

**Cuba Bird Survey** with  
**DAVID SIBLEY**  
**March 2 – 11 / 12, 2019**

An exclusive U.S.-led, U.S.-managed birding program in Cuba's Western Mountains, Zapata Peninsula, Northern Archipelago, Escambray Valley, and Havana presented by **BirdWatching magazine** in partnership with the Caribbean Conservation Trust, with special guest host David Allen Sibley, on March 2 – 11/12, 2019

For the fifth time, BirdWatching magazine, in collaboration with the **Caribbean Conservation Trust (CCT)**, is promoting an exclusive, U.S.-led and U.S.-managed birding program to Cuba, the Caribbean's largest and most ecologically diverse island nation. (Read the trip list from our previous trip [here](#).)

The program is coordinated under U.S. government authorization by Connecticut-based CCT. In early 2018, CCT staff began their 22nd year of managing bird-conservation and natural-history programs in Cuba. Along with **noted author and BirdWatching Contributing Editor David Allen Sibley**, our team will include acclaimed Cuban scientist **Dr. Luis Diaz, Curator, National Museum of Natural History in Havana**, a bilingual Cuban tour leader, and local naturalists in three different birding regions.

The Caribbean Conservation Trust 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 the regions we visit. Finally, and especially given the ongoing changes in U.S.-Cuba relations, we can expect some degree of inquiry into fascinating aspects of Cuban culture, history, and daily living during our visit.

#### **Cuba's birds**

According to BirdLife International, which has designated 28 Important Bird Areas in Cuba: "Over 400 bird species have been recorded in Cuba, including 26 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. The trip will also focus on the many Neotropical migrant species that migrate south to Cuba in the fall and are abundant in Cuba during the winter months (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, and Western Spindalis.*

**Other species of interest:** 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, 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.

## **Western mountains**

Cuba's western mountains include two of the country's most diverse and dramatic ranges: the Sierra del Rosario and Sierra de los Organos. We will explore an area common to both ranges in search of western-range endemic species such as Cuban Solitaire. A highlight of the trip will be a visit to 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 Cuban Solitaire, Cuban Grassquit, Giant Kingbird, and Olive-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, and Yellow-headed Warbler.

## **Zapata Peninsula**

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. The peninsula is a Ramsar Convention-designated site (the Ramsar Convention is an international conservation treaty) and among the most important wetlands in the West Indies. Here our highly experienced team will lead us through protected areas in Cienaga de Zapata National Park and other natural sites off the beaten track. The Zapata Peninsula covers more than 2,800 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 swampland, 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, Blue-headed and Grey-fronted Quail-Doves, and Tawny-shouldered and Red-shouldered Blackbirds are among the many birds we will hope to find (three nights).

## **Cayo Coco and Cuba's Atlantic Archipelago**

Cayo Coco and 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-long causeway in 1989. Cuba's academy of sciences maintains a research facility here. The barrier islands and keys offer opportunities for Cuban Gnatcatcher, Oriente Warbler, Thick-billed Vireo, Bahama Mockingbird, and West Indian Whistling Duck, as well as numerous shorebirds and aquatic birds. We may also see rare endemics such as Zapata Sparrow and Gundlach's Hawk. Accommodations are in a modern beachfront resort (two nights).

## **Sancti Spiritus, the Escambray Valley and Caribbean Coast**

The outskirts of Sancti Spiritus in central Cuba provides a peaceful and welcome location as we move south and east from Cuba's Atlantic coast. This lovely region is surrounded by 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, and to the south by the Caribbean Sea and its picturesque coastline. A lunch stop in historic Cienfuegos follows our search for *Palm Crow* and other resident birds.

## **Havana**

Our program concludes in Havana, one of Latin America's best preserved and most compelling colonial cities. You will have an opportunity to enjoy two evenings in Havana. A full-day extension option will include all meals and a guided city tour, including a walking tour of Habana Vieja (Old Havana) and the four original plazas, declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987. Old Havana is like a living museum and is currently undergoing rapid energetic change. As a special treat, we will also visit the home and private ornithological collection of Orlando Garrido, Cuba's most prolific living naturalist and senior author of *Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba* (Comstock Books).

