as details with regard to travel to Cuba, including all of the basics you need to know about travel documents, customs, facts about Cuba, currency, health and safety, food, flights, and what to bring. U.S. Government authorization documents and bird checklist will be provided following receipt of your final balance.

Physical Demands and Expectations

This program offers opportunities for several days of ambitious birding, with early departure times on birding days, and occasional evening sessions. Birding days may provide leisure time after lunch and before our afternoon birding sessions. Physical exertion will be light to moderate on most days, with the longest walks approximately 3 miles. Terrain is mostly flat and dry, with some hills present in western Cuba. All participants should be in reasonably good physical condition. Be prepared for strong sun, with temperatures in the mid 70s – 90s. Mosquitoes can be bothersome in Cayo Coco and the Zapata Region. Although unlikely, rain may occur as well, so bring adequate rain gear. Those with medical concerns should check with their physician before taking part in the program. Your health and well-being are very important to us!



Fernandina's Flicker



Cuban Green Woodpecker

Yellow-headed Warbler

Blue-headed Quail Dove

Cuban Parakeet

Zapata Wren

Registration, Trip Costs, Terms, and Conditions

Land costs for the **12 day** program are \$ **4,625.00** per person for shared accommodations. Single supplements are an additional \$ **575.00** per person. Reservation forms are accepted on a first come, first served basis, and must be accompanied by a deposit. Enrollment is limited to 14 participants. CCT Cuba trips have filled quickly this season. Fewer participants may result in a reasonable small group supplement. With a total of 12 participants, add \$ 175 per person for a small group supplement. With a total of 10 - 11 participants, add \$ 325 per person for a small group supplement.

What is included:

CCT Cuba Bird Survey Programs include the following: all accommodations, all meals in Cuba beginning with dinner on day 1, ending with breakfast on the last day of the program, guide services, most tips (guides, drivers, naturalists and restaurant and bell staff), airport/hotel transfers, ground transportation, bottled water, some drinks, admission fees (itinerary only), 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 include a donation to OOS and to programs that help support Caribbean Conservation Trust's bird conservation efforts in Cuba.

Great Lizard Cuckoo



Not Included:

Travel to Havana, Cuba (estimated at \$ 400 - \$ 475 from Miami); Cuban Visa (\$75) and Cuban health insurance (required by law and approximately \$3 per day); items of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, additional beverages, bar and housekeeping tips, etc., airport departure taxes (\$ 30 departing Cuba), U.S. passport fees, meals or accommodations in Miami, or other fees not listed in the program. Cost estimates are as of February, 2016 and are subject to change.

Flights

We fly from Miami to Havana on flights arranged by an authorized Cuba Travel Service provider (TSP). Flight schedules are approved by the U.S. government several weeks prior to departure, and were not available at the time this description was compiled. We will provide all of the information necessary to make booking these flights simple & secure.



American Flamingoes



Cuba Bird Survey 1996 – 2016

20 YEARS AND COUNTING!



CUBA BIRD SURVEY - ITINERARY
*Western Mountains, Zapata Peninsula, Northern Archipelago and
Eastern Endemic Region*
February 20 – March 3, 2017



Cuban Black Hawk

Western Spindalis

Cuban Bullfinch

Cuban Emerald

Cuban Pewee

Cuban Trogon

Day 1 ~ February 20, 2017

Miami, FL

Arrive Miami, accommodation in a Miami International Airport area hotel (included).

Day 2 ~ February 21, 2017

Miami to Havana and Las Terrazas

Airport transfer in Miami, and flight to **Havana** (not included). Arrival time in Havana is unknown as of February 2016. Following arrival we depart west (45 minutes) to **Hotel Moka** nestled in the Las Terrazas (the terraces) ecological community within the Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve (2 nights). Dinner at Moka.

