

Cuba

Bargain Birdwatching Tour

Naturetrek Tour Report

11 - 22 March 2006

Report compiled by Chris Kehoe



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Weather

Dry throughout, daytime temperatures were quite high (in the low 30's) with bright sunshine the norm. Cooling breezes were frequent and welcome but it was never windy enough to hamper birding. Some early mornings were on the chilly side but it was generally hot by 1000 and very hot by noon. It was briefly misty on a couple of early mornings, i.e. when travelling between Camaguey and Najasa. Humidity levels were low to medium.

Day 1

Saturday 11 March

Apart from two group members who had already arrived in Havana everyone assembled at Heathrow for a short feeder flight to Madrid where, after a brief wait, we boarded our Iberia Airlines 747 for a nine hour jog over the Atlantic to Cuba. Representatives from our ground agents met us at the arrivals hall (after our telescopes had briefly bemused immigration officials) along with our local tour escort Arturo and the remaining group members. A two hour drive took us to our first base at San Diego Del Los Banos where everyone soon retired to bed as it was now about 8am GMT but only 2am in Cuba.

Day 2

Sunday 12 March

Up bright and early there was a chance to pick up some new birds in the hotel garden before breakfast, most obvious being the first of numerous Greater Antillean Grackles before we set off on the one hour drive to La Guira NP. A short stop to look for Cuban Grassquits was unsuccessful on that front but did produce our first Loggerhead Kingbird and some strikingly different looking American Kestrels of both colour phases of the uniquely polymorphic local race. Soon after we pulled into the car park at La Guira and were soon finding several excellent birds including endemics such as Cuban Blackbird, the very localised Cuban Solitaire, stunning Cuban Todys, equally spectacular Cuban Trogons, Cuban Martin and Cuban Green Woodpecker. With a

supporting cast including Cuban Emerald (on the nest), Great Lizard Cuckoos, Scaly-naped Pigeons, Cuban Bullfinch, nesting Cave Swallows and a wintering Louisiana Waterthrush (among other North American Warblers) we were off to a flying start and even took a few minutes out to visit a cave used as a hideout by the legendary revolutionary Che Guevara during the Cuban Missile Crisis, although nesting Cave Swallows formed an ornithological diversion here. Soon after, we revisited the nearby Grassquit site where, among the more numerous Yellow-faced Grassquits, a couple of Cuban Grassquits were glimpsed by some but not all. We then moved on to an area of mixed pine forest where the hoped for endemic Olive-capped Warbler proved rather easy to find while another endemic here came in the form of a brief Yellow-headed Warbler while a Red-legged Honeycreeper and a few more migratory warblers were found. We returned to the hotel for lunch and a rest after such a hectic and bird-filled morning. By 1700 the heat had subsided enough to allow another birding session, this time within easy walking distance of the hotel. In the dense forest just across the river we spent a few hours traipsing about in search of the elusive Blue-headed Quail-dove...and elusive it proved to be with a couple of people getting an unsatisfactory flight view and a couple more birds heard in the distance. Some compensation came in the shape of more Cuban Todys and several other species seen earlier in the day but Smooth-billed Anis were new, as were a couple of Indigo Buntings. After dinner a brief spotlighting session in the hotel grounds served to confirm Arturo's suspicion that the bright full moon would not be conducive to the appearance of the hoped for Stygian Owl.

Day 3

Monday 13 March

Today was primarily a travelling day as we were driving half the length of the island to our next base at Cayo Coco, a sun kissed island off the north coast that has become a popular tourist destination but which is also renowned for some important and restricted range bird species. After a couple of hours we skirted Havana and a little while later pulled into a roadside eatery where packed lunches were collected. The drive east was through mainly unexceptional and frankly rather birdless cultivation but by early evening we diverted north from the largely traffic free autopiste and were soon surrounded by azure shallow waters as we made our way across the long causeway that connects Cayo Coco to the mainland. A brief stop allowed us to see our first Laughing Gulls and Royal Terns and a distant pink shimmer turned out to be a vast flock of Caribbean Flamingos lining the shore of another island. Not long afterwards we pulled up at the Tryp Hotel and after a few minutes were informed that our rooms were actually now available at another hotel nearby. We eventually got checked in at the Playa Coco hotel which, as it turned out was rather more to our suiting than the hectic seeming Tryp, both because the clientele seemed somewhat more mature but also because it was adjacent to some decent looking migrant habitat and also a rather productive mangrove lined lagoon. Some of the group managed to get out into the field for an hour or so before darkness fell and the results were encouraging: the bushes held several migrant warblers such as Yellow-rumped, Northern Parula and numerous Palm Warblers and our first Prairie and endemic Oriente Warbles; the adjacent lagoon held a nice selection of waders with Black-necked Stilts, Willets and Lesser Yellowlegs prominent while herons included Reddish, Snowy and Great Egrets, Great Blue and Little Blue Herons while a Common Black Hawk of the distinctive Cuban Race perched in the mangrove tops as the sun set. Others had already begun to take advantage of our all inclusive status at the bar.

Day4

Tuesday 14 March

Immediately after breakfast we set off in a smaller bus for Cayo Paredon Grande, 50 minutes away. The necessity for the smaller bus soon became clear as we reached the narrow bridge of sorts which connects Cayo Coco to

the northern Cays. Soon afterwards we pulled up at the lighthouse at the north end of Cayo Paredon Grande and began to explore the vegetation along the path running parallel to the coast. As soon as we entered some slightly taller vegetation Arturo heard the hoped-for Thick-billed Vireo and Cuban Gnatcatcher within a minute of each other. A quick blast of the tape and a walk into the vegetation soon produced our first views of the Vireo though as it turned out they gave themselves up rather easily with no fewer than five being seen before we left the area an hour and a half later. The Gnatcatcher was similarly obliging and birds seemed to popping up, singing and displaying every few minutes as we slowly walked along. At our turning around point several Yellow Warblers responded well to pishing and before re-boarding the bus we had also enjoyed great views of several Western Spindalis and our first Black-cowled Oriole. On the return to Cayo Coco we diverted down a side track to check a pool that occasionally holds West Indian Whistling Ducks. The Ducks were absent but a surprise came in the shape of three Zapata Sparrows which were new for the list and also for this particular island (Cayo Romano). Back at the narrow bridge there was time to stop and look at some of the waterbirds present and among the assembled Laughing Gulls and Royal Terns were a couple of local rarities in the shape of two Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Our lunch break back at the hotel was punctuated by visits to the lagoon and adjacent few square metres of well watered bushes where an excellent array of migrant warblers included least ten Northern Waterthrushes, several American Redstarts, Northern Parulas, Prairie, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped, Yellow-throated and Black-and-white Warblers. A few metres away the lagoon now held a nice flock of Stilt Sandpipers and both species of Yellowlegs. Having stayed at various hotels at Cayo Coco in the past Arturo concluded that the newly built Playa Coco offered by far the best on-site birding

