

Cuba

Naturetrek Tour Report

10 - 21 March 2007

Report compiled by Chris Kehoe



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour leaders: Chris Kehoe (Naturetrek)
Arturo Kirkconnell (local tour leader)
Rene (Havanatur) (local guide)

Tour participants: Nick Baker
Bridget Coullon
Christine Daley
John Eaton
Mike Grigson
Mike Harvey
Ron Hill
Lin Hill
Nit Lawrence
Ralph Parkes
Andrew Merritt
Tui Merrit
Chris Moore
Sue Tallents
Colin Undrill
John Williamson

Day 0

10 March 2007

Outbound from UK

Most of the group assembled at Heathrow for our mid-morning flight to Madrid, from where the onward Iberia Airlines flight to Havana left almost on time soon after 17.00. Just over 9 hours later we touched down in Havana at 21.15 (local), cleared immigration and customs and met the remaining two group members, Rene and Arturo in the arrivals hall.

We were delivered to The Mirador Hotel in San Diego del los Banos by 01.15 but the hotel staff informed us that Cuba had just decided to resume 'daylight saving' and that the clocks were just about to move forward by an hour. While this meant we had one hour less in bed tonight it also meant that dawn would be an hour later than it would otherwise have been throughout the tour which was certainly a good thing. Everyone quickly retired to bed for a few hours before our birding programme began in earnest.

Day 1

11 March 2007

La Guira

Weather: dry, bright and sunny

A 10 minute drive took us into La Guira National Park. Our first endemics soon appeared in the shape of Cuban Vireo and Yellow-headed Warblers and soon after a couple of showy Cuban Trogons and several Cuban Bullfinches appeared. Within an hour we connected with our primary targets here, the very localised Cuban

Solitaire and Olive-capped Warblers, both of which showed rather well. Nearby some took the opportunity to visit the caves used by Che Guevara as his base during the Cuban missile crisis while others watched North American migrants such as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Louisiana Waterthrush and Magnolia and Yellow-throated Warblers in the attractive parkland setting as Cuban Martins and Cave Swallows sailed overhead; more Solitaires were uncharacteristically showy.

After an extended lunch break back at the hotel we set off to check some open areas for Cuban Grassquits, always a tricky species to catch up with. There was no sign of any Grassquits but we came across plenty to hold our interest during the remainder of the day with some fish ponds proving particularly productive. A gathering of up to 30 Snail Kites was an obvious highlight here while Caspian Terns were joined by Cuban rarities in the shape of six Forster's and a Black Tern (only the third Arturo had ever seen in Cuba). Also present were a good range of herons, both Ruddy and Ring-necked Ducks and a host of other species. The last hour of the day was spent back at La Guira where West Indian Woodpeckers and American Kestrels of the very distinctive local subspecies were new and we enjoyed repeat views of Red-legged Honeycreepers in a flowering tree where Cuban Blackbirds, Cuban Emeralds and spectacular Western Spindalis' came and went.

After dinner we braved the noise of the salsa classes at the far end of the hotel grounds and were treated to reasonable spotlight views of a Stygian Owl that surveyed proceedings from the top of a large palm.

Day 2

12 March 2007

En route to Cayo Coco

Weather: dry, bright, rather hot

Today was a travelling day that saw us transfer from the mountains west of Havana to the sun-baked northern cays 500 km east of there. We set off at 08.00, changed buses on the outskirts of Havana and stopped for a lunch of sandwiches at a roadside eatery at 11.30.

The autopiste, the main west-east highway running almost the full length of Cuba, was almost completely devoid of traffic as we travelled along and stopped for a coffee or ice-cream at about 15.00. By 17.00 we reached the start of the 20km causeway that connects the mainland to the northern cays and reached our hotel, The Krystal Resort, soon after 18.00. Check-in took what seemed like an eternity but we eventually got our keys, and just as importantly the little plastic bracelets that confirmed our 'all inclusive' status. By 20.30 most were eating in the restaurant or already investigating some of the cocktails on offer at the free bar.

Day 3

13 March 2007

Cayo Coco area

Weather: Dry, bright and sunny, breezy later

We picked up local guide Paulino and were on our way to nearby Cayo Paredon Grande soon after 08.00, our primary target being Thick-billed Vireo at its only known location in Cuba. Paulino took us straight to a territorial bird that showed very well after a few minutes. Then, walking along a trail through dense scrub parallel

to the beach we soon saw our first Cuban Gnatcatchers which performed beautifully. In the rather still conditions several more Thick-billed Vireos and Gnatcatchers were found, as were a couple of Oriente Warblers, yet another speciality of these arid cays. A welcome surprise came in the form of a Bahama Mockingbird, a species normally found only on Cayo Gullerme on the opposite side of Cayo Coco. Migrant Prairie and Yellow Warblers were also seen before we returned towards Cayo Coco and lingered at a couple of spots we had past in haste earlier. Here we picked up a few new waders, some relatively close Caribbean Flamingos (after earlier very distant birds from the causeway) and some gulls and terns that included a couple of locally rare Lesser Black-backs. During the heat of early afternoon we rested at the hotel or took advantage of the free bar but those who took a stroll around the gardens encountered a small selection of migrant warblers.

As we had already seen Bahama Mockingbird we forsook the option of visiting Cayo Guillermo and instead concentrated more locally. In the vicinity of the Ecological Trail a couple of the group glimpsed an elusive Worm-eating Warbler and at another trail most people saw their first fabulous Cuban Todies, a superb species that we would see and hear plenty of in the coming days. A quick visit to an occupied Gundlach's Hawk nest revealed the female to be sitting but the area was thick with very fierce mosquitoes so we didn't linger long, although the bird did get up and fly around briefly before we left which allowed some good views.

