

Trip report: Jamaica

Portland Audubon Society

February 9-17, 2019

Leaders: Stefan Schlick, Ricardo Miller



Introduction:

Portland Audubon's 2019 Jamaica trip ended up being a great trip, but there had been some early adversity. First we struggled to get enough participants, but eventually had 6 (which was perfect!). Then the weather forecast for the flight out of Portland on the 9th looked horrible, with a winter storm arriving in the little hours. Nevertheless, we all got out well and made it to Kingston without any issues.

Once there it was all gravy. Ricardo, our guide, was fabulous! The food and lodging were good, weather was perfect and there was actually some down time if you so chose. The birding was fun! We saw pretty much all the 29 endemics, even though the Black-billed Parrot did not allow us good looks. All of us could have been staying at Goblin Hill a day longer to enjoy the relaxing setting. :-)

Notes:

- Of the 29 endemics, we saw 28 for sure. The Black-billed Parrot was seen in flight, so it was seen, but better views would have helped.
- The temperature in the Blue Mountains was unexpectedly cool. One day the high probably did not reach 70. We had substantial rain twice in the small hours, but as soon as we started birding in the morning, it magically stopped and the sun came out.
- We had quite a few nice meals with a good variety of Jamaican food. Anything jerk was delicious, as was Curried Goat and pretty much all the soups we had. Glen, the cook from the Starlight Chalet, prepared some wonderful meals for us. Our stomachs didn't quite seem up to the typical Jamaican breakfast with saltfish or mackerel (ackee, fried dumplings, boiled plantains, callaloo), but it was still fun trying it.
- Our cultural activities included the Devon House and Port Royal with 30-60 min guided tours. Both were fun and can be recommended.



Day-by-day account:

February 9: Flight to Kingston

It seemed to be a miracle that all 7 of us made it out of Oregon on this snowy morning. We arrived in Kingston at around 8pm and were picked up by Ricardo, our fearless guide. A short drive to the hotel, we found ourselves at the Melting Pot, the hotel's restaurant, for a late-ish dinner before heading to bed. Overnight at the Knutsford Court for 2 nights.

February 10: Hellshire Hills, Great Portmore Sewage Ponds, Caymanas Ponds, Hope Gardens

We started at 6:30am with breakfast and after that headed out to the normally hot-like-hell Hellshire Hills. Luckily, it was cloudy which kept the temperature down. We immediately found a Bahamian Mockingbird, but had to work for the Stolid Flycatcher. Eventually, we found a bird and got great looks. Jamaican Vireo, Jamaican Oriole, Jamaican Mango all put in nice appearances, and 2 Green-rumped Parrotlets were perched up on a cactus.

At the Great Portmore Sewage Ponds we were delighted by some Saffron Finches and Common Ground-Doves on the way in. There were oodles of birds everywhere. We could not find any whistling-ducks, but saw Northern Jacana, several species of shorebirds, a slew of wading birds, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Yellow-crowned Bishop in non-breeding aspect and a Peregrine Falcon roughing up the shorebirds.

The Caymanas Ponds held Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged Teal, Palm Warbler, Least Grebe and a female Vervain Hummingbird. How tiny this little gal was! Very cute! Some dragonflies were also zipping around and images were obtained.



Lunch at Sonia's was delightful. Quick and great local food!

We spent the afternoon at Hope Gardens. It was misting for a little while, but there was no real rain. The roosting Northern Potoo was quickly located at a stakeout location! Among the several Yellow-billed Parrots we found a couple of young tweeners making Ricardo think that we may have hybrid Black-billed x Yellow-billed birds here. Jamaican Woodpecker, several Cape May Warblers, Greater Antillean Grackle, White-chinned Thrush and Jamaican Euphonia rounded out a fabulous day with over 65 species.

Dinner was at the sumptuous Terra Nova.

