

Cuban Endemics
Western Mountains, Zapata Peninsula, Atlantic Coast, & Colonial Havana

February 6-16, 2024

Itinerary:

Day 1: Tue, Feb 6 – To Fort Lauderdale

Today you may arrive anytime to Fort Lauderdale and catch the shuttle to our airport hotel, where a room will be reserved in your name. We will meet at 6 PM for dinner and chat about the trip ahead.

Night in Fort Lauderdale.

Day 2: Wed, Feb 7 – to Havana

After breakfast, we will all board the same flight to Havana. After getting through immigration, we 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 April 2023.* ***Night near Sierra de la Rosario reserve.***

Day 3: Thu, Feb 8 - La Guira National Park

Early departure with morning birding within La Guira National Park. 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. ***Night in San Diego de los Banos.***

Day 4: Fri, Feb 9 - Sierra de la Rosario to Zapata

Morning birding nearby within the reserve. Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Tody, Cuban 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. 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. Our accommodation and dinner the next few nights will be in B & B style accommodations on the picturesque Bay of Pigs. ***Night in Playa Larga.***

Day 5: Sat, Feb 10 - 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, and Key West and Ruddy Quail Doves. Lunch will be 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 before heading back to Playa Larga for the night. ***Night in Playa Larga.***

Day 6: Sun, Feb 11 - Zapata Peninsula

Early breakfast and departure for birding within Zapata National Park. We'll enjoy 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 the endemic Cuban Black-Hawk. All walking is on dry, flat terrain (less than 2 miles total). Dinner at a private restaurant in the village. ***Night in Playa Larga.***

Day 7: Mon, Feb 12 - 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. ***Night in Moron.***

Day 8: Tue, Feb 13 - 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. ***Night in Moron.***

Day 9: Wed, Feb 14 - 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). ***Night in Havana.***

Day 10: Thu, Feb 15 - Havana

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. We then head into the city for a cultural tour and lunch, followed by unstructured time to explore the old city or rest. ***Night in Havana.***

Day 11: Fri, Feb 16 - Departure

Breakfast and transfer to Jose Marti International Airport for your return flight to Fort Lauderdale and connections home.