At an area of relatively undisturbed beach the tide had dropped enough for several plovers to gather and amongst the numerous Semi-palmateds were half-a-dozen Wilson's and the prized find of a Piping Plover. Dusk was approaching but Paulino had one last destination in mind and just before the light went altogether we found ourselves in the incongruous surroundings of a busy tourist hotel watching a couple of ultra-rare West Indian Whistling Ducks on an ornamental pond where, being nocturnal feeders, they would spend the night foraging as a disco raged nearby. Further bonuses here were a couple of noisy but mostly silhouetted Clapper Rails and a single Yellow-crowned Night Heron.

All in all it had been an excellent day and we had seen almost everything the northern cays had to offer.

Day 4

14 March 2007

Cayo Coco; en route to Camaguey

Weather: dry and bright in the morning, quite breezy, some rain in the afternoon.

Our one remaining target bird at Cayo Coco was Zapata Sparrow and straight after breakfast we set off in pursuit. At the first area we checked we drew a blank but did get more views of Oriente Warblers, Cuban Todies and several White-crowned Pigeons. At the Ecological Trail car park the Sparrows were quite quickly found but gave us a bit a run-around, though most people managed some sort of view. We staked out a nearby drinking pool for 40 minutes or so in the hope that a Key West Quail Dove might appear but had to content ourselves with a couple of Painted Buntings, several migrant warblers and some rather fleeting views of Scaly-naped Pigeons.

It was rather hot by 11.00 so we returned to the hotel in order to finish packing and have some lunch before leaving for Camaguey. Before finally leaving Cayo Coco we had one more quick but unsuccessful look for the Zapata Sparrows but did succeed in seeing a few migrant warblers that included a scarce Blue-winged. Once back on the mainland a short stop at a lake near Moron yielded a couple of Anhingas and Northern Waterthrushes

and a solitary Snail Kite. Arriving in Camaguey at about 18.00 we had a little daylight in which to admire the faded colonial charms of this interesting town before tucking into our buffet dinner and some drinks that we sadly had to pay for!

Day 5

15 March 2007

Najasa/ La Belen NP

Weather: dry, bright and hot

An early breakfast was required today and we were on the road south in darkness at 07.00 with several important targets in mind. Not long after first light Arturo spotted some crows and we stopped to check them and very soon heard the distinctive nasal mewling call of the hoped-for Cuban Palm Crow. Over the next ten minutes we counted six of these very rare and localised birds and also came across our first Grey Kingbird before pressing on. After a few more km we stopped again to check an area of palms where noisy Cuban Crows were much in evidence and a couple of Limpkins showed very well but the star birds here were undoubtedly Plain Pigeons, a couple of which perched up well for the scope. At another palm grove the hoped-for Giant Kingbirds were very quickly in evidence and we had therefore achieved pretty much all of our main targets for the day before 09.00 so spent a relaxing half hour enjoying the Kingbirds and other species in the vicinity which included another Grey Kingbird and several Cuban Parakeets.

A little while later we arrived at La Belen National Park and set off on an unsuccessful quest for Cuban Grassquits but did manage to see our first Cuban Parrots and a few warblers and others. We sat out the heat of the day at a pleasant ranch house where we ate our packed lunches, those who chose to explore the immediate area and were rewarded with more Parakeets and Plain Pigeons and an obliging Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. The less energetic were treated to a pair of Cuban Todies which at times could be viewed from the comfort of rocking chairs!

A quick check of a Gundlach's Hawk nest revealed the occupant to be out though some had views of a Barn Owl disappearing into the distance before we went in search of Cuban Grassquits again. After an hour or so there was no hint of our elusive quarry but we consoled ourselves with a perched Cuban Parrot and our first Cuban Pygmy-owl as we made our way back to the bus. Arturo chatted to a couple of local woodsmen who said they had just seen Cuban Grassquits near some farm buildings so we set off there post-haste and sure enough a pair eventually appeared amongst a flock of Yellow-faced Grassquits and showed rather well, even sitting still long enough for scope views on occasion, before melting away. We returned to Camaguey in time for some to accompany Rene on a short walking tour of the historic town centre before darkness fell.

Day 6

16 March 2007

En route to Zapata; Bermejas

Weather: dry, bright and hot

Another travelling day; this time heading back west towards Havana before diverting south into the famous Zapata National Park. The only stops en route were for coffee and lunchtime sandwiches. We arrived at the

Playa Larga Hotel on the shores of the Bay of Pigs at 16.00, quickly checked-in, dumped our luggage and re-boarded the bus for the forty minute drive to Bermejas. A most remarkable feature of this journey was the prodigious number of land crabs crossing the road, almost a month earlier than normal here, though sadly some inevitably fell victim to the occasional vehicles using the road and provided a feast for the area's Turkey Vultures.

Once at Bermejas, Arturo led us a few yards down an unremarkable looking side path but a little local knowledge goes a long way in Cuba and we had a great hour in store. We were hardly out of the bus when our first Fernandina's Flicker was found in a nearby pasture and a few metres further on an even bigger (metaphorically but certainly not literally) prize lay in store - an absolutely exquisite fully gorgetted male Bee Hummingbird that performed to perfection just a few feet away for as long as we wished. Also seen along a 20 metre stretch of trees and bushes were two or three more Bee Hummers and at least three Fernandina's Flickers. This all proved a perfect antidote to our long hours on the bus earlier and already confirmed Zapata as the foremost birding destination on the island.