**SAFETY** – In early 2018, Cuba won the Excelencias Award as the *safest country for international tourism* at the International Tourism Fair, Fitur which was held this year in Madrid Spain.

<https://www.caribbeannewsdigital.com/en/noticia/cuba-wins-excelencias-award-safest-travel-destination>

Cuba has long been an **exceptionally safe destination** for visitors, despite rumors and tall tales to the contrary. U.S. Citizens are warmly welcome, as they have been for the **22 + years** that Caribbean Conservation Trust has been bringing American birders there under U.S. Treasury Department authorization.

### **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., 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 the Caribbean Conservation Trust 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. This trip will contribute directly to our ongoing community conservation initiative by facilitating the delivery of resources such as binoculars, field guides, and other resources utilized by our Cuban partners.

For a glimpse of our program in action, watch the film ***Counting On Birds***, a 2013 New Hampshire Public Television production that describes the history of the Christmas Bird Count and features a segment on our program in Cuba as an example of how birders can contribute to citizen science-based bird-conservation efforts:

<https://www.pbs.org/video/counting-birds-finding-birds-cuba/>

### **Program leadership**

Our program is designed and managed in the United States, is professionally staffed, and has been field-tested over 21 years in Cuba! We are dedicated to providing participants with informative nature-oriented experiences with the help of our skilled local leaders.

**Gary Markowski, Founder and Executive Director of the Caribbean Conservation Trust.** Gary has managed more than 200 birding programs in Cuba since 1996. Gary has designed and will facilitate this program along CCT's highly experienced Cuban team, and our special guest, David Sibley.

### **BirdWatching magazine leader**



**David Sibley** is the author of the bestselling *Sibley Guide to Birds, Second Edition, Sibley's Birding Basics*, the *Sibley Guide to Trees*, guides to birds of eastern and western North America, and other books. He writes the column "[ID Toolkit](#)" in every issue of *BirdWatching*. His first article for the magazine, a profile of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, appeared in our August 2006 issue. Learn more about David on his [website](http://www.sibleyguides.com/) <http://www.sibleyguides.com/> and his [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/DavidAllenSibley/) <https://www.facebook.com/DavidAllenSibley/>

### **Full-time Cuban field leader**



**Dr. Luis Diaz** is the curator of herpetology at Cuba's National Museum of Natural History in Havana. Luis has authored Cuba's most comprehensive book on reptiles and has several ornithological publications to his credit. He is an excellent general naturalist and a talented birder and illustrator. He is fluent in English and has a warm, engaging personality. He has been involved with research projects throughout the West Indies and has traveled on a scientific visa to the U.S. on several occasions. Luis will be with us throughout the program in the field and will provide an overview of Cuban natural history as well as specific information relative to birds and other fauna, flora, geology, and other natural features.

Both David and Luis 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. Each 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 as well. Along with a professional driver, the guide will be with the group each day to tell us about Cuban history, culture, arts, and lifestyle. He or 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 four additional provinces. Our accommodations are staffed by friendly hosts and, in the countryside, represent the best Cuba has to offer in the regions we visit. They may include refurbished vintage hotels, modern resort hotels, and simple beach-front bungalows. 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, 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 most days. The longest walks will be approximately three miles. Terrain is mostly flat and dry, with some hills in western Cuba. Participants should be in reasonably good physical condition and prepared for strong sun. Temperatures will range from the mid-70s into the 90s. Mosquitoes can be bothersome in Cayo Coco and the Zapata Region. Though unlikely, rain may occur as well, so bring adequate rain gear. Participants with medical concerns should check with their physicians before taking part in the program. Your health and well-being are important to us!

### **Registration, trip costs, terms, and conditions**

Land costs for the ten-day program are **\$ 4,875.00** per person for shared accommodations. (Add \$ 525.00 for a single room). The one day **HAVANA EXTENSION** option is **\$ 285.00** per person sharing, with a \$ 75 single supplement and includes all meals, guide services, ground transportation, and a guided exploration of Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the most unique destinations in the Caribbean. Trip costs are based on 12 fully paying participants. A lower number of participants may result in a modest small group supplement.