Day 3 ~ February 22, 2017

La Guira National Park

Breakfast, and birding within the biosphere reserve. Lunch followed by visit to **La Guira National Park** (40 minutes drive; slightly hilly, easy forest trails, 2+ miles) and visit to Cueva de Portales, a classic ‘through cave’ carved by the San Diego River, which currently meanders through. This was Che Guevara’s military headquarters during the missile crisis of 1962. The endemic *Cuban Solitaire*, *Cuban Vireo*, *Cuban Oriole* as well as *Giant Kingbird*, Cuban Pewee, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Red-legged Thrush (endemic subspecies), and resident Olive-capped Warblers are likely to be seen here. Dinner and accommodation at **Hotel Moka**.

Day 4 ~ February 23, 2017

Moka– Zapata Peninsula/Zapata Swamp National Park

Morning birding nearby in **Cafetal Buena Vista**, an interesting former coffee plantation surrounded by mixed forest. The endemic *Cuban Grassquit*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker* and a range of other resident species are likely. Lunch followed by departure east to the Zapata Peninsula (4 hours). Birding stops along the way as opportunity permits. Accommodation and dinner in private home stays in **Playa Larga** (3 nights) on the picturesque **Bay of Pigs**. These tourist board approved accommodations offer the best lodging and food in the area, as well as an interesting glimpse into life in Cuba.

Day 5 ~ February 24, 2017

Zapata Peninsula

Early breakfast and departure for birding within **Zapata National Park**. 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. 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*, as well as 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.



Cuban Pygmy Owl

Day 6 ~ February 25, 2017

Zapata Peninsula

An early breakfast and a morning walk along a dry roadway in the swamp at **La Turba** and good opportunity for *Zapata Wren*, *Zapata Sparrow*, *Red-shouldered Blackbird* and Tawny-shouldered Blackbird and a variety of warblers and other

migrants. Parts of this area are reminiscent of the Everglades. Lunch followed by a mid-day break. Late afternoon visit 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 and accommodation in Playa Larga. Evening attempts to find Stygian Owl and/or the endemic Cuban Nightjar.

Day 7~ February 26, 2017

Zapata to Cayo Coco

Breakfast, check out and departure north west to Cayo Coco on Cuba's Atlantic shore. The Cuban archipelago is the setting for Hemingway's *Islands in the Stream*. The 'keys' offer excellent birding, scenery, and accommodation. All inclusive beachfront accommodation and meals **Sol Cayo Coco** hotel. Birding on site or en route (or both), depending on timing of arrival.



Day 8 ~ February 27 , 2017

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*, Thick-billed Vireo, *Zapata Sparrow*, and the endangered Bahama Mockingbird are the day's priorities. Lunch at the hotel followed by afternoon birding on **Cayo Guillermo** amidst mangrove flats, low coastal scrub, and pristine white sand shoreline (roadside, flat walking). Dinner, accommodation in Cayo Coco.

Oriente Warbler



Day 9 ~ February 28, 2017

Cayo Coco to Sancti

Spiritus AM birding trek a short distance from the hotel aquatic (such as West Indian Whistling Duck) and forest birds, or nay species we may have missed. Late check out followed by lunch in Cayo Coco and drive to **Sancti Spiritus** (2.5 hours) for accommodation and dinner. Birder stops along the way (leader discretion).

Day 10 ~ March 1 , 2017

Sancti Spiritus –

Havana Breakfast, departure west towards Havana (5 hours) with possible birding stops along the way. Lunch is on the road. Dinner and accommodation in Havana, the Caribbean's most historic colonial city. Accommodation in Old Havana.

Day 11 ~ March 2, 2017

Havana

After breakfast we will have an interpretive tour of Finca Vigia, Hemingway's home for his last years in Cuba. We'll visit a few of Papa's favorite haunts in Havana as well, and include a walking tour of Old Havana, one of the jewels of colonial America. Lunch & dinner at a paladare (private Cuban restaurant) are included as well.

Day 12 ~ March 3, 2017

Havana – Miami

Breakfast, checkout and transfer to the airport for one hour flight to Miami.



Habana Vieja (Old Havana), Cuba