Day 7

17 March 2007

Zapata: Bermejas X2

Weather: dry, bright and sunny

The first of our three full days in the Zapata area began with a visit to the Bermejas Reserve proper and our first concerted effort to find some of fiendishly elusive Quail-doves that inhabit the area. In the event finding Quail-doves proved tricky to the point of being impossible but we consoled ourselves with some brilliant views of up to three Cuban Pygmy-owls, similarly great views of our first, and only, Bare-legged Owls and several nice Warblers, Todies and Trogons. Of course it was hard to resist the temptation to go and have another look at the nearby Bee Hummingbirds and while there a Gundlach's Hawk flew over before we returned to the hotel for lunch and a rest.

With Quail-doves still our overriding focus we returned once more to Bermejas early evening and spent a while staking out a pool where we hoped one might be tempted to drink. In the event this never happened but a lovely Grey-fronted Quail-dove did appear on the trail allowing everyone good views before it vanished into the very dense forest. Pressing on we managed to find three more Grey-fronteds and a more fleeting Key West Quail-dove before the light began to fade and we made our way back to the road and took up positions ready for the hoped-for appearance of Cuban Nightjars. Eventually two Nightjars did show themselves in the spotlight but neither view was particularly good, clearly we'd have to try again for this species. After dinner some members of the group saw a Stygian Owl as they returned to their rooms

Day 8

18 March 2007

Zapata: La Turba; La Salinas

Weather: Dry, bright and sunny

Just after dawn we pulled up at La Turba and our target, Zapata Wren, was singing immediately as we got out of the bus. Frank played his tape and a few moments later the bird appeared in some bushes just across a small

channel where it sang in clear view for several minutes. Later on it crossed to our side of the channel and, for such a notoriously skulking species, rather disgraced itself by bouncing around in the open a few feet away. We then walked along the road, where some saw an American Bittern in flight, until we reached a point where we could scan the extensive marsh for the hoped-for Red-shouldered Blackbirds. After a few minutes we had a couple of distant birds in the scope where they remained in view for a while. A short jaunt to look for Zapata Sparrows met with no success but a few warblers were about, Tree Swallows were common overhead and just before we left a Purple Gallinule was watched in a Banana Tree eating, appropriately enough, bananas.

Heading back towards Playa Larga we stopped for a quick look in a more densely wooded area where Arturo had previously heard a Stygian Owl and our luck was in when one was quickly found roosting and gave superb views. Both Black-whiskered and Yellow-throated Vireos also showed well here. A roadside pool halfway back to Playa Larga contained more Purple Gallinules and a couple of Northern Jacanas but we were soon back at the hotel after a particularly successful and enjoyable morning.

In the afternoon we concentrated on the productive wetland and mangrove habitats of Las Salinas at the eastern end of the Zapata Peninsular. Early highlights were our first Blue-winged Teals, Lesser Yellowlegs and Least Sandpipers but rarer fare soon appeared in the shape of three American White Pelicans and a nice flock of Black Skimmers. Other new species included American Wigeons and Gull-billed Terns while 'Mangrove' Black Hawks, Caribbean Flamingos and several other choice species all showed well. Back at the hotel a taping session for Chuck Wills Widow was truncated when a Cuban Nightjar began to call nearby and this was lured in for excellent spotlight views.

Day 9

19 March 2007

Zapata: Sabsalon; Sopillar; Bermejas

Weather: dry, bright, rather breezy

Our final full day commenced with a visit to the dense forest at Sabsalon with Quail-doves once again our primary target, after all we had pretty much seen everything else. Though a couple of Quail-doves were briefly heard none were seen but plenty of other species kept up the interest and included our first Summer Tanager while welcome repeat performances came from Magnolia and several other Warblers and Red-legged Honeycreepers. A brief visit to Sopillar provided further flight views of Gundlach's Hawk and surprises in the shape of a Blue-winged Warbler and White-eyed Vireo.

The afternoon session began with a brief visit to a site where one of Arturo's associates had located a Blue-headed Quail-doves nest but unfortunately the termite mound on which it had been located had been destroyed, perhaps by a farmer collecting the mound for chicken food; yet another example of the many threats facing this rapidly declining species! At Bermejas, Quail-dove sightings were again at a premium though a single Grey-fronted was seen and other species included Magnolia and Blue-winged Warblers amongst several others and we enjoyed our first decent perched views of Cuban Parrots and many Cuban Parakeets. A final visit to the Bee Hummingbirds allowed us to marvel once more at these diminutive beauties and Fernandina's Flickers showed well before we returned to the hotel where a Cuban Nightjar once again showed very well at dusk.

Day 10**20 March 2007**

Zapata: Palpite; Havana; inbound to UK

Weather: dry, bright and sunny

Following a tip-off we visited nearby Palpite but the hoped-for Blue-headed Quail-doves failed to appear despite being heard, though compensation came in the shape of a close Key West Quail-dove that crossed the path plus a good selection of local species and migrant Warblers that included several Cuban Trogons and Vireos and an excellent selection of Warblers. There was time for a little final packing and a spot of lunch at the hotel before we loaded the bus and set off for Havana at 13.30. We were in the historic and very characterful city by 16.00 so had time for a little sightseeing and a coffee before saying our goodbyes to those remaining in Havana and driving to the airport. Check-in and immigration procedures were straightforward and at 01.00 we were on our way to Madrid.