### **What is included**

Caribbean Conservation Trust programs include all accommodations, all meals in Cuba beginning with dinner on Day 1 and ending with breakfast on the last day of the program, guide services, most tips (guide, driver, local naturalists, and restaurant and bell staff), airport/hotel transfers, ground transportation, bottled water, some drinks, national park 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 bilingual Cuban guide, bilingual Cuban naturalists, and a full-time driver. Program fees help support Caribbean Conservation Trust's bird-conservation efforts in Cuba.

**What is not included**

Travel / from Cuba, a Cuban visa (\$50) and Cuban health insurance (required by law, approximately \$3 per day), personal items such as laundry, phone calls, additional beverages, and bar and housekeeping tips, airport departure taxes (\$30 departing Cuba), U.S. passport fees, meals or accommodations in Florida, and other fees not listed in the program. Cost estimates are as of July 2018 and are subject to change.

**Flights**

We fly between south Florida and Havana round trip on **Southwest Airlines**. Our goal is to procure the best available options for our travelers. We will provide all of the information necessary to make booking these flights simple and secure. Flight costs range from \$225.00 to \$350.00 round trip. Flights are available 6 months prior to departure, by late July 2018. We suggest the 12:30 pm departure from Fort Lauderdale on Day 1, and 9:30 am departure from Havana on the last day.

**Travel insurance protection**

Any U.S. citizen traveling internationally these days should consider insurance protection. Reasonably priced coverage is available to provide protection against financial loss due to trip cancellation or delay, as well as lost baggage. Though uncommon, cancellations due to illness, accidents, work-related schedule changes, and other unplanned or unwelcome events have happened. Unforeseen travel-related events that you have little or no control over can also affect travel plans. All of these factors make trip-cancellation insurance an important consideration.

For information about Travelex insurance, call 1 (800) 228-9792. Be sure to use the agency location code **07-0067** to access coverage explicit to this program. The Caribbean Conservation Trust's U.S. Department of Treasury authorization is current and valid through 2019.

**Payment**

Regarding payment for the land portion of the tour, a \$700 deposit is due as soon as possible to reserve space on these programs. Online reservation and deposit payment are available from our web site using PayPal. Otherwise, payment can be paid by wire transfer, check, or money order payable to "Caribbean Conservation Trust." Please do not write "Cuba" on the check memo.

Please download the registration form at the bottom of this page and fill it out. Mail it along with your payment to this address:

**Caribbean Conservation Trust**  
**353 West Todd Street**  
**Hamden, Connecticut 06518**

For more information, contact Gary Markowski, Executive Director, Caribbean Conservation Trust, at cubirds@aol.com or (203) 733-1162.

Balance payment and cancellation and refund policy\*Full payment is due 90 days prior to departure or by September 8, 2018. You will receive a detailed receipt/invoice following receipt of your deposit and reservation form. All cancellations must be done in writing and are effective upon receipt in the Caribbean Conservation Trust office. Should it become necessary for you to cancel, all payments will be refunded after a deduction of our cancellation fee, outlined below:

More than 120 days prior to the tour	\$ 200.00 per person (land only)
Between 119 and 90 days prior to the tour	FULL DEPOSIT (unless we can fill your place)

Fewer than 90 days prior to the tour

NO REFUND (unless we can fill your place)

\*Please be aware that the refund policies apply only to the land portion of the trip, and that airlines may have different policies that exist beyond our ability to control. Additional registration fees may apply. As with all international travel programs, we highly encourage trip cancellation and travel insurance policies.

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Caribbean Conservation Trust and its agents and constituents reserve the right to make changes to the itineraries. Land and air arrangements may be subject to price increases beyond our control.

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**March 2 - 11, 2019**

**Trip itinerary**

**Day 1: March 2, 2019 (Saturday)**

**Florida (Fort Lauderdale) to Havana to Las Terrazas**

Departure times are unknown at this time. Upon arrival in Cuba, we will meet our Cuban guide, driver, and biologist and later depart to the tranquil Hotel Moka in the foothills surrounding Las Terrazas ecological community, one hour west. Cuban Blackbird, Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, Cuban Emerald, Loggerhead Kingbird, Cuban Trogon, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and Cuban Pewee may be present here. Accommodation and dinner at Hotel Moka.

