



Cuba Birding Expedition



Join GCBO for a trip of a lifetime! GCBO have worked on several Cuban bird conservation initiatives over the years. Here is your chance to join Executive Director Martin Hagne, and Conservation Research Director, Sue Heath, in not only collecting valuable bird data over much of Cuba, but also visit a migration banding station in the most bird diverse area of Cuba, Guanahacabibes!

The expedition includes 12 days and 11 nights. That's 10 1/2 days of intense birding! It will include a chance for all but two of Cuba's 28 endemic bird species! This will be a fairly fast paced exploration, with some early breakfasts and long days and much travel between sites, all intended to explore as many habitats as possible for the highest species count.

Our GCBO trips also help fund our continuing bird conservation work! Come bird with us, have a great time, and help us fulfil our mission!

This expedition is organized for GCBO by *Partnership for International Birding* (PIB) www.pibird.com

Dates:

October 15 – 26, 2020

Itinerary:

Please scroll down to see our Trip Itinerary below this information.

Participants:

Minimum: 8 people

Maximum: 12 people

Cost:

\$5340.00 US per person - Double Occupancy

\$5705.00 US per person - Single Occupancy

This tour DOES include Lodging, Meals, Guide Fees, Entry Fees, and Local Transportation.

It does NOT include International Flight, Baggage Costs, Insurance, Travel Visa, Alcoholic Drinks, Snacks/Drinks (other than water), Laundry, Tips, and other personal costs.

Registration:

Registration and payment is handled through Global Travel Support (US based).

Please send an email or call when you are ready to reserve your trip:

Charles Thornton-Kolbe

charles@pibird.com

720-320-1974

Deposit: \$500.00

Make Checks Payable to "Global Travel Support"



Mail Check to:

Global Travel Support
2443 South University
Suite 199
Denver, CO 80210

* See Deposit, Payment and Refund Policy at end of this document.

Travel Visa:

Partnership for International Birding (PIB) will send an email with instructions on how to attain a Visa. It is a simple process, and they can be reached by phone if help is required.

The Visa will be provided by the Airline you book (Delta, AA, Jet Blue, etc.) at airline's airport counter. Cost range from \$50.00 - \$70.00 US depending on the airline.

Exploration Guide:

Our main guide will be **Mr. Alejandro Llanes**.

Alejandro earned a Bachelor's Degree in Biological Sciences from the School of Biology of the University of Havana in 1983, and a Master's Degree in Sciences, in Ecology and Applied Systematics with a mention in Ecology and Biological Collections, in 1998, in the Institute of Ecology and Systematics of the Ministry of Science Technology and Environment. The curriculum vitae of Alejandro Llanes includes more than 50 scientific articles. He has participated in more than 43 scientific events with 60 works, of them 34 as the first author. He is a member of the Cuban Society of Zoology since 2004, of the Society for the Study and Conservation of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB), and of BIRDSCARIBBEAN. He has been a specialized avian guide since 1993.

Havana Extension:

We offer a 1 day Havanan Tour Extension for \$325.00 US per person.

It includes: hotel, meals, transportation (regular tour bus), Old American Convertible City tour, cultural guide, and museum entrances.

Havana Itinerary:

9:00 AM - Walking tour in Old Havana.

12:00 – 1:00 PM - Lunch

1:30 - 2:30 PM - Driving tour (in old antique American cars)

We will make short stops at (depending on time):

Morro Cabaña Fortress, Capitol Building, Presidential Palace, Central Park, Reina Ave, Revolution Square, Havana Forest, Colon Cemetery, Malecon.

4:30 – 5:00 PM - Driving back to the Hotel.



Payment and Refund Policy:

* Note: \$500.00 Non-refundable deposit will be refunded only if we cancel trip (which is not expected). Trip deposit is due upon signing up for the trip.

*Note: All payments are due by 90 days prior to the trip and this would be Mid July 2020.

* Note: Refunds: (1) Non-refundable deposit can only be refunded based upon conditions stated above. (2) Refunds for internal airlines and trains are not refundable once booked. (3) Once trip is viable with minimum participation confirmed, payments are non-refundable with the exceptions stated at (4) and (5). Your commitment to paying trip in full is expected and required, once minimum participation has been agreed to by all. (4) If you wish to cancel prior to 120 days to start of trip, we will try to get full amount refunded for lodging and meal payments unless lodges have required advance payment or otherwise lodges refuse refund. Payments for your share of fixed costs of trip (guide, host, driver, transport and related costs) cannot be refunded. (5) Refunds after 120 days in advance are often difficult, but we will do our best to get your cost reimbursed to you for lodging and meals. (6) After 120 days prior to the trip or after the trip is on go (the minimum participation has been met), your share of guiding and host costs cannot be refunded. Please call if these terms are confusing as we are happy to clarify and explain further.