Day 11**21 March 2007**

Inbound to UK cont.

We arrived at Madrid roughly on time and, after our journey to the terminal where our Heathrow flight departed, settled down for the final couple of hours in flight. At Heathrow we said our goodbyes and dispersed to various parts of the UK and beyond.

Systematic 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 other adjustments when these have been announced by major taxonomic bodies such as AOU (incl. the 47th Checklist supp.) and BOU.

Figures in brackets show the number of days out of 10 that the species was seen. Endemic species are designated 'E' and endemic races 'e'; species in square brackets are not included in the species total because they were heard only or were not seen by any group members.

Species marked NL were not seen by the tour leaders and those marked LO were seen only by the leaders or guides. Details of the conservation status of globally rare species are taken from the data zone of the Birdlife International website: <http://www.birdlife.org/index.html>

1 West Indian Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna arborea* (1:10)

Two were on an ornamental pond at the Tryp Hotel at Cayo Coco at dusk.

This Caribbean endemic is classified as VULNERABLE by Birdlife International/ IUCN on the basis of a rapid population decline (estimated at 10,000-20,000 individuals in 2000). Excessive hunting (for food and sport), habitat loss and perhaps predation by introduced species are the primary causes of ongoing declines and this species has become something of conservation flagship in the region

2 American Wigeon *Anas americana* (1:10)

A flock of 24 were at Las Salinas

3 Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* (1:10)

About 30 were at Las Salinas

4 Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* (1:10)

Two were at Las Salinas

5 Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* (1:10)

A female was on the fish ponds near San Diego del los Banos

6 Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* (4:10)

Up to 50 at and around Cayo Coco preceded about 20 at Las Salinas

7 Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* (1:10)

A male was on the fish ponds near San Diego del los Banos

8 Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps antillarum* (3:10)

Singles at the fish farm near San Diego del los Banos and en route to Cayo Coco were followed by at least 20 at Las Salinas

9 American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos* (1:10)

Three adults were at Las Salinas; this was a major rarity in Cuba until about 10 years ago but is now just about annual in very small numbers

10 Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis occidentalis* (4:10)

About 50 at the northern cays were followed by another 20 at Las Salinas

11 Neotropic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax brasilianus mexicanus* (1:10)

Common in the Zapata area where over 300 were noted at La Turba and Las Salinas

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

Quite common at Cayo Coco where about 60 were recorded

13 Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga* (3:10)

Three were at the lake on the outskirts of Moron, one en route to Zapata and one at La Turba

14 Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* (4:10)

About 60 were at Cayo Coco with another half-dozen or so at Zapata

15 American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus* (1:10)

One was seen briefly in flight at La Turba

16 Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias herodias* & *occidentalis* (7:10)

About 50 were seen at widespread wetland sites with three 'Great White Herons' (*occidentalis*) on the northern cays and a handful of 'Wurderman's' Herons (intergrade *herodias* x *occidentalis*) there and one at Las Salinas

17 'American' Great Egret *Ardea (alba) egretta* (9:10)

About 70 were seen in similar areas to the previous species

18 Snowy Egret *Egretta thula brewsteri* (7:10)

Almost 100 were noted in total

19 Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* (5:10)

About 40 were seen

20 Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor ruficollis* (5:10)

Just over 20 were noted at various wetlands

21 Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens* (4:10)

Three or four dark birds at Cayo Coco were followed by a couple of white individuals at Las Salinas

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

Quite common and widespread.

There is an increasing trend to consider birds in Europe, Africa and the Americas as a separate species from those in South and Southeast Asia but this treatment has not yet been adopted by any major taxonomic bodies

23 Green Heron *Butorides virescens virescens* &/or *maculata* (5:10)

After the first at the fish ponds near San Diego del los Banos a further nine were seen at scattered localities

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

Three were at La Turba

25 Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea bancrofti* (1:10)

An immature at Cayo Coco was the only one seen

26 White Ibis *Eudocimus albus* (5:10)

About 20 on the northern cays were followed by a further 30 or more in the Zapata area, several of which inhabited the lawns of the Playa Larga hotel

27 Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (1:10)

Two were seen briefly at the northern cays

28 Roseate Spoonbill *Ajaia ajaja* (2:10)

Singles were at Cayo Coco and Las Salinas

29 Wood Stork *Mycteria americana* (2:10)

A couple were seen in flight over Bermejas and Las Salinas

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

Very common and widespread

31 Caribbean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* (3:10)

A couple of thousand rather distant birds were on the northern cays but another 20 or so gave much closer views at Las Salinas

Apart from a small population on Galapagos this recently split species is confined to the Caribbean basin

32 Osprey *Pandion haliaetus carolinensis* (5:10)

Just over 20 were noted at various sites but mainly in the northern cays and at Zapata. All those seen well appeared to be of the migratory North American race rather than the rarer Caribbean race *ridgwayi* which has a much paler head

33 Snail Kite *Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus* (2:10)

At least 30 at the fish farm near San Diego del los Banos included a remarkable gathering of 22 in one field; another was seen on the lake near Moron.

Cuban birds were formerly accorded subspecies status (as *R. s. levis*) but this race is no longer considered valid, subspecies *plumbeus* also occurs in Florida

34 Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus fringilloides* (2:10) e

Two at La Guira were followed by one from the bus between Camaguey and Zapata (N/L)

35 Gundlach's Hawk *Accipiter gundlachi gundlachi* (3:10) E

A female at the nest on Cayo Coco was followed by singles in flight at Bermejas and Sopillar; not a bad haul of this sometimes difficult to connect with raptor.