February 11: Blue Mountains: Newcastle Rd owling, Woodside track, Starlight Chalet



On an optional owling outing early morning we immediately heard Jamaican Owl calling when we got out of the car. 2 birds were in the cone of the spotlight a few seconds later. It took a while to track down a calling potoo, but eventually we found the eyeshine and then the bird on a likely roosting snag.

After breakfast and a gas station/ATM stop we drove up the Blue Mountains. Our morning stop was at the Woodside track where we ended up finding our first Jamaican Tody! What a thrill! Also present were Orangequit, a few Jamaican Becards, Arrowhead Warbler, White-eyed

Thrush, Jamaican Pewee, Greater Antillean Elaenia and Jamaican Spindalis. The latter were coming in to feed on some berries close to the road.



After a nice lunch at the Cafe Blue/Crystal Edge with a slice of delicious cheesecake that some of us ate before the actual lunch, we headed all the way up to the hotel, Starlight Chalet, and birded for another 2 hours until the sunlight vanished behind the hills. We found Orangequit, Jamaican Vireo, Jamaican Spindalis, many Red-billed Streamertails, Jamaican Tody, Orange-winged Grassquit and Ring-tailed Pigeon. There were some nice photo ops as well. We saw the afternoon out on the deck of the lodge, resting up and enjoying some wine and beer. Oh, Jamaica!

Just after a very tasty dinner at the Starlight Chalet, we walked down the entrance road to look for a stakeout Chuck-Will's-Widow. The bird was on a lamp post, somewhat hard to see because of the bright light, but it

flew to catch a bug a few times and also called softly.

Overnight for the next 3 nights at the Starlight Chalet.

February 12: Blue Mountains: Starlight Chalet, Section, road to Cascade

We started a little bit later in the morning today, had a Jamaican breakfast with ackee and saltfish and then started our day along the main road in an area called Section. Our main targets were Crested Quail-Dove and Jamaican Blackbird. We found both, but the looks were not the best. We had great looks of Blue Mountain and Jamaican Vireo, Arrowhead Warbler and Orangequit. We also saw a flyby Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo and nearby had a private interaction with a Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo. Nobody saw the whole bird in view, but we saw bits and pieces well, he did its raucous call and finally flew over. Fun, fun!



For lunch we went back to the Starlight Chalet. After lunch we went for a brief walk and were rewarded by a female Jamaican Becard, a nice Sad Flycatcher with a Jamaican Pewee for comparison and 2 Jamaican Euphonias doing their song that sounds like a car that won't start.

At 3pm we were out along the main road again, this time further downslope near Cascade. It was a little slow, but we enjoyed 2 Jamaican Todys sparring, had more good looks of Blue Mountain and Jamaican Vireo, Arrowhead Warbler and, new for the trip, a Jamaican Elaenia. A Caribbean Dove briefly perched and walked on a downed tree trunk. On the walk back to the hotel, a Crested Quail-Dove was fully out in the open for a little while, but few could get on.



After another great dinner at the Starlight Chalet we re-found the Chuck-Will's Widow one more time. Just as we were wrapping up, a Barn Owl was flying over! What a nice ending of the day!

February 13: Blue Mountains: Starlight Chalet, Section, road to Cascade

Today was a little slow ... In the morning we worked the Section area again. We had nice looks at Jamaican Tody and everybody got on 2 Rufous-tailed Flycatchers as they were feeding low. A Ruddy Quail-Dove zipped by, just like yesterday. We looked hard for Crested Quail-Dove, but couldn't find one all day. At a homestead with many azaleas we heard several Rufous-throated Solitaires, got glimpses of some White-eyed Thrush and most saw a Black-faced Grassquit.



At lunch we enjoyed another one of Glen's soups at the Starlight Chalet.

In the afternoon all finally got great scope looks of a White-eyed Thrush and, right next to it, a Jamaican Blackbird. After that it got very slow, but towards the end of the day our persistence was rewarded with 2 Chestnut-bellied Cuckoos. Of course you always wish you could have seen them better, but we did get decent enough looks.