NOTE:

The leaders will make every reasonable effort to follow the itinerary as described, but please bear in mind that conditions can change rapidly in Cuba and lodging is under increasing demand. Weather or other conditions beyond our control may cause modification of plans to ensure the safety of the group. Birding locations may change based on local information or to enhance the experiences.

Cuba Birding Itinerary

For

Gulf Coast Bird Observatory

October 15 - 26, 2020



October 15 Arrivals into Havana and Transfer to Viñales

Day 1: Fly to Havana today, making sure you arrive no later than 2:00pm. This may require you to fly into Havana the day before or take a flight the day before with a nights stayover to get to Havana by 2:00pm on Day 1. We leave for the Viñales region in Pinar del Rio province, a little under two hours away, arriving there about 5:00pm. The Viñales valley is an area rich in birdlife and with some of the best landscape in Cuba. The prime landscape feature of the region are the mogotes, outcrops limestone karst forming hills ranging from about 50ft to 1000ft. They are usually steep sided and often domed, due to a hard, weathered limestone cap and softer limestone sides. Caves are found throughout the mogotes, including shallow open ones where one can see stalactites while driving the roads. Today we can expect to see birds like Olive-capped Warbler, West Indian Woodpecker, Red-legged Thrush, Cuban Blackbird, Grater Antillean Grackle among many others.

Tonight you will have supper at 7:00 PM with Alejandro Llanes (your guide). This supper will be the perfect time for the group to meet up and get to know one another. Alejandro will also provide the orientation for the tour this evening.

All clients will spend the night in Viñales.



October 16: AM Transfer and bird on the way to Guanahacabibes; PM Surveys in Guanahacabibes

Day 2. Plan to be at breakfast by 6:30 AM, and please have your bags packed for departure at that time. We will load the vehicle at 6:45 AM. At 7:00 AM we will depart for Guanahacabibes National Park. This is a beautiful reserve with nice beaches. The main habitat is a semi-deciduous forest, and sandy coastal vegetation: Target species: **Bee Hummingbird** and other endemic birds, such as: **Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Blue-headed Quail- Dove**, among others.

Today (or tomorrow) we will also get to visit the migratory banding station, and follow up with the researchers performing the banding project supported by GCBO.

Gunahacabibes

Guanahacabibes Peninsula: As the island gets narrow at its western end, you fall upon the low-lying and ecologically rich Peninsula de Guanahacabibes. One of Cuba's most isolated enclaves, it once provided shelter for earliest inhabitants the Guanahatabeys. A five hours drive from Havana, this region lacks major tourist infrastructure, meaning it feels far more isolated than it is.

In 1987 was declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO – one of only six in Cuba. The reasons for the protection measures were manifold. First the reserve's submerged coastline features a wide variety of landscapes including broad mangrove swamps, low scrubs thicket vegetation and an uplifted shelf of alternating white sand and coral rock. Second, the area's distinctive limestone karst formation are home to a plethora of unique flora and fauna including 172 species of birds, 700 species of plants, 35 types of reptiles among others.(LP159)



Each evening, Alejandro will review with the group the day's bird counts and habitat data and confirm the next day's plans, including our wake-up time, survey route, and other logistics.

After an exciting first day in the field, we stay in Maria la Gorda in Guanahacabibes.

October 17: FULL Day Survey in Guanahacabibes.

Day 3. Be ready to meet for breakfast at 7:00 AM at the hotel restaurant. Today we will have a full day of birding in the Guanahacabibes region, looking for endemic species and Nearctic migrants. Lunch at the hotel. After 3:30 PM, resume birding in the area.

After we finish the day's surveys, we will review our bird counts and confirm our plans for tomorrow with Alejandro.

We stay the night in Maria la Gorda in Guanahacabibes.

October 17: AM Transfer to Viñales; PM Birding in Viñales.

Day 4. Plan to be at breakfast by 7:00 AM, and please have your bags packed for departure at that time. Today will be our last time to explore the region of Guanahacabibes. At about 10:00 AM we should start driving back to Viñales birding along the way.

After lunch, we will begin to survey the Viñales area. About 130 species have been reported here, and we are particularly interested in collecting information about the habits of Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Solitaire, Olive-capped Warbler, and a few other Cuban and Caribbean endemics frequently encountered here.



After supper, Alejandro will review our data, and then head to bed.

We stay the night in Viñales.

October 18: AM Surveys in Viñales; Drive to Zapata; Late PM Surveys in Zapata.

Day 5. We will start our day with an early morning survey in the Viñales area in hope of observing species and behaviors we may have overlooked yesterday afternoon. We will have breakfast at 6:30 AM, and we hope to leave the hotel by 7:00 AM.

