

CARIBBEAN ENDEMIC BIRD FESTIVAL

VISIT BY BAHAMIAN BIRDERS TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC FOR A BIRDING TRIP TO CELEBRATE C.E.B.F. 4-10 May 2010

Six members of the Bahamas National Trust Ornithology Group and one visiting birder from New Jersey visited the Dominican Republic in May 2010 for a week's birding tour with Kate Wallace of Tody Tours www.todytours.com who specializes in the island's endemic birds. This trip coincided with the celebration of the Caribbean Endemic Bird Festival, an annual event during the month of May spearheaded by the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB).



*Tony, Susan, Lillian, Alyssa, Peggy, Neil
Carolyn, Kate*



*Sweeping paths in the Botanical Gardens
(no noisy and anti-social blowers)*

The flight from Miami started with a delay of 3 hours to fix an engine part but better to fix it on the ground than the alternative. This meant visiting the Botanical Gardens in Santo Domingo the following morning, but Kate rightly insisted we did this before driving to other areas. In the parking lot while having a picnic breakfast there was our first endemic, the Palm Chat, the national bird of the DR. It is the only member of its genus and family, making it very special. Several pairs will build a large structure with separate entrances for each nest chamber, so locating a nest is not difficult.

During a morning in the Botanical Gardens we identified endemics the Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo, Hispaniolan Woodpecker and the Black-crowned Palm-Tanager. We added a family of West Indian Whistling Ducks and other Caribbean birds.

Driving west along the south coast of the island towards Kate's camp we birded as we went and enjoyed finding a couple of burrowing owls. Kate's camp at Puerto Escondido south of Lago Enriquillo is located a short distance from Zapoten in the hills close to the Haitian border where several endemics can be found.



One foot in Haiti (note background)



*Black-crowned Palm Tanager
(Photo Tony Hepburn)*

Next morning before dawn found us negotiating an uphill rugged unpaved road in our rented 4-wheel drive vehicles. To see the La Selle Thrush one has to be in the right place at the right time (before dawn), which of course we were, rewarded by some excellent views of this illusive and endangered bird. Other endemics added that day included the Hispaniolan Parakeet, Hispaniolan Parrot, Hispaniolan Emerald, Hispaniolan Trogon, Narrow-billed Tody, Hispaniolan Pewee, Golden Swallow, Green-tailed Warbler, White-winged Warbler and Hispaniolan Spindalis and later, at lower elevations, the Broad-billed Tody and Antillean Siskin. Not a bad day's work, Kate!



Antillean Mango (Photo Tony Hepburn)



Narrow-billed Tody (Photo Tony Hepburn)

A second night at camp and then off to other habitats where we found the Hispaniolan Palm-Crow and the White-necked Crow and more good looks and photo opportunities of some of the endemics already identified. We moved on to spend two nights in a comfortable hotel on the seashore south of Barahona.

Next day found us on the road again, this time around the south west corner of the Dominican Republic and up into a pine forest not far from Zapoten "as the crow flies" across a mountain range. Our quest was to see the White-winged or Hispaniolan Crossbill. The use of voice playback did not attract any birds to nearby trees and only a glimpse of a few flying by with calls was all we got. Moving on, we visited a wetland at Cabo Rajo on the south-western shore, then crossed back to the east to Laguna de Oviedo, a large and impressive brackish lagoon attracting a flock of American Flamingoes, several Roseate Spoonbills and other waders. A flock of more than 40

Magnificent Frigatebirds was equally impressive. We did not spend too much time studying the White-cheeked Pintails there.

Kept best for last that day, after supper and nightfall, Kate led us to some way-out place in the dark where we parked and then stumbled along a narrow trail with the use of flashlights until stopped by the customary barbed wire fence. Some distance ahead was a very tall dead topless palm tree when, in response to our lights aimed at the top, what should appear but the endemic Ashy-faced Owl. It peered down at us for several minutes, long enough for our photographers to fail to get any decent pictures from lack of light, then quietly disappeared again into the top of the tree. We thanked the owl kindly for giving us a great view for a few minutes and wished it “goodnight”. Happily the owner of the land has agreed not to cut down the dead tree.