At 1600 we set off to Cayo Guillermo in search of Bahama Mockingbirds and after checking about ten Mockingbirds that all turned out to be Northern the real McCoy was eventually found and gave reasonable scope views for ten minutes or more. Returning towards Cayo Coco we stopped at the causeway connecting the two islands where about 50 Semipalmated Plovers gathered along with our first Yellow-crowned Night Herons and 'Great White' Herons. Another stop produced an intermediate 'Wurdermans's' Heron before we made our way to the Cayo Coco Nature Trail where a couple of Oriente Warblers showed briefly as the mosquito's began to bite. Back at the hotel another quick look at the lagoon showed that the Stilt Sandpipers had now been joined by a flock of Short-billed Dowitchers.

Day 5

Wednesday 15 March

With a final morning at our disposal on Cayo Coco we returned to the Nature Trail where several Oriente Warblers showed well along with our first Cuban Vireos before a couple of Zapatta Sparrows put on a good show. We then moved on to the Ecological Trail nearby where we made our way through thick forest to a drinking pool. Viewing here was not too easy for everyone in the rather confined space available but several of the group managed views of a Key West Quail-dove and some unexpected Painted Buntings while several Red-legged Thrushes and Grey Catbirds and a delightful Ovenbird kept the interest up. Before we departed from Cayo Coco after lunch there was time to look for migrants and waders again at the hotel and several Clapper Rails were noted on the lagoon where a Sora had been seen at dawn.

After lunch we sadly rescinded our all inclusive status and boarded the bus for the three hour journey to Camaguey. A short diversion to a lake at Moron immediately produced the hoped for Snail Kites which put on a very good display. We arrived at Camaguey at 1700 and checked-in surprisingly quickly to the characterful and rather pleasant Plaza Hotel.

Day 7

Thursday 16 March

After an early breakfast we were on the road to Najasa well before dawn with quite a long list of targets in mind. Even before the sun had appeared on the horizon we were watching rare and very localised Cuban Palm Crows calling away in a nearby tree and as we watched them our first Cuban Crows flew over, a couple of Plain Pigeons perched well in a bare tree top and an Eastern Meadowlark (Cuban birds being a potential split) appeared on the opposite side of the road. Another stop shortly afterwards failed to produce the hoped for Cuban Parakeets but did provide us with our first Limpkin of the tour while a few kilometres away a stop at a site for Giant Kingbird quickly produced our quarry. We were still several kilometres short of the Najasa, there was still a chill in the air, and Arturo had already pulled many of our day's targets out of the bag!

The rest of the morning was spent in La Belen National Park, a lovely and bird rich spot that provided us with several Cuban Parrots and Parakeets, stunning Cuban Grassquits, a couple of Red-legged Honeycreepers for some, our only Cape May Warblers and excellent prolonged views of our first Cuban Pygmy Owls. Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Summer Tanager and Baltimore Oriole were surprise finds from the north. The only disappointment here was the absence of Gundlach's Hawks as a pair seemed to have abandoned a nest that Arturo had seen them building a couple of weeks earlier but we could hardly complain at our pre-lunch haul and a distant accipiter may actually have been a Gundlach's anyway but was just too far and brief to clinch.

We had lunch at a very pleasant spot on the site of an old ranch with a well-stocked fridge, those who chose to take a stroll nearby turned up a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and several other interesting species including two showy Cuban Todys near the front door and a briefly perched Cuban Parakeet. A brief return to the trail we had visited in the morning produced another Giant Kingbird but there was still no sign of the Gundlach's Hawks so we soon moved on and tried unsuccessfully for Bare-legged Owls before leaving the park. Our return to Camaguey was punctuated by a stop at a pleasant lake with extensive lily covered fringes where several Northern Jacanas and both Least and Pied-billed Grebes were seen and a small flock of Bobwhite Quail was flushed, one having been seen earlier from the bus by some. Back at Camaguey the hotel bar did good business before dinner.

Day 8

Friday 17 March

With all our Najasa targets seen well we set off towards Zapata straight after breakfast. The journey via Trinidad was rather uneventful birdwise but the landscape was rather more varied and interesting than that along the autopiste route and lunch was taken at a pleasant cafe perched on a hill overlooking a valley near Trinidad. By 1630 we arrived at Bermejas where Orlando, a Zapata National Park Guard, joined us and within seconds he was showing us a superb female Bee Hummingbird perched quietly a few feet away where it remained for ages. This dream start to our time at Zapata got even better when soon after we were being shown a Bare-legged Owl; a Fernandina's Flicker was literally pulled out of the bag by Arturo (it had been trapped for colour ringing by his research assistant while we were looking at the owl). While walking in the forest an unidentified Quail-dove was flushed and another seen briefly on the ground by a few soon sped off but not before being identified as a rare Blue-headed.

Check-in at the nearby Playa Giron was painfully slow and hampered somewhat by power cuts (the only ones we suffered) but we eventually got keys and embarked on a room finding odyssey in the extensive grounds. A

spotlight search of the grounds after dinner failed once more to find a Stygian Owl though the moon was still rising quite early.

Day 9

Saturday 18 March

After breakfast we set off towards Palpite, about 45 minutes away, and dropped off Arturo on the way as he was now leaving us in the capable hands of Angel Garcia, a renowned expert on the birds of the Zapatta National Park who very conscientiously makes it his business to find some of the trickier inhabitants of the area. Along the wide trail at Palpite a number of interesting small birds were found including a scarce Blue-winged Warbler and several other Warblers including several Yellow-headed, the first seen by most of the group. A Summer Tanager showed well, as did Cuban Vireos and Fernandina's Flicker amongst others. We then set off to another area of woodland in search of a male Bee Hummingbird known to be in the area. As we approached the area where the Hummingbird was holding territory the shout of Gundlach's Hawk went up and one remained overhead for a minute or so before drifting away. The Bee Hummingbird then duly obliged, alternating its time between the top branch of a bare tree and the shady corner of another tree a few metres away, we savoured prolonged scope views of this little jewel. Nearby some of the group also connected with a Blackpoll Warbler before we returned to Playa Giron for lunch and a rest.