At the end of the day we briefly went to James Dennis coffee house to buy some fancy Blue Mountain coffee. They were gearing up for a party, so it was fun to chat with some of the locals.

After dinner we tried for the Chuck-Will's Widow again and were able to once more get nice looks. The bird was on the wire, so was easier to see.

February 14: Blue Mountains: Starlight Chalet, road to Cascade; Spanish River bridge, Goblin Hill

Early morning we stayed around the Starlight Chalet to make sure that all finally got the Sad Flycatcher. From there we went downhill towards the north coast, stopping once more along the road near Cascade. Ricardo flushed up a Crested Quail-Dove and it landed on a horizontal branch, so we were all able to see the bird through the scope. Jamaican Blackbirds were also easy to see today. Our looks of Jamaican Euphonia were fabulous as 4 birds were playing around very close to us. A Black-throated Green Warbler was new for us.

After a quick stop for chips and cookies we made a 10min stop at the bridge over the Spanish River. 2 Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, several Glossy Ibis, an American Coot, 2 Black-necked Stilts were the highlights. A funny scene unfolded in the background, as a naked local was bathing right behind where all the birds were. He saw us staring in his directions and ended up putting his shorts back on. :-)



We had burgers at Woody's in San San and then checked into the Goblin Hill. Everybody loved the villas and the lush grounds, so much so that half the crew enjoyed the peace and quiet of the pool and the grounds for the rest of the afternoon.

At 3pm the rest of us went for another bird walk on foot, starting at the lobby. We found a really striking adult Cape

May Warbler, a Worm-eating Warbler, had more looks at Sad and Rufous-tailed Flycatchers. Black-billed Streamertails and Jamaican Mango were at the lodge feeders. A smart Olive-throated Parakeet was feeding in an Immortelle tree behind our villas. Dinner was in the leader villa. A storm had arrived and we skipped the planned owling session.

February 15: Hector's River, Ecclesdown Rd

Ricardo and I had run out the evening before to get breakfast foods. We started cooking omelets and setting everything up at 5am. At 6am we left for today's birding excursion.

It rained hard early morning, so we felt lucky when the rain had stopped at the tropicbird site near Hector's River. We immediately saw a White-tailed Tropicbird fly around very close to where we were. Soon after we discovered a bird on eggs in a hole. Wow! A little later several birds were seen flying around just offshore, likely on mission to pick up food further out.

The beginning of Ecclesdown Rd yielded parrots, very likely Black-billed. No red, orange was showing in the face. While trying to get the scope on one of the birds, 2 Jamaican Lizard Cuckoos were showing well. We proceeded with walking stretches of this beautiful road, but didn't really come up with a lot other than the "usual fare" of Jamaican Tody, Sad and Rufous-tailed Flycatcher, Black-billed Streamertail, Jamaican Mango and Vervain Hummingbird.



After a great lunch at the jerk chicken place in Boston, we went back to the hotel for a siesta only to try again at Ecclesdown Rd later for Jamaican Crow and Black-billed Parrot. We found the crow and had excellent views of Rufous-throated Solitaire, but we failed to get truly diagnostic looks of Black-billed Parrot. We did see 4 Yellow-billeds from up close. The final show of the day was the lift-off of 12 Olive-throated (or Jamaican) Parakeets.

Our dinner at villa 5 was nicely prepared by the ladies. It consisted of sweet & sour chicken, lots of veggies, mashed potatoes and salad.

February 16: Around Goblin Hill; Castleton Gardens; Kingston: Devon House and Port Royal



We once again started early this morning trying for Jamaican Owl. We immediately found 2-3 calling birds, but it took us a while to get on a bird in flight and later perched on a limb as it got light.

After another home-cooked breakfast we headed back to Kingston. At a 15 min restroom stop at Castleton Botanical Gardens we immediately found the resident Jamaican Crows.