Classified as ENDANGERED by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to its restricted range and very small population size (estimated at 300-400 individuals in 2000). Although never common the species has declined recently due to habitat loss and to some extent human persecution due to its habit of taking poultry. The largest remaining population is thought to be in eastern Cuba where birds are of the subspecies *wileyi*, the total population of the nominate race is probably very small indeed

36 'Cuban' (Common/ Mangrove) Black Hawk *Buteogallus (anthracinus/ subillis) gundlachii* (3:10) e

About 10 were on the northern cays and another six or so were found at Las Salinas.

'Mangrove' Black Hawks are sometimes regarded as a separate species (*B. subillis*) from those occurring in drier habitats but despite marked ecological differences and some minor differences in size a split is not universally supported. However, birds in Cuba also differ significantly in plumage as well as being distinctly smaller than those elsewhere so a (further) split of these might be in order, the name 'Cuban Crab Hawk' *B. gundlachi* has been suggested

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

Four at La Guira NP were followed by one over Bermejas

38 Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis solitudinis* (3:10) e

Singles were at la Guira NP, between there and Havana and along the approach road to Playa Larga from Australia

39 Crested Caracara *Caracara cheriway auduboni* (5:10)

After the first while en route to Cayo Coco from Havana a further 11 were noted on the northern cays and in Camaguey province.

Birds from the northern parts of the Americas are sometimes split from those in the south but this treatment does not have much recent support and, indeed, this species is now sometimes regarded as monotypic

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

Up to 40 of these attractive birds were seen at widespread localities.

The distinctive dimorphic race *sparveroides* also occurs on the southern Bahamas and Caymans, a split might be in order from North American populations but there has been little dedicated research

41 Merlin *Falco columbarius columbarius* (4:10)

Four in the northern cays were followed by three in the Zapata area.

It is possible that North American and Old World populations will be split in the future

42 Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus anatum/ tundrius* (2:10)

One near the fish ponds at San Diego del los Banos was followed by another that flew alongside the bus as we crossed the causeway to Cayo Coco

43 Clapper Rail *Rallus longirostris caribaeus* (2:10)

A couple of noisy birds were seen at dusk at Cayo Coco but one gave very good views creeping along the reed edge at Las Salinas

Subspecies *caribaeus* occurs throughout the Antilles from Cuba to Guadeloupe but is likely to be threatened by habitat loss

[Sora *Porzana carolina*

Two were heard but not seen at La Turba]

44 Purple Gallinule *Porphyryla martinica cerceris* (2:10)

A couple seen from the moving bus near Najasa preceded three or four more at La Turba and Zapata 'Canal'

45 Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus cachinnans* (2:10)

Two seen from the moving bus near Najasa were followed by six more at La Turba and Zapata 'canal'.

Although very similar to Old World populations in appearance birds in the New World are vocally very different and a split has been mooted

46 American Coot *Fulica americana americana* (3:10)

Ten on the fish ponds near San Diego del los Banos were followed by a similar number seen from the bus en route to Cayo Coco next day; at least 75 were then seen at Las Salinas

47 Limpkin *Aramus guarauna pictus* (3:10)

After the first two near Najasa a further six were divided between La Belen and Zapata

Subspecies *pictus* is the race occurring in Florida

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

10 on the northern cays were followed by about 30 at Las Salinas

49 Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia wilsonia* (1:10)

At least six were at Cayo Coco.

West Indian breeding birds are sometimes separated as subspecies *rufinucha* as they may show strong rufous tones on the head when breeding unlike other populations of *wilsonia*

50 Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* (1:10)

At least 20 wintering birds fed along the shore at Cayo Coco

51 Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus* (1:10)

One showed quite well at Cayo Coco

This winter visitor to Cuba from North America is classified as NEAR THREATENED by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to population declines associated with disturbance of coastal nesting sites, habitat loss and various other factors

52 Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus ternominatus* (5:10)

Just over 10 were seen at widespread localities

Subspecies *ternominatus* is confined to the Caribbean region but is a rather subtle race

53 Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus* (2:10)

One at the fish farm near San Diego del los Banos was followed by about 20 distant birds at Las Salinas.

The split of Old World Black-winged Stilt *H. himantopus* from New World *mexicanus* is now widely accepted

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

A couple seen from the moving bus south of Camaguey were followed by four at la Turba and on Zapata 'canal'

Subspecies *violacea* is confined to the Greater Antilles

55 Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* (4:10)

The 10 seen were divided between the fish ponds near San Diego del los Banos, the northern cays and the Zapata area

56 Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria* (2:10)

One flew off from Zapata Canal

57 Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* (3:10)

After the first at La Belen NP others were seen in flight at la Turba and about 20 were at Las Salinas

58 Willet *Tringa semipalmata* ssp (1:10)

Three roosting birds were at Cayo Romano

59 Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* (1:10)

About 10 were found at Las Salinas

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

Just over 20 were noted on the northern cays

61 Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* (1:10)

At least 50 were found at Las Salinas

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

Thirty or more Dowitchers at Cayo Coco and one at Las Salinas were assumed to be this species which is far commoner in Cuba than its Long-billed relative

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

Locally common at the northern cays, where about 50 were noted, with a couple more at Zapata and about 20 in Havana Bay

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

One was seen in flight as we crossed the Cayo Coco causeway

65 'American' Herring Gull *Larus (argentatus) smithsonianus* (1:10)

At least five were soaring around over Havana Bay

A split of American and European Herring Gulls seems in order they differ quite consistently in appearance and in their DNA profiles

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

Two at Cayo Romano/Coco were followed by one over Havana Bay.

