



**SPRING MIGRATION and ENDEMICS
CUBA BIRD SURVEY
Cuba's Western Mountains, Zapata Swamp, Atlantic Archipelago,
Escambray Valley and Colonial Havana**

March 17 – 25/26, 2024

You are invited to join on 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 2023 CCT staff began their **27th** year of managing bird conservation and natural history programs in Cuba. Along with **acclaimed author, illustrator, and birding guide NILS NAVARRO**, our team will include a bilingual Cuban tour leader and local naturalists in 4 different birding regions. They will guide you through some of the best bird habitat in Cuba, the Caribbean's largest and most ecologically diverse island nation.

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, and especially given the ongoing changes in U.S. – Cuban 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 (IBAs) in Cuba, "Over 370 bird species have been recorded in Cuba, including 28 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 Martin, Cuban Emerald, Bahama Mockingbird, Thick-billed Vireo, & Western Spindalis.



Cuban Gnatcatcher



Cuban Oriole



Smooth-billed Ani



Cuban Tody



Red-legged Thrush

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

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.

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 western Cuba, which features towering, lushly vegetated, flat-top limestone monoliths and extensive cave systems. 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 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 *Blue-headed and Grey-fronted Quail Doves*, *Red-shouldered Blackbird* are among the many birds we will hope to find (**3 nights**).



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 causeway completed in 1989. Cuba's academy of sciences (CITMA) maintains a research facility here. **These barrier islands and keys provide unique opportunities for:** *Cuban Gnatcatcher*, *Oriente Warbler*, Thick-billed Vireo, West Indian Whistling Duck, as well as numerous shorebirds and aquatic birds. This region also provides additional opportunities to see rare endemics such as *Zapata Sparrow* & *Gundlach's Hawk*.

Accommodations are in a privately owned tourist accommodation on the mainland. (**2 nights**).

Escambray Valley Caribbean Coast

We return to the Caribbean coast as we move south and west from Cuba's Atlantic coast. This scenic route includes 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. As we travel, we will search prime habitat for *Palm Crow* and other resident birds.

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 20 years in Cuba. We are dedicated to providing participants with informative nature oriented experiences with the help of our highly skilled local leaders.

Full-time Cuban Field Leader - Nils Navarro has dedicated his life to the study and conservation of the biodiversity of his native Cuba as well as other areas of the West Indies and Latin America. He holds a degree in Fine Arts, and worked for 10 years as a taxonomist and curator in the **Museum of Natural History** in **Holguin, Cuba**. An extraordinarily versatile and internationally recognized wildlife artist and illustrator, Nils’ work is characterized by refined technique combined with a profound understanding of the biodiversity of the Caribbean Region. Nils is the author and illustrator of ***ENDEMIC BIRDS OF CUBA A Comprehensive Field Guide***, which will be included in the program cost to all participants. The book contains illustrations as well as photographs, and provides detailed and invaluable information describing habitat, distribution, behavior and physical characteristics of Cuba’s 28 endemic birds, and another 24 species endemic to the West Indies. This dynamic resource is a result of many years of dedicated research, persistent determination, and artistic brilliance.



Nils Navarro

Dayana (guide)

Michael Good

Our Cuban Naturalists



Cuban Pygmy Owl

We work with a very competent team of biologists, museum curators and 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

These feature certified private homestays in Havana and 4 additional provinces. Our Cuban accommodations are staffed by friendly hosts and in the countryside represent the best Cuba has to offer in the regions we visit. 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, with the longest walks approximately 3 miles.

Terrain is mostly flat and dry, with some hills present in western Cuba. Participants should be in reasonably good physical condition and prepared for strong sun, with temperatures in the high 70s – low 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!

Registration, Trip Costs, Terms, and Conditions

Land costs for the **9- day** program are **\$ 3,995.00** per person for shared accommodations, with an additional **\$ 475.00** for Single supplements. The 1 day/night Havana extension option is **\$ 275.00** per person sharing, and **\$ 325.00** per single traveler. A full page HAVANA EXTENSION DESCRIPTION is included on the last page of this document.

Reservation forms are accepted on a first come, first served basis, and must be accompanied by a **\$ 700.00 deposit** payable to **Caribbean Conservation Trust**. Enrollment is limited to 12 travelers. **CCT Cuba** programs are quickly selling for next season. Fewer participants may result in a reasonable small group supplement. With a total of 9 participants, add \$ 125.00 per person for a small group supplement.

What is included:

CCT Cuba Bird Survey Programs include: 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 help support Caribbean Conservation Trust's bird conservation efforts in Cuba.

Not Included:

Travel to Havana, Cuba; Cuban Visa (\$ 85) and Cuban health insurance (required by law and \$3 per day); items of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, additional beverages, bar and housekeeping tips, etc., U.S. passport fees, meals or accommodations outside of Cuba, and other fees not listed in the program. Cost estimates are as of April, 2023 and are subject to change.

Flights

We fly directly between the U.S. and Havana, Cuba on U.S. based commercial airlines. Most direct departures to Cuba are from south Florida, and the best fares and departures have been on Jet Blue between Fort Lauderdale & Havana (\$ 275 – \$ 350 round trip average). Departures from JFK and Newark are possible, and flights from Philadelphia, Baltimore and various other cities with connections in Florida are widely available.