The afternoon session saw us return to Bermejas where an hour or so stake-out at a small drinking pool in the dark forest produced a single Key West Quail-dove, at least three superb Grey-crowned Quail-doves and a couple of Worm-eating Warblers amongst other passerines attracted to the water. Eventually moving on, we then resumed our search for better views of Blue-headed Quail-dove to no avail but there were other birds to keep us occupied including the ever popular Cuban Todys and Trogons. After dinner a further search for Stygian Owl in the hotel grounds drew a blank but later one appeared briefly outside one of our chalets so we now knew for sure they were about.

Day 10

Sunday 19 March

An 0600 departure saw us clutching our packed breakfasts and hitting the road towards La Turba in order to get a dawn start there. A Barn Owl on the roadside was followed on the La Turba track by a pair of Cuban Nightjars that gave reasonable torchlight views for several minutes and also a close range fly-past by the male in the almost half-light. We arrived at Angel's site for Zapata Wren just as the light was good enough to allow for practical searching and a bird was soon heard singing in the distance. Over several minutes it was lured closer until just a few feet away but remained resolutely hidden to most of us. We moved on and tried for another bird in more open habitat and were soon enjoying decent views of a bird singing from low cover and allowing itself to be scoped.

Moving on we arrived at a site for another endemic, Red-shouldered Blackbird. A distant perched male was found almost immediately and also heard before Angel located a more distinctive (relative to female Red-winged Blackbird anyway!) and noisy female. While here there was a brief encounter with a flying Sandhill Crane of the now very rare Cuban race but sadly it quickly dropped into cover before all the group could get on to it. Soon after, a Limpkin appeared and gave good views but a walk along a trackside channel produced only a Sora Rail of the hoped-for Rallidae and another Zapata Wren was heard. Returning towards Playa Giron we stopped at a

roadside pool and watched our first American Purple Gallinules gracing the lily pads while a Green Heron posed well.

There was a change of scene in the afternoon as we visited the extensive mangroves and lagoons at La Salinas. A variety of Herons and Egrets was supplemented by a good selection of waders including Stilt, Least and Spotted Sandpipers. A gathering of Dowitchers were presumably mostly Short-billed but the only one heard calling was a Long-billed which is regarded as the much scarcer of the two in Cuba. Best of all though were the 50 or so superb Caribbean Flamingos that showed much better here than at Cayo Coco. Other highlights were several flying Wood Storks and at least seven Common Black Hawks of the distinctive Cuban race.

The Stygian Owl was heard by some and glimpsed by others in flight.

Day 11

Monday 20 March

Our final full day in the field began with an early return to Palpite, primarily in search of the elusive Blue-headed Quail-dove, the only species still eluding several of the group. The doves remained resolutely silent and hidden but other birds kept the interest up as several Red-legged Thrushes and Grey Catbirds fed on the track and small birds in the trees included our first Yellow-headed Vireo and numerous Yellow-headed Warblers among others. Back at the bus a pair of Fernandina's Flickers performed well as did our first confirmed Cuban Blackbird since very early in the tour. Exploration of nearby trails then produced good numbers of White-crowned Pigeons, a couple of Scaly-naped Pigeons, a pair of Cuban Pygmy Owls and a couple of Broad-winged Hawks. As we returned towards the hotel sharp-eyed Angel picked up a flying Gundlach's Hawk and we had time to get off the bus and briefly get a scope on it.

A return to Bermejas in the evening produced three Grey-headed Quail-doves and numerous commoner birds including, for some of the group, final views of now familiar species such as West Indian and Cuban Woodpeckers, Cuban Pewees and La Sagra's Flycatchers, Todys, Trogons and various Warblers. After dinner Angel took us into the hotel grounds and a few minutes later we were finally enjoying excellent views of a superb Stygian Owl calling from a treetop, and in exactly the area Arturo had checked a few days before though the moon had not yet risen tonight.

Day 12

Tuesday 21 March

About half the group returned to Bermejas this morning while the rest remained at the hotel to pack and relax. Highlights at Bermejas included three more Grey-headed Quail-doves, good views of only our second red morph American Kestrel and many of the by now usual suspects of which both the Trogon and Tody performed to perfection again. Shortly after noon we set off with packed lunches and three hours later were in the historic centre of Havana for a short tour and a coffee or two. We bade farewell to the group members leaving us here and made our way to airport. Exit formalities were straightforward and the departure lounge pleasantly comfortable before we departed on time, just after midnight, for Madrid.

Day 13

Wednesday 22 March

A simple transfer at Madrid saw us land at a grey and chilly Heathrow on time at 1630 GMT.

Bird list

Species order, nomenclature and taxonomy generally follows Garrido and Kirkconnell's Birds Of Cuba (Helm) 2000, but includes changes presented in Raffaele et al's Birds of the West Indies (Helm) 2003, and taxonomic adjustments announced by major taxonomic bodies. The figure in brackets shows the number of days out of ten that the species was seen. Endemic species are designated 'E' and endemic races 'e'

Least Grebe *Tachybaptus* (or *Podiceps*) *dominicus dominicus* (2:10)

Up to four, including a full-grown juvenile, were on a lake near Najasa, earlier one had been seen from the passing bus near Havana

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps antillarum* (2:10)

A couple were seen briefly on a lake near Najasa and another was at Zapata

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis occidentalis* (and *carolinensis*?) (7:10)

After the first at Cayo Coco causeway this species was seen fairly regularly around the northern cays and in the Zapata area, though it was never common and barely reached daily double figures anywhere. A couple more were feeding offshore at Havana. *P. o. occidentalis* is a Caribbean subspecies though migrant *carolinensis* might also occur in Cuba

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus floridanus* (3:10)

Only identified with certainty at and near Cayo Coco where it was fairly common, a few others may have been overlooked elsewhere

Neotropic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax brasilianus mexicanus* (2:10)

After the first confirmed bird on a lake near Najasa several more were recorded on wetlands at Zapata

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* (6:10)

Recorded at Cayo Coco and adjacent islands (up to 40) and the Zapata area where there was a maximum of about 15 at La Salinas and occasional birds off Playa Giron

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* (5:10)

Small numbers were seen at a range of larger wetlands. White morph birds ('Great White Heron' sometimes given subspecies status as *A. h. occidentalis*) were found at Cayo Coco and Zapata with intermediate morph birds ('Wurderman's Heron') found at the same sites on a couple of occasions

Great Egret *Ardea alba egretta* (6:10)