Finally in Kingston, we pulled into the Devon House at around noon and had lunch at Pimentos. After that we were met by Giovanni, our fun tour guide for the Devon House. He gave us a neat 1hr tour of the premises. Between that and our final activity for the day, Port Royal, we checked into the hotel. Fort Charles was interesting with the Giddy House being the most curious, and we even made one final brief birding stop on the way back yielding Royal and Sandwich Tern, Ruddy Turnstone and Laughing Gull. Several Magnificent Frigatebirds were circling overhead.

Dinner at the Knutsen, ahhh, Knutsford Court. :-)

February 17: Hope Gardens and flight home

Early morning the roads in Kingston were jacked up because of a 5k/10k run. We still managed to go back to Hope Gardens for an hour and enjoyed it even though our time there was so short. We saw many Yellow-billed Parrots, yet good looks of Black-billed eluded us on this tour. European Starling, Shiny Cowbird and a gorgeous Yellow-throated Warbler were new for us. We particularly enjoyed a relatively bare tree of unknown species with orange flowers that seemed to attract the warblers. Our final views of Northern Potoo, Vervain Hummingbird and Red-billed Streamertail were most satisfying and gave us enough energy to endure the long trip home.



We boarded our flight at around noon which is about the time that Diana and Henry were picked up for their encore at Wilks Bay. They found a Jamaican Owl roosting during daylight hours, something that Ricardo had only succeeded twice with. Wow! And everybody made it through to their final destination that day!

Species list (115 total):

- BM means Blue Mountains
- Species marked with an asterisk are not counted as group birds
- Endemics are in red
- Red- and Black-billed Streamertail are not officially split in eBird (Clement's)

Least Grebe (Caymanas Sewage Ponds)

Pied-billed Grebe (Spanish River)

Brown Pelican

White-tailed Tropicbird (7 at Hector's River)

Magnificent Frigatebird (south coast only)
Little Blue Heron
Tricolored Heron
Snowy Egret
Reddish Egret (1 white morph at Hellshire Hills)
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Cattle Egret
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (2 at Spanish River)
Black-crowned Night-Heron (several at Portmore Sewage Ponds)
Green Heron
Glossy Ibis
Northern Shoveler
Blue-winged Teal
Turkey Vulture
American Kestrel
Peregrine Falcon (1 at Portmore Sewage Ponds)
Osprey (1 at Hellshire Hills)
Red-tailed Hawk
American Coot
Common Gallinule
Northern Jacana (Portmore Sewage Ponds)
Black-necked Stilt
Killdeer
Black-bellied Plover (1 at Portmore Sewage Ponds)
Least Sandpiper (Portmore Sewage Ponds)
Spotted Sandpiper (Portmore Sewage Ponds, Spanish River)
Greater Yellowlegs (Portmore Sewage Ponds)
Lesser Yellowlegs (Portmore Sewage Ponds)
Ruddy Turnstone (near Kingston Airport)
Laughing Gull
Royal Tern (Spanish River, Kingston Airport)
Sandwich Tern (2 near Kingston Airport)
Rock Pigeon
Ring-tailed Pigeon (Blue Mountains and North Coast)
Zenaida Dove
Mourning Dove
White-crowned Pigeon
White-winged Dove
Common Ground-Dove
Caribbean Dove (1 near Cascade in the Blue Mountains)
Crested Quail-Dove (2 near Section, 1 well-seen near Cascade in BM)
Ruddy Quail-Dove (3 flybys)