All too soon we were headed east again back to Santo Domingo, but we were not quite finished. Kate had one last trick up her sleeve, to find the Ridgway’s Hawk, a Hispaniolan endemic and the rarest of the Buteos, requiring a further 1 ½ hours’ drive north of the city to the Monte Plata area. A pair had built a nest in a palm tree, using a large abandoned Palm Chat nest as a base and gave us a perfect view of 2 or 3 chicks in the nest. The adult bird sat in a nearby tree for as long as we wanted to take photographs, albeit with a slightly restricted view.



*Ridgway’s Hawk guarding nest
(Photo Lillian Russell)*



Tony Hepburn photographing the hawk

Of the endemics not seen, we all heard the Bay-breasted Cuckoo and spent a lot of time looking for it, Kate also identified from calls the Flat-billed Vireo and the Antillean Piculet.

Our final list follows, (numbers indicate number of days)

Least Grebe 2
Pied-billed Grebe 1
Brown Pelican 2
Magnificent Frigatebird 3
Great Blue Heron 1
Great Egret 3
Reddish Egret 1

Tricoloured Heron 1
Little Blue Heron 1
Snowy Egret 3
Cattle Egret 5
Green Heron 3
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron 2
White Ibis 1
Roseate Spoonbill 1
American Flamingo 1

West Indian Whistling Duck 1
 White-cheeked Pintail 1
 Turkey Vulture 1
 Ridgway's Hawk 1
 Red-tailed Hawk 2
 American Kestrel 4
 Limpkin 2
 Common Moorhen 3
 Black-necked Stilt 1
 Semi-palmated Plover 1
 Killdeer 3
 Snowy Plover 1
 Greater Yellowlegs 1
 Lesser Yellowlegs 1
 Solitary Sandpiper 1
 Willet 1
 Ruddy Turnstone 1
 Semi-palmated Sandpiper 1
 Least Sandpiper 1
 Laughing Gull 3
 Gull-billed Tern 1
 Royal Tern 1
 Least Tern 1
 Rock Dove 3
 Scaly-necked Pigeon 2
 Plain Pigeon 2
 Mourning Dove 6
 Zenaida Dove 2
 White-winged Dove 1
 Common Ground-Dove 6
 Key West Quail-Dove 1
 Hispaniolan Parakeet 3
 Hispaniolan Parrot 3
 Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo 3
 Bay-breasted Cuckoo 2 (heard only)
 Smooth-billed Ani 6
 Ashy-faced Owl 1
 Burrowing Owl 2
 Antillean Palm-Swift 5
 Antillean Mango 5
 Hispaniolan Emerald 1

Vervain Hummingbird 2
 Hispaniolan Trogon 2
 Broad-billed Tody 3
 Narrow-billed Tody 1
 Antillean Piculet 1 (heard only)
 Hispaniolan Woodpecker 5
 Greater Antillean Elaenia 1
 Hispaniolan Pewee 1
 Stolid Flycatcher 4
 Gray Kingbird 5
 Caribbean Martin 1
 Golden Swallow 2
 Barn Swallow 1
 Palm Chat 5
 Northern Mockingbird 5
 Rufous-throated Solitaire 1 (heard only)
 Red-legged Thrush 4
 La Selle Thrush 1
 Hispaniolan Palm Crow 2
 White-necked Crow 2
 Village Weaver 1
 Flat-billed Vireo 1 (heard only)
 Black-whiskered Vireo 4
 Hispaniolan Crossbill 1
 Antillean Siskin 2
 Yellow Warbler 1
 Black-throated Blue Warbler 1
 Pine Warbler 1
 American Redstart 1
 Green-tailed Warbler 2
 White-winged Warbler 1
 Bananaquit 2
 Black-crowned Palm-Tanager 3
 Hispaniolan Spindalis 1
 Antillean Euphonia 2
 Yellow-faced Grassquit 2
 Black-faced Grassquit 1
 Greater Antillean Bullfinch 1
 Greater Antillean Grackle 2
 Greater Antillean Oriole 2
 House sparrow 3

Our group consisted of Carolyn Wardle, Tony Hepburn, Neil Sealey, Susan Blazek, Lillian Russell and Peggy Cooper from Nassau and Alyssa Della Fave from New Jersey. Our very appreciative thanks to Kate Wallace of Tody Tours who gave us such an excellent experience and great views of many of the Hispaniolan endemics. A great way to celebrate Caribbean Endemic Bird Festival in 2010!

Carolyn Wardle,
 Bahamas National Trust Ornithology Group coordinator
 May 2010