Iceland seems like the most likely source of North American and Caribbean birds

[Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus recognita*

Heard at night at Playa Larga]

67 Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica aranea* (1:10)

A couple were at Las Salinas

68 Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* (2:10)

Up to four at the fish ponds near San Diego del los Banos were followed by about 30 at Las Salinas

69 'American' Royal Tern *Thalasseus (maxima) maxima* (4:10)

One was at the fish ponds near San Diego del los Banos, about 20 were seen on the northern cays and 10 were at Las Salinas

Birds in the Americas may warrant splitting from the smaller and paler-billed birds in West Africa

70 'American' Black Tern *Chlidonias (niger) surinamensis* (1:10)

One at the fish ponds near San Diego del los Banos was a Cuban rarity

Another potential split from its Old World counterpart which differs in appearance in all plumages

71 Common Tern *Sterna hirundo hirundo* (1:10)

Three were seen briefly as we re-crossed the Cayo Coco causeway

72 Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* (1:10)

Six were at the fish farm near San Diego del los Banos; this is a rather uncommon species in Cuba

73 Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger niger* (1:10)

A group of 20 were roosting at Las Salinas, a rather rare and erratic winter visitor to Cuba

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

A couple were seen quite briefly at Cayo Coco; somewhat blustery conditions around Zapata probably prevented more sightings as few pigeons were perching in exposed positions

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

Over fifty at Cayo Coco included a handful of obliging perched birds and another 20 were seen in flight at Zapata

This species has a range restricted to the Caribbean islands and adjacent mainland areas and is classified as NEAR THREATENED by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to population declines associated with habitat loss and over hunting

76 Plain Pigeon *Patagioenas inornata inornata* (1:10)

A couple near Najasa were followed shortly after by about six at La Belen; others were heard at these sites

This Caribbean endemic (which also occurs on Hispaniola, Jamaica and Puerto Rico) is classified as NEAR THREATENED by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to declining populations linked to habitat loss, hunting and perhaps predation by introduced species. Recent genetic studies suggest that more than one species may be involved with, for example, birds on Puerto Rico being a separate species from those on Hispaniola and Cuba

77 White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica asiatica* (5:10)

Five singles were noted at widespread localities

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

Ones and two were at Cayo Coco and the Zapata area on several occasions

Subspecies *zenaida* occurs throughout the northern Caribbean

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

Common and rather widespread

Nominate *macroura* is the resident subspecies of the northern Caribbean

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

Quite common and widespread with at least a handful most days, often in hotel grounds, and many more heard

Subspecies *insularis* is widespread throughout the Greater Antilles

81 Key West Quail-dove *Geotrygon chrysis* (2:10)

One was seen briefly or in flight at Bermejas, another was heard at Sabsalon and one showed briefly but well as it walked across the trail at close range at Palpite.

A Caribbean endemic that occurs throughout the Greater Antilles except Jamaica but is now only a rare visitor to Florida where, as its name suggests, it was originally discovered by Audubon who described it as 'the most beautiful cooer of the woods'

82 Gray-fronted Quail-dove *Geotrygon caniceps* (3:10) E

A total of four were seen quite well at Bermejas on our first afternoon visit to the main forest there and another was seen briefly on our final visit.

Grey-headed Quail Dove, as was, is classified as VULNERABLE by Birdlife International/ IUCN who have not yet taken into account a recent split into two species (AOU 45th Checklist supp.). Birds on Hispaniola are now called White-fronted Quail-dove *G. leucometopius*. The 2000 population estimate of 2,500-10,000 individuals therefore covers two species and needs adjustment, as may the conservation status of each species. Habitat fragmentation and hunting for food are the primary causes of ongoing declines in Cuba but predation by introduced species may also be having an adverse impact.

[Blue-headed Quail-dove *Starnoenas cyanocephala* E

This notoriously elusive species was heard but not seen at Sabsalon and Palpite]

Classified as ENDANGERED by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to a rapidly declining population (estimated at 1,000-2,500 in 2000). Excessive hunting for food (this species is regarded as especially tasty!) coupled with habitat loss (exacerbated by hurricane damage) are the primary causes for the ongoing decline

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

About 25 near Najasa and La Belen were followed by at least 40 at Bermejas; most were seen in flight but several were also seen in the scope

Classified as VULNERABLE by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to the dwindling population (estimated at 2,500-10,000 but once an abundant species in many parts of Cuba). Primary causes for the ongoing decline are habitat loss (including the destruction of nest trees by those collecting Cuban Parrot chicks) and persecution as a crop pest, though collection for the cagebird trade now seems to be a less significant threat than previously

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

Two or three at La Belen were followed by a total of six at Bermejas.

This Caribbean endemic (which also occurs on the Bahamas and Caymans) is classified as NEAR THREATENED by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to habitat loss and collection for the cagebird trade. Hurricane damage to nesting trees poses another threat as does the cutting down of trees while collecting chicks

85 Great Lizard Cuckoo *Coccyzus merlini merlini* (8:10) e

Up to 10 per day, but more often one or two, were seen after the first couple on Cayo Coco

A Caribbean endemic that also occurs on the Bahamas, though birds there lack rufous wings

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

Quite common and widespread

87 'Antillean' Barn Owl *Tyto (alba) furcata* (1:10)

One was seen briefly at La Belen

Subspecies *furcata* occurs in Jamaica, Cuba, and the Caymans. The possibility of a split has been mooted

88 Bare-legged Owl *Gymnoglaux lawrencii* (1:10) E

A pair showed very well at their day roost at Bermejas.