A group of ten on a roadside pool between Havana and Cayo Coco were the first, thereafter a handful were seen each day in the northern cays and a couple more at La Salinas

Snowy Egret *Egretta* (or *Leucophox*) *thula brewsteri* (5:10)

As with other wetland species this one was found only at the northern cays and around Zapata, generally in small number but with a dawn gathering of over thirty at Playa Coco lagoon

Little Blue Heron *Egretta* (or *Florida*) *caerulea* (5:10)

One of the commoner Herons at the northern cays, a couple more were at Zapata

Tricolored Heron *Egretta* (or *Hydranassa*) *tricolor ruficollis* (5:10)

Distribution and numbers were very similar to the previous species

Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens* (4:10)

Up to half a dozen were noted at Cayo Coco and La Salinas, all were dark morph individuals and some white birds may have been overlooked

'Western' Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis ibis* (10:10)

Quite common and widespread

Green Heron *Butorides virescens virescens* or *maculata* (2:10)

Two at a lake near Najasa were followed by two more on a roadside pond north of Palpite

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax hoadli* (1:10)

Two were found at Cayo Coco

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea bancrofti* (5:10)

A handful were found on the northern cays and a similar number in the Zapata area, several unidentified Herons flying around in the dark at Playa Giron were most likely this species

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus* (4:10)

This species was frequently seen around the Cays where up to 40 were found on the Playa Coco lagoon on occasion, a couple were also found in the Zapata area

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (1:10)

A single bird flew past Playa Giron

Roseate Spoonbill *Ajaia ajaja* (4:10)

Half a dozen were present each early morning at the lagoon next to Playa Coco (with a few also seen on the evening of our arrival there) and one was fleetingly seen at La Salinas

Wood Stork *Mycteria americana* (1:10)

Only seen at La Salinas where a total of five or more flew over

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura aura* (10:10)

Ubiquitous and common; exactly what they all find to feed on is a mystery

Caribbean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* (American Flamingo) (2:10)

A very distant flock totalling a thousand or more birds was viewed from the Cayo Coco causeway but over 50 of these stunning birds at La Salinas gave excellent views. This form has recently been given full species status and is separated from both Old World Greater Flamingo *P. roseus* and South American *P. chilensis*

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* (1:10)

A single bird was seen from the moving bus just east of Havana

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* (5:10)

Variable numbers were seen at Cayo Coco, La Turba and La Salina where a maximum of 20 was counted

American Wigeon *Anas americana* (1:10)

A pair was briefly on the Playa Coco lagoon

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* (3:10)

Several hundred were in the Cayo Coco area, mainly viewed from the causeway but one was also on the Playa Coco lagoon

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus carolinensis* and *ridgwayi* (6:10)

Several were seen at the northern cays and Zapatta area with a couple of others around Camaguey and Moron. Most appeared to be of the migratory North American race but at least one at Cayo Coco showed a weaker eye-line indicating the local race *ridgwayi*

Snail Kite *Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus* (1:10)

Five showed very well on a lake on the outskirts of Moron, one perched male called continuously during our 20 minute visit

Hen Harrier *Circus (cyaneus) hudsonicus* (Northern Harrier) (5:10)

Two were seen from the moving bus just east of Havana

Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus finglyoides* (1:10) e

One seen from the bus as we travelled towards Cayo Coco from Havana was presumably of local origin

Gundlach's Hawk *Accipiter gundlachi gundlachi* (2:10) E

Singles were seen in flight over Palpite and between Playa Larga and the Hotel Giron, their tails being prominently rounded like those Cooper's Hawk. A distant unidentified *Accipiter* over La Belen NP was either this species or Sharp-shinned Hawk. There are apparently only very subtle average differences in appearance between this species and Cooper's Hawk of North America (and *gundlachi* is often regarded as part of a superspecies with that and Bicoloured Hawk *A. bicolor* of Central and South America). Identification is largely based on the assumption that Cooper's Hawk never occurs in Cuba though the fact that an old record of Gundlach's from the Isla de Pinos is now generally regarded as referring to a migrant Cooper's means that identification of this subtle species away from an active nest is something of an act of faith....

Common Black Hawk *Buteogallus (anthracinus) gundlachi* (Cuban Crab Hawk) (3:10) e

Locally common, at least eight were seen in and around mangroves in the northern cays and in similar habitat at least five were at La Salinas. Based on its consistently different appearance, differing ecology (*cubensis* eats mainly crabs) and perhaps voice the Cuban form would appear to be a good candidate for species status.

Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus cubanensis* (2:10) e

About three were soaring over La Guira and at least six were seen on one date in the Zapata area. Most at least are assumed to refer to the quite common endemic subspecies rather than migrants from the north which are believed to be rare. Two adults in close proximity and calling at Palpite probably represented a local breeding pair

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis solitudinis* (5:10) e

Singles were seen at La Guira, La Belen and during lunch near Trinidad with a couple of others en route between sites

Crested Caracara *Caracara plancus auduboni* (4:10)

Singles were near Moron, on Cayo Coco, near Trinidad and at La Salinas. This species is widespread in Central and southern North America but does not occur elsewhere in the Caribbean

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius sparveroides* (9:10)

Up to three or four were seen most days, though often only from the passing bus. Most were of the white phase with very white unmarked underparts (though a couple were a little more buffy), weak head patterns and plain rufous mantles. Dramatically different looking red phase birds with greyish mantles, extensively deep rufous underparts and a hooded look were recorded near La Guira NP and Bermejas. This is the only polymorphic population of American Kestrels, pale birds seem to fit neatly at one end of a cline of increasing paleness and plainness from Northern North America southwards but there is nothing on mainland North America that remotely corresponds with the very striking and beautiful red phase. If, as seems possible, Cuban and south Bahaman sparvroides is deserving of species status then other Caribbean and Neotropic forms may also be split in future.