**Day 2: March 3, 2019**

**Las Terrazas to La Güira National Park**

Early breakfast and departure to the national park (45 minutes, with easy forest trails, 2+ miles) and a visit to Cueva de los Portales, a classic "through cave" carved by the San Diego River. This was Che Guevara's military headquarters during the missile crisis of 1962. Lunch nearby in San Diego de los Banos. Late-day birding near Hacienda Cortina, a lavish former estate with excellent birding options. The endemic Cuban Solitaire, Cuban Vireo, Cuban Oriole, Yellow-headed Warbler, Giant Kingbird, and Red-legged Honeycreeper will be pursued here. Accommodation and dinner at Hotel Moka.

**Day 3: March 4, 2019**

**Las Terrazas to Zapata Peninsula**

Morning birding nearby within Las Terrazas and the Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve. Cuban Grassquit, Olive-capped Warbler, Cuban Tody, Cuban Bullfinch, and Great Lizard-Cuckoo are likely species. Lunch at Cafetal Buenavista, 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. Accommodation and dinner in private home stays in Playa Larga (three nights) 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.

**Day 4: March 5, 2019**

**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 (the 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 and accommodation in Playa Larga.

**Day 5: March 6, 2019**

**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 and Tawny-shouldered Blackbirds, 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 two miles total). Dinner at a private restaurant in the village, accommodation in Playa Larga.

**Day 6: March 7, 2019**

**Zapata to Cayo Coco**

Breakfast, checkout, and birding options within the protected areas of the park, based on leader discretion. Late-morning drive northeast to Cayo Coco (6+ hours), in Cuba's northern archipelago, the setting for Ernest Hemingway's

novel Islands in the Stream. The keys offer excellent birding, scenery, and accommodation. Beachfront accommodation and meals at our all-inclusive Cayo Coco Hotel. Birding on site or en route (or both), depending on timing of arrival.

**Day 7: March 8, 2019**

**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, a possible subspecies of Zapata Sparrow, and Bahama Mockingbird are target birds for the day. Lunch at the hotel 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). Dinner and accommodation in Cayo Coco.

**Day 8: March 9, 2019**

**Cayo Coco to Sancti Spiritus**

Breakfast and morning birding for anything we may have missed specific to this area, followed by departure southeast to Sancti Spiritus.(3+ hours). Lunch is en route. Dinner and accommodation at Rancho Hatuey in the peaceful countryside.

**Day 9: March 10, 2019**

**Sancti Spiritus Province-Havana**

Breakfast and morning departure west, with birding stops along the mountainous and quite scenic coastal route with a chance of spotting Cuban Palm Crow, a future endemic with isolated area populations. Afternoon break with lunch en route as we move west toward Havana (5+ hours). Accommodation and dinner in Havana.

**Day 10: March 11, 2019**

**Optional one-day/night extension**

**Havana-Fort Lauderdale**

After breakfast, we will visit the home and private ornithological collection of Orlando Garrido, Cuba's greatest living naturalist. Sr. Garrido is the venerable retired curator of birds at the National Museum of Natural History in Havana and senior author of Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba (Comstock Books) as well as hundreds of scientific publications. This visit is always mentioned as a trip highlight and is followed by a guided, interpretive exploration of some of colonial Havana's most significant historical sites. Havana is a UNESCO World Heritage site loaded with museums, a thriving arts scene, and architectural examples of both renovated and neglected structures, many opulent or otherwise unique, representing five centuries of human habitation. The extension also includes lunch in one of Old Havana's best paladares (private restaurant). Late afternoon is open for self-exploration of this fascinating and historic small city. Accommodation in Havana. Dinner at a private restaurant.

Those not choosing the extension will be provided airport transfer and depart Havana for the U.S. on March 11.

**Day 11: March 12, 2019**

**Havana—U.S.**

Breakfast and transfer to José Martí International Airport for your return flight to the U.S.

For more information, contact Gary Markowski, Executive Director, Caribbean Conservation Trust, at [cubirds@aol.com](mailto:cubirds@aol.com) or (203) 733-1162.