Although formerly included in the genus *Otus* (Scops/ Screech Owls) this species is now placed in its own monotypic genus.

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

One at La Belen was followed by two or three very showy individuals at Bermejas where copulation was observed

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

One was spotlighted in the grounds of the Mirador hotel in San Diego del los Banos on our first evening and one was found at its day roost at La Turba where it gave superb scope views. The regular birds at Playa Larga

Hotel were seen several times as we came and went from our rooms after dark and also heard calling. Although quite widespread in the neotropics this species is far easier to see in Cuba than elsewhere

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

Two were found at Bermejas just after dark one night but on subsequent nights one gave superb views in the spotlight at the Playa Larga Hotel.

Formerly considered conspecific with birds on Hispaniola and called Greater Antillean Nightjar but there are marked differences in appearance and voice. Another subspecies has recently been described from Islas Pinos

[Swift species

One over our lunch stop near Santa Clara never came close enough to be clinched though it was clearly either a White-collared *Streptoprocne zonaris* or Black Swift *Cypseloides niger* and very likely the former]

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

Almost all of the 15 or so seen were observed stops as we travelled along the autopiste but a couple were over the Mirador Hotel in San Diego del los Banos

93 Cuban Emerald Chlorostilbon *ricordii ricordii* (9:10) e

Quite common and widespread with almost 50 noted.

Also occurs on the Bahamas

94 Bee Hummingbird *Mellisuga helenae* (3:10) E

At Bermejas a fully gorgetted male, a partially gorgetted male and one or two females were found. The gorgetted male gave particularly good views on our first visit there but was not seen subsequently so the forty minutes we spent admiring him down to a few feet was time very well spent. Undoubtedly one of the highlights of the tour. Classified as NEAR THREATENED by Birdlife International/ IUCN as a result of ongoing habitat loss and fragmentation, it is also vulnerable to significant losses during severe hurricanes. Arturo is investigating the possibility that there may be a previously undescribed subspecies in eastern Cuba

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

Up to six at La Guira were followed by a similar number in wooded contexts at Zapata, others were heard. The national bird of Cuba and an absolute delight.

Another subspecies occurs on the Islas Pinos

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

After the first half dozen were seen and heard at Cayo Coco this gorgeous species was then regularly found; a pair at La Belen gave outstanding views during our lunch break there. In total over 20 were seen with several others heard

97 Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon* (5:10)

In total 16 were seen with 10 of these at Las Salinas

98 West Indian Woodpecker *Melanerpes superciliaris superciliaris* (8:10) e

Quite common and widespread with almost 30 noted. Particularly prominent and noisy at La Belen NP.

Also occurs on the Bahamas and Grand Cayman

99 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* (6:10)

After the first at La Guira a further six were noted, mostly at Zapata

100 Cuban Woodpecker *Xiphidiopicus percussus* probably all ssp *percussus* (7:10) E

Fairly common and widespread with at least 14 seen

101 Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus chrysocaulosus* (1:10) e

After the first (nesting) birds at Cayo Coco a further six were found at Najasa/ La Belen and Bermejas.

Cuban *chrysocaulosus* is sometimes mooted as another endemic species (Cuban Flicker) but little research has been carried out

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

A total of five birds (including one pair at an active nest) were found at Bermejas where we had excellent views on each visit.

Classified as VULNERABLE by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to its restricted range and very small population size (estimated at 600-800 individuals in 2000 but this is perhaps an underestimate). Habitat loss and fragmentation is the primary cause of concern with additional factors being the destruction of nesting trees by people collecting Cuban Parrot chicks for the cagebird trade. Hurricane damage to nesting trees represents a further threat.

103 Eastern Wood-Pewee *Contopus virens* (1:10)

One was seen briefly at La Guira NP (NL)

104 Cuban Pewee *Contopus caribaeus caribaeus* (6:10) e

Quite common and widespread with about 20 seen and others heard

A Caribbean endemic that also occurs on the Bahamas.

Formerly part of Greater Antillean Pewee *Contopus caribaeus* prior to that species being split into three species which are distributed throughout the north Caribbean

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

Fairly common and widespread with a handful found in most wooded contexts

A Caribbean endemic that also occurs on the Bahamas and Caymans

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

Two singles between Camaguey and Najasa were followed by one at Bermejas, the vanguard of the arriving summer population

A widespread Caribbean endemic

107 Loggerhead Kingbird *Tyrannus caudifasciatus caudifasciatus* (9:10) e

Quite common and widespread with over 35 recorded

A Caribbean endemic that occurs throughout the Greater Antilles and Bahamas although the Cuban nominate race is rather distinct in appearance (and somewhat more similar in plumage to Eastern Kingbird *T. tyrannus* than more eastern races) and may warrant further taxonomic investigation

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

Two showed very well between Camaguey and Najasa with a couple more heard at La Belen later

Classified as ENDANGERED by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to its very restricted and rather fragmented range and small and declining population (estimated at 250-1000 individuals in 2000). Reasons for the species decline are uncertain but habitat loss is a likely factor and this presumably contributed to its extinction in the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos

109 White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus* (2:10)

Singles were seen briefly at Cayo Coco and Sopillar

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

Up to six gave good views at Cayo Paredon Grande, the only Cuban site for this very localised species.