Yellow-billed Parrot (Hope Gardens, Ecclesdown Rd)
*Black-billed Parrot (Ecclesdown Rd, possible hybrids at Hope Gardens; not seen well)
Olive-throated (Jamaican) Parakeet (Hope Gardens, Goblin Hill)
Green-rumped Parrotlet (2 at Hellshire Hills)
Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo (1 near Cascade in BM, 2 on Ecclesdown Rd)
Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo (3 in Blue Mountains)
Smooth-billed Ani
Barn Owl (1 flyover at Starlight Chalet)
Jamaican Owl (2 near Irishtown, 3 at Goblin Hill)
Chuck-Will's-Widow (1 stakeout at the Starlight Chalet)
Northern Potoo (1 at Hope Gardens, 1 near Irishtown)
White-collared Swift (Hope Gardens and Blue Mountains)
Antillean Palm-Swift
Vervain Hummingbird (various locations)
Jamaican Mango (Hellshire Hills, Goblin Hill)
Red-billed Streamertail (Hope Gardens, Blue Mountains)
Black-billed Streamertail (Goblin Hill, Ecclesdown Rd)
Jamaican Tody (various locations)
Belted Kingfisher
Jamaican Woodpecker (common)
Jamaican Elaenia (1 near Section)
Greater Antillean Elaenia (1 at Woodside track, BM)
Jamaican Pewee (BM)
Rufous-tailed Flycatcher (Starlight Chalet, Goblin Hill, BM)
Sad Flycatcher (BM)
Stolid Flycatcher (2 at Hellshire Hills)
Loggerhead Kingbird (all day every day)
Gray Kingbird (1 early migrant at Hope Gardens)
Jamaican Becard (BM, Ecclesdown Rd)
Jamaican Vireo (BM and North Coast)
Blue Mountain Vireo (BM)
Jamaican Crow (Ecclesdown Rd, Castleton Gardens)
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Cave Swallow (near Boston Jerk lunch stop)
Rufous-throated Solitaire (heard often, only seen at EcclesDown Rd)
White-eyed Thrush (BM, Goblin Hill)
White-chinned Thrush (common)
Bahama Mockingbird (2 at Hellshire Hills)
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
Northern Parula
Yellow Warbler
Cape May Warbler (several in various locations)

Black-throated Blue Warbler
 Black-throated Green Warbler (1 near Cascade)
 Yellow-throated Warbler (1 at Hope Gardens)
 Prairie Warbler
 Palm Warbler (2-3 at Caymanas Sewage Ponds)
 Arrowhead Warbler (BM, North Coast)
 American Redstart
 Worm-eating Warbler (1 at Goblin Hill)
 Black-and-white Warbler
 Common Yellowthroat (many along Ecclesdown Rd)
 Bananaquit
 Jamaican Euphonia (common)
 Jamaican Spindalis (common Blue Mountains)
 Yellow-shouldered Grassquit (1 near Starlight Chalet)
 Yellow-faced Grassquit (Starlight Chalet)
 Black-faced Grassquit (Starlight Chalet)
 Orangequit (the most common endemic)
 Saffron Finch (near entrance to Portmore Sewage Ponds)
 Greater Antillean Bullfinch (Starlight Chalet)
 Jamaican Oriole (daily)
 Greater Antillean Grackle (most places, especially North Coast)
 Great-tailed Grackle (Portmore Sewage Ponds only)
 Shiny Cowbird (2 flyovers at Hope Gardens)
 Jamaican Blackbird (near Cascade, Section in BM)
 *House Sparrow (only seen by Stefan at the airport)
 Yellow-crowned Bishop (Portmore Sewage Ponds)
 Scaly-breasted Munia (Ecclesdown Rd, 10 at Hope Gardens)

Other critters and also trees:

Mongoose

American Crocodile
 Jamaican Gray Anole
 Jamaican Giant Anole
 Jamaican Turquoise Anole
 House Gecko
 Cane Toad

Buckeye
 Julia
 Jamaican Satyr
 Cassius Blue



Jamaican Polydamas
Zebra Longwing
Malachite
Cuban Swallowtail
small eureka sp (sulphur)

West Indian Mahogany
Immortelle (Goblin Hill)
Lignum Vitae
Jamaican Hibiscus (BM)
African Tulip Tree (lower BM and North Coast)
Ackee (in Devon House courtyard)
Soursop (in yard at Woody's)
Bottlebrush
Caribbean Pine (non-native)



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