Merlin *Falco columbarius columbarius* (1:10)

One was glimpsed from the moving bus on Cayo Coco. Birds wintering in the Caribbean are presumably of the nominate race which breeds in Eastern North America

Northern Bobwhite *Colinus virginianus cubanensis* (1:10) e

One from the moving bus and five in flight later the same day near Najasa were the only ones seen

Clapper Rail *Rallus longirostris caribaeus* (1:10)

Between three and five frequented the lagoon next to the Playa Coco Hotel though they showed only occasionally

Sora *Porzana carolina* (2:10)

Singles were on the lagoon next to the Playa Coco Hotel and in a reed fringed channel at La Turba

American Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinica cæreris* (1:10)

Three of these attractive birds were on a lily-covered roadside pond between La Turba and Palpite

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus cachinnans* (Common Gallinule) (4:10)

Small numbers were on a few overgrown wetlands

American Coot *Fulica americana americana* (4:10)

Up to thirty were in very localised concentrations on a few wetlands

Limpkin *Aramus guarauna pictus* (2:10)

After the first two brief birds near Najasa another was seen at La Turba and gave good scope views

Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis nesiotis* (1:10) e

One was seen very briefly in flight before dropping into dense reeds at La Turba

Grey or Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola cynosurae* (3:10)

A handful were on the Playa Coco lagoon and at Las Salinas

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* (1:10)

At least fifty near the causeway to Cayo Guillermo were the only ones seen

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus temominatus* (10:10)

Quite common with two or three seen each day or heard calling noisily at night

'Black-necked' Stilt *Himantopus (himantopus) mexicanus* (6:10)

Good numbers gathered on the Playa Coco lagoon and at Las Salinas in particular. Several authorities share the view that New World races should be treated as a separate species from Black-winged Stilts in the Old World

Northern Jacana *Jacana spinosa violacea* (2:10)

Up to ten were on the lake near Najasa and an immature was on a roadside pool north of Palpite

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* (3:10)

Small numbers gathered at Cayo Coco and La Salinas

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* (4:10)

Found in similar places to the previous species though in rather larger numbers

Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria* (2:10)

Two or three were regularly in the vicinity of the Playa Coco Hotel

'Eastern' Willet *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus semipalmatus* (4:10)

Up to ten gathered on the lagoon besides the Playa Coco Hotel and odd ones were seen elsewhere with a couple at La Salinas

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* (4:10)

A few were seen at Cayo Coco, between Trinidad and Zapata and at Las Salinas; none were noticeably spotty

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres morinella* (3:10)

A couple at Cayo Coco causeway were followed by a few at Playa Giron

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* (2:10)

About ten winter plumaged birds were on mud at the Cayo Guillermo causeway and about 20 more were at La Salinas

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus* (3:10)

Gatherings of up to 20 were at the lagoon next to the Playa Coco Hotel and on La Salinas; birds at the latter site were just acquiring breeding plumage

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus griseus* and/ or *hendersoni* (2+:10)

Up to 30 gathered on the lagoon at the Playa Coco and some (and probably the majority) of 30 or more Dowitchers at La Salinas were presumably this species

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* (1+:10)

At least one of the 30 or so Dowitchers gathered at Las Salinas, Zapata called like this species in flight

Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata* (1:10)

One was seen briefly in flight at a lake near Najasa. The split of this species from Common Snipe *G. gallinago* of the Old World is now generally accepted

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla atricilla* (4:10)

Fairly common around the northern cays with a handful offshore at Havana on our final afternoon

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* (1:10)

One was at the causeway to Cayo Guillermo

'American' Herring Gull *Larus (argentatus) smithsonianus* (2:10)

A couple were at the Cayo Coco causeway as we left the island and one was over Havana. Evidence that this species should be split from European Herring Gulls is growing

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus graellsii* (1:10)

Two were at a traditional site near the bridge to Cayo Romano; both appeared to be typical examples of the subspecies *graellsii*, perhaps most likely of Icelandic origin. This species is regarded as a rarity in Cuba, and is not even mentioned in the national fieldguide dating from 2000, but regular returning birds have been seen at the northern cays for several years now

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* (1:10)

One was at La Salinas

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* (2:10)

A couple at Cayo Coco were followed by one at La Salinas

(American) Royal Tern *Sterna maxima maxima* (4:10)

This species was found at a few locations in the northern Cays and offshore at Havana

Scaly-naped Pigeon *Patagioenas* (or *Columba*) *squamosa* (2:10)

A couple showed well at La Guira NP and two were seen more fleetingly near Palpite. A Caribbean endemic

White-crowned Pigeon *Patagioenas* (or *Columba*) *leucocephala* (4:10)

Common at Cayo Coco where at least thirty were seen on each of our visits to the Nature Trail. About 20 were seen east of Palpite and one at Bermejas. A Caribbean endemic

Plain Pigeon *Patagioenas* (or *Columba*) *inornata inornata* (2:10)

One seen in flight near La Guira NP was at a new location for this species and about 15 were seen in and around the Najasa/La Belen NP area with a couple posing for the scope in a bare tree. A Caribbean endemic

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica asiatica* (7:10)

Quite scarce but rather widespread with ones and twos popping up occasionally in all parts of the island visited

Zenaida Dove *Zenaida aurita aurita* or *zenaida* (8:10)

Although greatly outnumbered by Mourning Doves this species was found in similar contexts in small numbers and also occasionally in denser forest

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura macroura* (10:10)

Common and widespread

Common Ground Dove *Columbina passerina insularis* (9:10)

Quite common and very widespread, seen on all days except the travelling day between San Diego De Los Banos and Cayo Coco

Key West Quail Dove *Geotrygon chrysis* (2:10)

One visited the drinking pool at the end of the Ecological trail at Cayo Coco and another visited a drinking pool at Bermejas where another was heard. A Caribbean endemic

Gray-headed Quail Dove *Geotrygon caniceps caniceps* (3:10) e

Only seen at Bermejas where at least eight were encountered, others were heard there and at Palpite. If split from the Hispaniolan form *leucometopius* that has a white forehead Cuban birds become an endemic species

[Ruddy Quail Dove *Geotrygon montana*

What was very probably this species was glimpsed at La Guira by one tour member]

Blue-headed Quail Dove *Stamoenas cyanocephala* (2:10) E

Two were heard and one seen briefly in flight in the forest opposite the Hotel Mirador in San Diego De Los Banos and another was glimpsed briefly at Bermejas where we spent a lot of time looking for others without success

Cuban Parakeet *Aratinga euops* (5:10) E

About 20 were seen, mostly in flight at La Belen NP and about 15 were seen on each of our visits to Bermejas where a small group posed well on one occasion, many of those seen at Najasa were in active moult with missing tail feathers but those at Zapata all seemed to be in full plumage

Cuban Parrot *Amazona leucocephala leucocephala* (Rose-throated Parrot) (5:10) e

Regularly seen in woodlands at La Belen and Bermejas, Zapata, some posed well. At La Belen several birds were in active wing moult but none were at Zapata. A Caribbean endemic with other subspecies on the Bahamas and the Caymans

