



**Ornithological Study in Cuba
with Arturo Kirkconnell
and Host from the American Birding Association**

Trip Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Havana and Trip Orientation

Trip participants arrive in Havana today. Upon arrival, each participant will be met by a transfer agent holding a sign with their name on it. The transfer agent will take you to your first hotel (likely a small hotel or bed and breakfast type lodging) in Havana, where you will be greeted by your bird guide, Arturo. Arturo plans to have supper with the group this evening.



Day 2: AM Birding at Las Terrazas and La Guira on Way to Viñales; PM Birding Viñales

In the morning, the group will depart for Viñales, which is a few hours away.

We will have several birding stops along the way, including Las Terrazas and La Guira. This morning, we hope to find Black-whiskered Vireo, Cuban Tody, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Cuban Pewee, Loggerhead Kingbird, Cuban Emerald, Western Spindalis, and Red-legged Honeycreeper. We will have lunch in Viñales.

By mid-day, we should reach Viñales. Viñales is a delightful small town situated in a beautiful valley with distinctive landscapes in Sierra de los Oreganos . Everyone loves the steep-sided limestone mogotes.

Later in the afternoon, we will start birding in the Viñales area. About 130 species have been reported from the area, and we will focus on Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Solitaire, Olive-capped Warbler, and a few other Cuban and Caribbean endemics that are found here.

Day 3: Early AM Transfer to Zapata and Bird Rest of Day in Zapata

After breakfast, we depart to the Zapata Peninsula.

The drive will take up most of the rest of the morning, but we will break up the drive with several brief birding stops. We will also stop for lunch on the way.

By late afternoon, we should reach the Zapata Peninsula, and we can start with some late afternoon birding here. We will spend the next three full days here birding, with an opportunity to find nearly all of Cuba's endemic bird species. Today, we will try for Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Red-shouldered Blackbird, and Yellow-throated Warbler.





The Zapata Peninsula is, undoubtedly, the best birding area in Cuba, and possibly the entire Caribbean region. It supports all but three of Cuba's 23 avian endemics. The area has had over 260 bird species reported. This is a great place to find many native species besides the endemics, both winter residents and transients along with several summer and spring visitors (which breed in Cuba but return south in fall).

We will overnight in Zapata tonight and the following four nights.

Day 4: Great Start for Zapata: Full Day Birding Bermeja

We will have breakfast early, and then we depart for Bermeja for some of the best morning birding so far on the trip.

Bermeja is a wildlife refuge with national significance. It is an open area with Cuban Royal Palms, other trees, bushes and shrubbery. It is a short drive north of Playa Girón. This is the best place to look for Ferdinandina's Flicker, Cuba's two endemic owls, Cuban Nightjar, Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Trogon, and Cuban Tody. We hope to find all four quail-dove species here, and the two rarer species are frequently encountered here. This is also a good place to find many Nearctic warblers.

After a great morning of birding, we will have lunch with a nice break in the hot part of the middle of the day.

In the afternoon, we will continue to bird the Bermeja area.

Tonight, we are back at our nice hotel in Zapata.

Day 5: Full Day Birding in Zapata: AM Marsh Habitat at La Turba; PM Continue Birding in the Area

We will again have an early breakfast to support a full morning of birding. We will focus birding this morning on marsh habitat at La Turba. We will be looking for Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, and Red-shouldered Blackbird.

Lunch today depends upon our exact birding plans, but we will likely have lunch back at the hotel.

After lunch, we will focus on any species we may have missed in the marshy area, or we may begin to focus on new species in the greater Zapata area later in the afternoon when it cools down.



We will likely get back to the lodging a bit later today to support late afternoon birding.

Tonight, we are back at our nice hotel in Zapata.

Day 6: Zapata Birding Continues at La Salina in AM; Likely Late Afternoon Back at Bermeja

We will again have breakfast early, and then travel to nearby La Salina for morning birding.

La Salina has ideal feeding conditions for many waterbirds (flamingos, egrets, ducks, shorebirds) that come to feast on the fishes, crustaceans, and other

invertebrates. We will be looking for Cuban Black Hawk, Mangrove Warbler, Northern Crested Caracara, Cuban Martin, Cuban Bullfinch, American Flamingo, and maybe a Clapper Rail.

We will break for lunch during the heat of the day.