From Viñales, we will depart for the Zapata Peninsula. The drive takes most of the morning, but we will break it up with some brief stops to collect data at small ponds and forested areas that we will visit as part of our study. Lunch is at a restaurant en route.

By late afternoon, we will reach the Zapata Peninsula, one of the most important conservation areas in Cuba and, indeed, in all the Caribbean. Over 270 bird species have been reported from here, including all but three of Cuba's 28 avian endemics. Notably, the peninsula is a stronghold of the world's smallest bird, the Bee Hummingbird, and our work helps to monitor its status. The area also provides important habitat for migratory birds: many Nearctic species spend their winters here or pass through on their way to Central and South America, and several spring and summer residents (which breed in Cuba but return south in fall) occur here as well.

Because the Zapata peninsula's conservation value is so great, we will spend the next two full days conducting surveys here.

After we finish the day's surveys, we will review our bird counts and confirm our plans for tomorrow with Alejandro.

We stay in the in Zapata, tonight and the following two nights.

October 19: Great Start for Zapata: Full Day of Bird Surveys in Bermeja.



Day 6. Plan for another early breakfast, at 6:30 AM, and plan to leave our Zapata area hostel at 7:00 AM. We first head for the village of Bermeja on the east side of the Zapata region for some of the most interesting morning bird survey sites on our trip.

Bermeja is a fauna refuge with national significance a short drive north of Playa Girón on the Bay of Pigs. It is an open area with numerous Royal Palms and abundant fruiting and flowering shrubs. This is the best place to observe Fernandina's Flicker, a species of concern in Cuba. The palms provide good nesting sites for woodpeckers, as well as for Cuba's two endemic owls (Bare-legged Owl and Cuban Pygmy-Owl. It is also a good place to study quail-doves; all four of Cuba's species occur in the park, and the two rarest are frequently encountered here. Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Tody and Cuban Nightjar can be found here as well, as can a variety of New World warblers that overwinter in Cuba. Our survey will help to illuminate how all of those species use the park's habitats.

After a productive morning, we will return to our guest house to eat lunch and rest. Afterward, we will continue to survey the Bermeja area through the afternoon.

In the evening, we will return to our guest house for supper, review our data and go over the plan for tomorrow with Alejandro. Afterward, we may complete nighttime bird surveys in the area as necessary.

Once again, we spend the night in Zapata.

October 20: Further Work in Zapata: AM Surveys in Marsh Habitat at Santo Tomás; PM Investigate Sites Around the Greater Zapata Area.

Day 7. Today, we leave early, at 5:30 AM, and we will bring a packed breakfast along to eat later in the morning. We need an early start today to support a full morning of bird surveys. We will start the day in the marsh habitat at Santo Tomás, where we hope to collect further observations about Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow and Red-shouldered Blackbird.

Lunch today will depend on our success in the morning; it may be a picnic, or we may return to the guest house if we decide to move on to another area.



After lunch, and about 3:00 PM, we will focus on birding in an area called La Salina in Zapata. This area has ideal feeding conditions for many waterbirds (flamingos, egrets, ducks, shorebirds), which come to feast on the fishes, crustaceans, and other invertebrates.

Later this evening, we will return to our guest house for supper, review our data, and then head to bed.

We spend a third and final night in Zapata.



October 21: AM Final Surveys in Zapata; Drive to Camaguey.

Day 8. After another early breakfast, we will spend a final morning conducting surveys in the Zapata area. Our plan for the morning is flexible based on the need for us to study any of several notable sites here.

After birding Zapata, we will start moving to Camagüey, with some birding along the way.

We will stop at midday to have a lunch, and also make a few brief rest stops in the afternoon.

We will reach Camagüey City in the late afternoon, and we may survey a few locations in the area before checking in to our lodging for the night.

As usual, we will review our bird and habitat data and confirm our plans for tomorrow with Alejandro before we retire for the evening.

We spend the night in Camagüey City.

Camagüey

Welcome to the the maze. Camaguey's odd labyrinthine layout is the by-product off two centuries spent fighting of musket-toting pirates like Henry Morgan: Tumultuous times led the fledgling settlement to develop a peculiar street pattern designed to confuse pillaging invaders and provide cover for its long-suffering residence (Or so legend has it).

In 2008 its well preserved historical center was made Cuba's ninth UNESCO World Heritage Site.

October 22: AM Survey Najasa; PM Survey Cayo Coco Day 9. Another 5:30 AM breakfast is in order so that we might have plenty of time for this morning's bird surveys in Najasa, just over an hour away.

Najasa is a very productive area and well worth the time it takes to survey. It is a protected area that encompasses both open country with many palm groves and low foothills covered in a mixture of semi- deciduous woodlands. About 120 species of birds have been reported here to date (we may add a few!), and we especially hope to record observations about Plain Pigeon, Cuban Parakeet,

Rose-throated Parrot, Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Cuban Palm Crow, three species of woodpeckers (Cuban Green Woodpecker, West Indian Woodpecker and Fernandina's Flicker) and Giant Kingbird.