Great Lizard Cuckoo *Saurothera merlini merlini* (7:10) e

After the first at La Guira this spectacular species was seen in small numbers in several well wooded contexts, its characteristic and strange calls were frequently heard at Zapata. Birds on the northern cays are regarded as a separate subspecies (*S. m. santamariae*) from the widespread nominate race but we only heard them there. Whether birds found on the Bahamas, the only other area this species is found, should really be regarded as part of *merlini* is perhaps doubtful, if not *merlini* becomes another Cuban endemic species

Smooth-billed Ani *Crotophaga ani* (10:10)

Although seen everyday appearances were unpredictable with birds sparsely distributed in open areas and sometimes hotel gardens

Barn Owl *Tyto alba furcata* (1:10)

One was in roadside bushes before dawn as we drove from the Playa Giron towards Playa Larga. The resident race *furcata* is a pale-breasted type and the individual we saw also showed patchy white and buff upperparts and wings. Migrants from North America are regarded as very rare, *furcata* also occurs in Jamaica and the Caymans

Bare-legged Owl *Gymnoglaux* (or *Otus*) *lawrencii* (Cuban Screech Owl) (1:10) E

One appeared at the top of its roost tree after a little encouragement from Orlando, our park guard at Bermejas. Recent authors tend to regard this species as a member of a monotypic genus rather than belonging to the much more widespread 'Scops Owl' genus *Otus*

Cuban Pygmy-Owl *Glaucidium siju siju* (3:10) E

After the first pair were seen well at La Belen NP a further three individuals were seen in the Zapata area; others were heard

Stygian Owl *Asio stygius siguapa* (3:10) e

Finding this species proved something of a saga before one performed beautifully after dinner in the grounds of Playa Giron Hotel on our final evening there. Earlier a couple of people had brief good views outside their chalet one night and others had had fleeting flight views only

Cuban Nightjar *Caprimulgus cubanensis cubanensis* (1:10) E

Two were seen quite well perched and in flight by torchlight on the track to La Turba before dawn. *C. b. cubanensis* was formerly regarded as the nominate endemic subspecies of the Greater Antillean Nightjar but that species has now been split with the former race *ekmani* now considered separate, as Hispaniolan Nightjar *C.*

ekmani, due to differences in appearance and, more critically, voice. Another race of cubanensis occurs on Cuba's Isla de Pinos

Antillean Palm Swift *Tachornis phoenicobia iradii* (4:10) e

Appearances by this species were very unpredictable with singles or small groups popping up from time to time throughout the tour; at least 20 were seen. A Caribbean endemic confined to Cuba, Hispaniola and Jamaica

Cuban Emerald *Chlorostilbon ricordii ricordii* (10:10) e

Common and widespread with at least half a dozen seen or heard every day. Despite its English name this species also occurs on the Bahamas

Bee Hummingbird *Mellisuga helenae* (2:10) E

Our time at Zapata began in fine fashion when Orlando had a very obliging female lined up for us no more than 40m from where we first stopped the bus, it remained in clear view at eye level no more than five metres away for more than twenty minutes; it didn't look so small when zoomed to x60! The next day a superb male was watched at Palpite as it alternated between two perches about 30 metres away and allowed good scope views showing its iridescent plum throat

Cuban Trogon *Priotelus temnurus temnurus* (6:10) E

This fantastic species was seen very shortly after we arrived at La Guira NP and in the couple of hours that we were there a further five were found; others were at La Belen NP and in the Zapata area at Bermejas and Palpite

Cuban Tody *Todus multicolor* (7:10) E

Another stunning Cuban endemic, Todys were seen or at least heard at most wooded sites visited after the first were found at La Guira NP on our first morning

Belted Kingfisher *Megascyle* (or *Ceryle*) *alcyon* (6:10)

Occasionally encountered at a range of wetlands

West Indian Woodpecker *Melanerpes supercilialis supercilialis* (7:10) e

Several were seen each day in wooded areas away from the northern cays, particularly common at La Belen NP where 15 were noted. A Caribbean endemic with other races on the Bahamas and Grand Cayman

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* (4:10)

Wintering birds were found at La Guira, Cayo Coco, La Belen and Palpite, all were youngsters

Cuban (Green) Woodpecker *Xiphidiopicus peraussus peraussus* E

A handful were seen at most wooded locations visited after the first at La Guira. As well as being an endemic species this attractive woodpecker is in its own genus too

Northern Flicker *Colaptes (auratus) drysocaulosus* (1:10)

Birds were heard at a few sites but the only one seen was on Cayo Coco. There are no confirmed records of migrants from North America in Cuba so all records are presumed to relate to the Caribbean endemic race which is sometimes regarded as a separate species occurring only on Cuba and the Caymans

Fernandina's Flicker *Colaptes fernandinae* (3:10) E

Only seen in the Zapata area where two or three were seen on each visit to Bermejas and Palpite. Arturo is conducting research on this species and on the evening of our arrival we were able to enjoy close up views of a female his research assistant had trapped and colour ringed as part of the research

Cuban Pewee *Contopus caribaeus caribaeus* and *morenoi* (8:10) e and e

Quite common and widespread, found in almost all wooded contexts in ones and twos though more were heard than seen. The nominate race is widespread but birds at Zapata are regarded as a separate subspecies. Elsewhere this species occurs only on the Bahamas

La Sagra's Flycatcher *Myiarchus sagrae* (8:10)

Common and widespread though more were heard than seen. A Caribbean endemic occurring only on Cuba, the Bahamas and Caymans

Gray Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis dominicensis* (5:10)

Uncommon, singles were seen at La Guira and at Playa Giron; this is summer visitor to Cuba and we just caught the first few returning birds

Loggerhead Kingbird *Tyrannus caudifasciatus caudifasciatus* (10:10) e

Common and widespread. A Caribbean endemic with other races occurring throughout the Greater Antilles and on the Bahamas and Grand Cayman

Giant Kingbird *Tyrannus cubensis* (1:10) E

Arturo took us to a stake out just north of Najasa where a pair responded well to a brief blast from the tape, later that day another was found at La Belen NP

Thick-billed Vireo *Vireo crassirostris* (1:10)

At the traditional site on Cayo Paredon Grande this sometimes difficult to find species gave itself up quite easily with at least five being seen well during our hour and a half there. The status of this species on Cuba remains unclear though birds do seem to be a permanent fixture at Cayo Paredon Grande now so the previous view that it is only a migrant or winter visitor requires some adjustment

Cuban Vireo *Vireo gundlachi gundlachi* and *orientalis* (4:10) E

After the first few along the Nature Trail at Cayo Coco (*orientalis*) small numbers were seen at La Belen, Bermejas and Palpite (nominate *gundlachi*); more often heard than seen