After lunch, we will travel back to Bermeja and focus our bird-finding on any species we may have missed. We will be primarily focused on finding any endemic species we have not yet found, and everyone will enjoy getting better views of some of the birds that have been seen over the previous days.



Tonight is our last evening in Zapata.

Day 7: AM Birding in Zapata (as needed); PM Off to Camagüey

We should have some time for some final birding in the Zapata area (if we are still missing any species more likely to be found here). However, we anticipate a long drive today to reach Camagüey (about five hours with no birding); so, an early start for Camagüey may be the best plan.

Based on the good judgment of our expert local guide, we may try a bit more birding in Zapata before leaving.

We may take a few hours to try several sites today in the Zapata area that are more reliable for some of the species we may have missed, and/or we may just try to squeeze in birding at one more site in the area.

- We may take another try at La Salina, though this will require an early start. There are a number of key species here.
- We may have time in the late morning for a trip to the Hatiguanico River and/or another destination before it gets hot at mid-day. However, it may make more sense to get on the way to Camagüey. Arturo will have the best plan, as makes sense for bird finding.

At mid-day (or perhaps before), we will have a box lunch and likely start the drive to Camagüey.

The group will stop a few times throughout the afternoon for birding (likely limited) and brief rest stops.

We will reach Camagüey in the evening and spend the night there.

Day 8: AM Birding Najasa; PM Birding Cayo Coco

Another early breakfast will be in order to support birding at Najasa, just over one hour away.

Everyone will enjoy a good morning of birding at Najasa. This is a protected area of open country with many palm groves and with a mixture of semi-deciduous woods in the foothills at lower elevations. About 120 species of birds have been reported here, and we will focus on finding 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 it warms up and becomes nearly too hot for birding, we will continue our travel on to Cayo Coco. We will have lunch along the way there.

Most of the afternoon will be spent birding Cayo Coco. Cayo Coco is the second-largest cay in Cuba (recently connected to the mainland by a rock-filled road). It is located an hour's drive northwest of Morón. The area is mostly covered by semi-deciduous forest and also has a good mix of other habitats to support birding. Besides the forest area, we will be birding mangroves, coastal scrub, patches of grass, and lagoons. A total of over 200 species have been reported here, including many Cuban rarities. We will add several new birds to the trip list, including Cuban Gnatcatcher, a race of Zapata Sparrow, and Oriente Warbler. We should also find Western Spindalis and Cuban Bullfinch. There are many waders here. All birders will enjoy the large group of American Flamingo. In fall, Merlin and Peregrine Falcon are reliable, and Piping Plover is a winter resident on these keys.



We will spend our first of two nights in Cayo Coco.

Day 9: AM Birding Cayo Paredón Grande; PM Birding Cayo Guillermo

We will have a later breakfast than usual, but we will have a full morning of birding at Paredón Grande.

Cayo Paredón Grande will become recognizable in the distance shortly after we start our morning drive, as you will see its black-and-yellow-painted lighthouse. The main habitat here is sandy coastal 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 in

Cuba). If we are birding here during fall migration, the lighthouse is an excellent spot for finding North American warblers. It is also an excellent area to find Mangrove Cuckoo, Cuban Gnatcatcher, and Oriente Warbler.

In the hot part of the day, we will have lunch and then depart for Cayo Guillermo for late-afternoon birding.

Cayo Guillermo is situated less than an hour northwest of Cayo Coco. This is a sandy key with xerophitic vegetation and lots of palms. This will be our best opportunity to find Bahama Mockingbird, and this is a nice place to wrap up our birding in the area.



We will spend our second night in Cayo Coco.

Day 10: AM Coastal Birding; Most Day Driving with Few Birding Stops to Havana

Today, we will focus on any species we may have missed. Though we will spend most of the day driving to Havana, we will have a final morning to bird any sites in the Cayo Coco area. We will also have a chance for some coastal birding stops on the way to Havana as well, especially in the morning and the late afternoon. You can count on the expertise of your premier local guides to slip in any additional birding, which may yield a look (or a better look) at any species we may have missed thus far.

We should reach Havana by the later afternoon, and we will have a final supper together at a nice restaurant there.

Tonight, we spend our final night in Cuba back in Havana.

Day 11: Flights Home Today

You will be transferred to the airport, based upon your flights plans for today.

As you travel onward today, you can reflect on the beauty of Cuban birds and the wonderful opportunity to see Cuba.