Payment

Regarding payment for the land portion of the tour, a **\$ 700.00** deposit is due as soon as possible to reserve space on these programs. This can be paid by wire transfer, check or money order payable to

CARIBBEAN CONSERVATION TRUST
353 West Todd Street
Hamden, CT 06518

Please do not write **Cuba** on the check memo.
Balance Payment and cancellation and refund policy *

Full payment is due 90 days prior to departure or by December 16, 2023. 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 CCT 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 90 days prior to the tour... \$ 150.00 per person (land only)

Fewer than 90 days prior to the tour... FULL DEPOSIT

Fewer than 75 days prior to the tour... NO REFUND (unless we can fill your place)



In the unlikely event that we must cancel the tour, a full refund less a \$100.00 processing fee for your license application will be forwarded to you, should cancellation occur after your license has been processed.

***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.**



Blue-headed Quail Dove



Cuban Blackhawk



Cuban Emerald



Cuban Grassquit



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SPRING MIGRATION and ENDEMIC
Wild Western Peninsula, Western Mountains, Zapata Peninsula,
Northern Archipelago and Colonial Havana

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Day 1 ~ March 17, 2024 (Sunday) arrive *Havana*, transfer to *Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve*, nestled in the forest and foothills of the **Sierra de la Rosario mountains** 1 hour west of Havana for accommodation (2 nights) and dinner. Arrival time in Havana is unknown as of May, 2023.

Day 2 ~ March 18, 2024

Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve to San Diego de los Baños

Early departure with morning birding within **La Guira National Park** (1+ hour) . *Cuban Solitaire, Cuban,*



Yellow-headed Warbler, Cuban Vireo, Cuban Oriole, and a range of regional endemic birds such as *Giant Kingbird, Olive-capped Warbler,* and *Red-legged Honeycreeper* will be top priorities. A highlight is *Cueva Portales*, an enchanting and historic site where Cuba's Western Army sheltered during the Missile Crisis of 1962. Lunch followed by birding to the south near wetlands and fish farms. Snail Kite and various wading and aquatic birds are typically abundant here.

Fernandina's Flicker

Day 3 ~ March 19, 2024

Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve to Zapata Peninsula

Morning birding nearby within the reserve. *Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Tody, Cuba Trogon, Cuban Bullfinch, Fernandina's Flicker, Cuban Pewee, Great Lizard Cuckoo,* and *Red-legged Thrush* (endemic subspecies) are likely species to encounter. Lunch at **Cafetal Buena Vista**, 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 / dinner in private home stays in **Playa Larga** (3 nights in B & B style accommodations) 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 20, 2024

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* (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/accommodation in *Playa Larga*.

Day 5 ~ March 21, 2024

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 Blackbird* and *Tawny-shouldered Blackbird* 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 2 miles total). Dinner at a private restaurant in the village.

Day 6 ~ March 22, 2024

Zapata to the Atlantic Coast

Breakfast, check out, and birding options at leader discretion. Departure east and north towards Moron (5 + hours) just south of Cuba's Atlantic archipelago, the setting for Hemingway's *Islands in the Stream*. The 'keys' offer excellent birding, scenery and variety of species. Dinner, accommodation in Moron (2 nights).

Day 7 ~ March 23, 2024

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* and possibly a subspecies of *Zapata Sparrow* and the locally endangered *Bahama Mockingbird* are target birds for the day. Lunch 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). Shorebirds, aquatic, and wading birds abound. Dinner, accommodation in Moron.



Cuban Gnatcatcher

Day 8 ~ March 24 2024

Atlantic Coast to Havana

Relaxed morning departure with nearby birding before heading south towards the Caribbean Coast. Our route is to the south and west through the scenic Escambray Valley in search of *Palm Crow*, and if previously missed, Giant Kingbird, both future endemics. Departure to the south and west towards Havana, with birding stops and lunch enroute (6 + hours), followed by dinner and accommodation in Havana (**1 or 2 nights***).

Day 9 ~ March 25, 2024

Havana - U.S.

OR

EXTENSION OPTION*

Morning visit with Orlando Garrido, Cuba's most prolific living naturalist. Orlando is Cuba's most distinguished and accomplished former curator of ornithology and co-founder the National Museum of Natural History. City tour, including a walking tour of historic Old Havana with lunch, followed by unstructured time to explore the old city.

Day 10 ~ March 26, 2024

Havana – U.S.

Breakfast and transfer to Jose Marti International Airport for your return flight to the U.S.



HAVANA EXTENSION OPTION

Our very popular one day/night Havana extension includes breakfast, lunch, dinner, guide services, ground transportation, accommodation (same accommodation as the previous night), and a guided walking exploration of Old Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the most unique destinations in the Caribbean. Havana is loaded with interesting historic sites, museums, art galleries, and now several excellent restaurants.



Due a half century of relative economic isolation, Havana avoided rapid development and the loss of scores of historic residential and commercial properties during the last half of the 20th century. Many buildings have been recently refurbished, some dating back to the 17th century. The harbor in Old Havana is presided over by Fortaleza de San Carlos de la Cabana, which is among the largest and best preserved Spanish Colonial fortresses in the world. The Malecon, Havana's historic and scenic ocean drive, winds several miles along the coast from the harbor in Old Havana to the mouth of the Almendares River, defining the northern limits of this once opulent and attractive city.

There is a new found energy, excitement, and sense of hope for a positive future among Cubans living here following historic improvements in U.S. and Cuban relations in 2015, which continue to result in increased economic opportunities for many Cuba citizens, despite recent political posturing. If Cuba is to change radically in the coming years, most changes will be evident in Havana. Our hope is that future development here focuses on historic preservation and renewal, but this outcome is not guaranteed. We hope you take this opportunity to enjoy historic Havana while you can!