Yellow-throated Vireo *Vireo flavifrons* (1:10)

After a couple of heard only birds one eventually showed well at Palpite

Black-whiskered Vireo *Vireo altiloquus altiloquus* (2:10)

Locally quite common, especially at La Guira NP but with others seen at Bermejas and heard at La Belen and Palpite

Cuban Palm Crow *Corvus minutus* (1:10) E

Just before sunrise the bus screeched to a halt along the back roads between Camaguey and Najasa and we were able to watch, and more importantly to hear, up to fifteen birds in roadside trees. A couple more were heard nearby soon after. We may have seen this species subsequently but we didn't hear any more so they couldn't be confirmed. This species is a recent split from Palm Crow *C. palmarum* (now known as Hispaniolan Crow and confined to that Island)

Cuban Crow *Corvus nasicus*

Quite common (and noisy) in the Najasa/La Belen area, Corvids seen between Camaguey and Zapata and occasionally at Zapata sites were assumed to be this species although few were heard. A Caribbean endemic

Cuban Martin *Progne* (or *Golondrina*) *cryptoleuca* (5:10) E

Obvious females (the only identifiable category) were seen over La Guira and La Belen with males (presumably this species but impossible to distinguish from Purple Martin *Progne* (or *Golondrina*) *subis subis* which occurs as a migrant) over Cayo Coco and elsewhere. This is a summer visitor to Cuba but its wintering grounds remain unknown

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*

The first were at La Belen NP where about 50 were found, thereafter migrants were seen in small numbers at several sites

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* (2:10)

Several were hawking over fields west of Camaguey with others at La Turba where a handful showed well roosting in trailside bushes

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia riparia* (Bank Swallow) (1:10)

One over the reedbeds at La Turba was the only record. The race breeding in North America is the same as that through most of Europe and Northern Asia

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica erythrogaster* (1:10)

Surprisingly the only one seen was a bird that flew past the restaurant window at Playa Giron during breakfast on our final morning there

Cave Swallow *Pterochelidon* (or *Hirundo*) *fulva cavicola* (3:10) e

A colony in the caves at La Guira contained at least 50 birds and others were seen over Camaguey and Playa Giron. Like other Caribbean races, *P. f. cavicola* is a conspicuously dark with a barely contrasting rufous rump and is therefore readily distinguishable from any eastern race Cliff Swallows *P. pyrrhonota* that occur as migrants

Zapata Wren *Femina cerverai* (Cervera's Wren) (1:10) E

After an anxious wait one finally gave itself up at La Turba and sang loudly in response to Angel's tape as it moved from one low song perch to another, it even allowed some scope views as it did so. At least four more were heard but not seen apart from one very briefly glimpsed

Cuban Gnatcatcher *Poliptila lembeyi* (1:10) E

About ten showed very well indeed at Cayo Paredon Grande with several singing loudly from exposed perches

Cuban Solitaire *Myadestes elisabeth* (1:10) E

Of two or three birds singing above the caves at La Guira NP one posed well for the scope for a few minutes, another was seen later in the morning at the Olive-capped Warbler site by one tour member while answering the call of nature!

Red-legged Thrush *Turdus plumbeus rubripes* (7:10) e

This cracking looking thrush was very widespread in wooded contexts, up to ten per day were seen on occasion but a couple was more normal. This is quite a widespread Caribbean endemic species, other island races show less black on the throat and no rufous on the belly

Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis* (5:10)

More often heard than seen though in total at least 20 showed well, often at drinking pools while we waited for Quail-doves

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos orpheus* (10:10)

Very common and widespread

Bahama Mockingbird *Mimus gundlachi gundlachi* (1:10)

After some searching a couple were eventually tracked down at Cayo Guillermo amongst the much commoner Northern Mockingbirds there. This species is confined to the Bahamas and Jamaica and this one very small area on Cuba

Blue-winged Warbler *Vermivora pinus* (1:10)

One at Palpite on one date was a good local find by Angel

Northern Parula *Parula americana* (5:10)

One or two at scattered wooded sites were the norm but at least five were at the Warbler corner at Playa Coco

Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia gundlachi* ('Golden' Warbler) (4:10)

Quite common at Cayo Paredon Grande, up to ten birds there were presumably of the local mangrove breeding race gundlachi (petechia group) although no males showed any distinct rufous tones on the crown as many members of this group do. Elsewhere a few scattered individuals were presumably migrants of the North American aestiva group. Some authors regard members of the petechia group as a separate species, Golden Warbler (scientific name retained), while North American birds become *D. aestiva*

Magnolia Warbler *Dendroica magnolia* (1:10)

A single female was with other warblers at Playa Coco on one date

Cape May Warbler *Dendroica tigrina* (1:10)

A male and female in the same tree at La Belen NP were, rather surprisingly, the only ones seen

Black-throated Blue Warbler *Dendroica caerulescens caerulescens* (6:10)

One of the more frequently seen American Wood Warblers with up to four per day at well wooded sites and at the coast at Playa Coco where a colour ringed male was seen. Two subspecies occur in the Caribbean, widespread *D. c. caerulescens* and Appalachian breeding *cairnsi* but we saw none clearly suggesting the darker latter race

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata coronata* (Myrtle Warbler) (3:10)

Only seen among the gatherings of migrant Warblers at Cayo Coco where about eight were found

Black-throated Green Warbler *Dendroica virens* (5:10)

Quite common and seen at most wooded sites visited but not prominent among gatherings of migrant Warblers at Playa Coco

Yellow-throated Warbler *Dendroica dominica* ssp (6:10)

Occasionally recorded at La Guira, Playa Coco, La Belen and Playa Giron. At least three subspecies occur in the Caribbean, all birds seen by us showed the white bellies typical of the migratory North American races, i.e. *dominica* and *albilora*, and some at least showed the white lores typical of *albilora*

Olive-capped Warbler *Dendroica pityophila* (1:10)

Once we were in the appropriate habitat for this very localised species it proved to be rather common with about ten seen and heard in 40 minutes in the pines at La Guira NP. . A Caribbean endemic, elsewhere this species occurs only on two islands in the Bahamas

Prairie Warbler *Dendroica discolor* ssp (7:10)

Inland woodlands and coastal migrant traps both held small numbers of this very attractive warbler. Two subspecies occur in the Caribbean *D. d. discolor* and *paludicola* but they are probably impossible to distinguish in the field

Palm Warbler *Dendroica palmarum palmarum* and *hypochrysea* (9:10)