Once the day warms up and bird activity settles down, we will pack up and continue our travels to Cayo Coco, one of several large keys off Cuba's northern coast that together form an archipelago called the Jardines del Rey (Gardens of the King). We will have lunch along the way.

We will spend most of the afternoon conducting surveys on Cayo Coco. Cayo Coco is the second-largest key in Cuba, and was recently connected to the mainland by a causeway (on which we will drive). Semi-deciduous forests cover most of the key, but there are also mangroves, coastal shrub, patches of grass, and lagoons. Over 200 bird species have been reported from here, including many Cuban rarities. We can expect to find several species that we have not yet had the chance to study, including Cuban Gnatcatcher, a race of Zapata Sparrow, and Oriente Warbler. We also aim to observe Western Spindalis and Cuban Bullfinch. We will collect data about the many waders that utilize the key's wetlands and coastal areas, most notably including American Flamingo (Cayo Coco is home to one of the largest populations in the Caribbean) and Piping Plover (a winter resident and a species of concern).

The Jardines del Rey, and Cayo Coco in particular, are being developed for tourism, so the data we collect here about how birds use the islands' habitats may be valuable for future conservation work.

Around suppertime, Alejandro will review with us the day's bird counts and habitat data and confirm our plans for tomorrow. Morning plans will be carefully reviewed, as we have an early start with a few hours of birding before breakfast.

We stay at Cayo Coco both tonight and tomorrow night.

October 23: AM Survey Cayo Paredón Grande; PM Survey Cayo Guillermo

Day 10. Today, we leave early for a few hours of birding before breakfast. Everyone should be packed and ready to go at 6:00 AM. Let Arturo know if you want to make a quick stop for some coffee this morning.

We will spot Cayo Paredón Grande in the distance soon after starting our drive; you will be able to recognize it by its black-and-yellow-painted lighthouse. The main habitats here are sandy-coast vegetation and mangroves. Well over 100 bird species have been reported in the area, including Thick-billed Vireo (of the recently-described endemic subspecies *cubensis*) and Bahama Mockingbird (a difficult-to-find bird that is believed to



be in decline across its range, including in Cuba), which are of particular interest for our study. It is also an excellent place to observe Mangrove Cuckoo, Cuban Gnatcatcher and Oriente Warbler.

We will return for breakfast at about 9:00 AM (and 9:30 AM at the latest). After breakfast, we will continue birding in the Cayo Coco area.

During the hot part of the day, we will have lunch back at the hotel, and then depart for Cayo Guillermo for our late afternoon surveys.

Cayo Guillermo is situated less than an hour northwest of Cayo Coco. It is a sandy key with xerophytic vegetation and lots of palms - a lovely place to wrap up our work in the Jardines del Rey, and, more importantly, excellent habitat for Bahama Mockingbird. We focus our efforts here on studying that species.



Around suppertime, we will review our data and discuss our plans for tomorrow.

Tonight, we stay on Cayo Coco.

October 24: AM Surveys on Cayo Coco; Most of Day Drive to Havana (With a Few Study Sites Along the Way)

Day 11. On this last day of the tour, we usually start a bit later in the morning. We will likely have breakfast around 7:00 AM and will plan to leave between 7:30 AM and 8:00 AM. This will allow us to relax a bit before we begin the long drive back to Havana.

Before we leave the Cayo Coco area, we may spend a little more time surveying sites in the area.

We also plan to stop during our drive to collect data at some coastal sites that are of interest for our study, and Arturo may have some additional locations of interest in mind for us to visit as well.

We will arrive back in Havana in the afternoon.

After completing a final review of the bird and habitat data we've collected, we will share a celebratory dinner. Alejandro will confirm departure plans and airport transfer plans for the group before we retire for the evening.

We spend the final night of our tour in Havana.

Departures from Havana on October 25

No matter the time of your departure, we have arranged transfers for the group to support getting to the airport three hours before your international flights.

Note: A 1 Day Extension Tour of Havana is available, just let us know.

Havana

La Havana was founded in 1514 named after the daughter of a famous Taíno chief. Close your eyes for a moment and imagine you are there. Waves crashing against a mildewed see wall, a young couple cavorting in the dark, dilapidated alley, guitar and voices harmonizing over a syncopated drum rhythm.

No one could have invented Havana. It's too audacious, too contradictory, and despite 50 years of withering neglect too damned beautiful.

Don't come here looking for answers. Just arrive with an open mind and prepare yourself for a long and slow seduction.

Old Havana and the Fortification System was Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982.