Very common and widespread away from the densest forest, the dominant migrant Warbler at Cayo Coco where several frequented the lawns and shrubberies in hotel gardens. The majority exhibiting breeding plumage were of the commoner western form *palmarum* with just a couple of far north eastern *hypochrysea* noted, the latter having extensively bright yellow underparts but a restricted range and relatively small population size

Blackpoll Warbler *Dendroica striata* (1:10)

One was seen by a couple of froup members at Palpite

Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* (7:10)

One or two were seen in a wide variety of wooded contexts including a couple of migrants at Playa Coco

American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla* (10:10)

Frequently encountered in ones and twos but with at least eight at Playa Coco, only a couple of adult males were seen

Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorus* (1:10)

Only seen at the drinking pool at Bermejas where a couple were observed on one date

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapillus* ssp (4:10)

After the first at Playa Coco several more were seen in various wooded contexts at Zapata, about ten were seen in total. Two subspecies occur in the Caribbean *S. a. aurocapillus* and *fulvior* but they are impossible to distinguish in the field

Northern Waterthrush *Seiurus noveboracensis* (6:10)

At least ten gathered at the Warbler corner at Playa Coco and showed very well, smaller numbers were seen at several other damper sites, especially La Salina and any drinking pools visited. About a third of the birds lacked yellow tones on the supercillium and underparts

Louisiana Waterthrush *Seiurus motacilla* (1:10)

One fed quietly along the stream running through the caves at La Guira and showed well, a couple of others were suspected at migrant hotspots but were too fleeting to confirm

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas trichas* (8:10)

Fairly widespread and locally quite common in damper areas

Yellow-headed Warbler *Teretistris fernandinae gundlachi* (5:10) E

After one at La Guira NP we didn't come across another until our arrival at Zapata where it proved common and noisy at Bermejas and Palpite. With the next species this is one of only two species in the endemic genus *Teretistris*

Oriente Warbler *Teretistris fornsi gundlachi* (3:10) E

Only seen in drier scrub and bushes at Cayo Coco where up to ten were found at the Nature Trail, for example

Red-legged Honeycreeper *Cyanerpes cyaneus* (2:10)

One at the Olive-capped Warbler site at La Guira NP was followed by a couple of fleeting birds at La Belen NP; another was heard but not seen at the Ecological trail at Cayo Coco. It has been suggested that birds on Cuba originate from escapes from captivity as its presence there but not elsewhere in the Antilles seems anomalous

Western Spindalis *Spindalis zena pretrei* (7:10) e

Quite common and widespread, these very attractive birds were found in a range of wooded and scrubby habitats with at least a couple recorded each day. Western Spindalis was formerly regarded as part of a much more widespread Caribbean species (Stripe-headed Tanager), other races of Western Spindalis occur on the Bahamas, Caymans and Cozumel but the other former races of Stripe-headed Tanager (in Puerto Rico, Hispaniola and Jamaica) are granted endemic species status

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra rubra* (3:10)

At least two were at both La Belen NP and Palpite

Cuban Grassquit *Tiaris canora* (2:10) E

One or two seen very briefly by a couple of group members near La Guira NP were eventually followed by three or four much more obliging individuals at La Belen NP where a particularly bright male attracted admiring comments. All were in close association with the next species. This species has been introduced on the Bahamas but is native only on Cuba

Yellow-faced Grassquit *Tiaris olivacea olivacea* (10:10)

Fairly common and widespread with small numbers seen every day, often in hotel grounds

Zapata Sparrow *Torreornis inexpectata varonai* (2:10) E

Three on Cayo Romano were, according to Arturo, at a new island location for the species, the northern race not having previously recorded beyond Cayo Coco. The next day three or four showed well at the more traditional site of the Nature Trail on Cayo Coco; other races occur at Zapata and Guantanamo

Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Phœsticus ludovicianus* (1:10)

One at La Belen NP was the only one seen

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* (3:10)

Ones and two were found La Guira, La Belen NP and La Turba

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* (2:10)

Three females and immatures visited the drinking pool at the end of the Ecological Trail at Cayo Coco and another was at Bermejas

Cuban Bullfinch *Melopyrrha nigra nigra* (8:10) e

Quite common and widespread though without any real concentrations anywhere, despite its common name this species also occurs on Grand Cayman

Red-shouldered Blackbird *Agelaius assimilis* (1:10) E

Two or three, including a characteristically all black (and helpfully vocal) female were found at La Turba

Tawny-shouldered Blackbird *Agelaius humeralis humeralis* (7:10) e

Overall common though distribution quite patchy, the tell-tale shoulder pattern was more often than not completely concealed by the scapulars on perched birds. Elsewhere this species occurs only in Haiti where it is rare

Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella (magna) hippocrepis* (Cuban Meadowlark) (1:10) e

One was in a field opposite the Cuban Palm Crows as we approached Najasa and later that day was seen briefly in flight as we returned towards Camaguey. Cuban contains two discrete populations of Meadowlarks, one in the lowlands (which we saw) and one in the western hills. A split from birds of continental North America has been tentatively proposed. Birds in the western hills are likely to represent at least a previously undescribed subspecies.

Cuban Blackbird *Dives atrovireacea* (2:10) E

Quite common at La Guira NP where we paid quite close attention to them, thereafter this species was presumably underrecorded amongst Tawny-shouldered Blackbirds

Greater Antillean Grackle *Quiscalus niger gundlachi* (10:10) e

Very common, widespread and rather noisy. A Caribbean endemic that is widespread in the Greater Antilles

Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis* (1:10)

Presumably underrecorded, the only birds identified were those that hung around the stables at La Belen

Greater Antillean Oriole *Icterus dominicensis melanopsis* (3:10) e

After the first at Cayo Paredon Grande several were seen at La Belen NP and elsewhere. Recent studies suggest that birds in Cuba should be split as Cuban Oriole *I. melanopsis*, a new endemic species. A further three forms from different Caribbean islands may also be elevated to species status as distinct from Black-cowled Oriole *Icterus prothemelas* of Central America (Garrido, Wiley and Kirkconnell, *Ornitologia Neotropical* (16: pp.449–470))

Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula* (1:10)

A male was a surprise find at La Belen NP

163 species

Non-native species:

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*

Two were seen in flight at La Belen

Common Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*

Heard only near Najasa

Rock Dove *Columbia livia*

Feral Pigeons were occasionally seen in built up areas, especially Havana

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

One that flew over the road west of Camaguey was followed by several in central Havana

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Small numbers were found in several urban contexts