This Caribbean endemic with a very restricted range was previously thought to be just a winter visitor to Cuba from its core range on the Bahamas but breeding on Cayo Paredon Grande has recently been confirmed. Also occurs on the Cayman Islands

111 Cuban Vireo *Vireo gundlachii gundlachii* and *orientalis* (4:10) E

Small numbers were present at most well wooded sites, more were heard than seen but at least 15 showed well

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

One showed well at La Turba

113 Black-whiskered Vireo *Vireo altiloquus altiloquus* (4:10)

The eight seen (and several others heard) were widely distributed but most prominent and noisy at La Guira NP where four were noted

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

Six were seen (and, more importantly, heard!) between Camaguey and Najasa with a couple more heard later on at La Belen.

This species (formerly part of the more widespread Palm Crow *C. palmarum*) is classified as ENDANGERED by Birdlife International/ IUCN on the basis of its very restricted range (which now lies entirely within Camaguey Province) and apparently declining population (estimated at 2,500-10,000 in 2000). The causes of the decline are unknown but habitat loss/ change may have recently brought this species into competition with Cuban Crow for the first time

115 Cuban Crow *Corvus nasicus* (4:10) E

Quite common at and around Najasa and La Belen with a couple more at Playa Larga and elsewhere when travelling

116 Cuban Martin *Progne cryptoleuca* (5:10) E

Appearances by this species were very unpredictable, and often brief, though about 20 were seen in total

117 Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor* (5:10)

Very small numbers prior to our arrival at Zapata were followed by several hundred migrants there

118 Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* (3:10)

Most of the 60 or so recorded were at Zapata, up to 50 were in the vicinity of Zapata 'canal'

119 'Caribbean' Cave Swallow *Pterochelidon (fulva) cavicola* (5:10) e

Four at La Guira were followed by a further eight rather fleetingly seen individuals at a variety of sites. Caribbean races differ consistently from paler-rumped mainland populations

120 'American' Barn Swallow *Hirundo (rustica) erythrogaster* (1:10)

After a couple of brief singles at various sites about 10 migrants were hawking over the lawns at the Playa Larga Hotel just prior to our departure for Havana.

New World erythrogaster differs consistently from Old World populations in head pattern and other ways

121 Zapata Wren *Ferminia cerverai* (1:10) E

After a short wait one responded strongly to the tape and gave prolonged good views, eventually coming to within a few feet and singing from an exposed perch!

Classified as ENDANGERED by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to its very restricted range and small population size (estimated at 1,000-2,500 individuals in 2000). Major threats included habitat loss due to drainage and dry season burning and perhaps also predation by introduced mongooses and rats

122 Blue-grey Gnatcatcher *Polioptila caerulea* (2:10)

Two were found at La Belen

123 Cuban Gnatcatcher *Polioptila lembeyi* (1:10) E

Up to eight showed very well at Cayo Paredon Grande; later on a couple more were found on Cayo Coco; excellent little birds!

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

Three were seen well and a couple more heard at La Guira National Park.

Classified as NEAR THREATENED by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to its very restricted and shrinking range. Habitat loss due to agricultural expansion is the primary cause of concern though populations in the main stronghold of Pinar del Rio Province (which includes La Guira NP) are regarded as stable and the habitat their relatively secure

125 Red-legged Thrush *Turdus plumbeus rubripes* (9:10) e

Quite common and widespread with over 30 seen and others heard

A widespread Caribbean endemic, the Cuban subspecies being unique in showing a solidly black throat and rufous wash on the belly

126 Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis* (5:10)

Six on Cayo Coco were followed by another 10 in the Zapata area

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

Very common and widespread with well over 50 seen and many others heard

Subspecies *orpheus* is found throughout the Caribbean

128 Bahama Mockingbird *Mimus gundlachii gundlachii* (1:10)

One gave excellent views at Cayo Paredon Grande, the first Arturo had seen there for 10 years.

Confined to the Bahamas and Jamaica (where rare) and a very small area on Cuba (mainly Cayo Guillermo)

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

Singles were at Cayo Coco, Sopillar and Bermejas

130 Northern Parula *Parula americana* (4:10)

The six seen were spread between La Guira, Cayo Coco, La Belen and a couple of sites at Zapata

131 Yellow Warbler *Dendroica aestiva* or *petechia* ssp (1:10)

A couple of brief singles at Cayo Paredon Grande and another heard at Las Salinas were the only records.

132 Magnolia Warbler *Dendroica magnolia* (3:10)

One at La Guira was followed by three more at Zapata sites

133 Cape May Warbler *Dendroica tigrina* (2:10)

A total of five were found on Cayo Coco

134 Black-throated Blue Warbler *Dendroica caerulescens caerulescens* (7:10)

One of the commoner migrant warblers with about 30 noted at widespread sites

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

One at La Guira was followed by three on Cayo Coco

136 Black-throated Green Warbler *Dendroica virens* (6:10)

The eight seen were widely distributed after the first on Cayo Coco

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

After the first two at La Guira NP a further eight were seen at widespread localities

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

At least six were seen well in the pines at La Guira with several others heard

A restricted range Caribbean endemic that also occurs locally on the Bahamas

139 Prairie Warbler *Dendroica discolor* ssp (6:10)

Most of the 10 seen were on the northern cays with others at La Belen and Zapata

140 Palm Warbler *Dendroica palmarum* ssp (10:10)

Very common and widespread in disturbed and edge habitats, almost 100 were noted

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

One at La Guira NP was followed by a further 11 at widespread sites

142 American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla* (8:10)

Quite common and widespread with nearly 50 recorded

143 Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorus* (2:10)

Singles were very briefly at Cayo Coco and Sopillar (NL)

144 Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapillus* ssp (5:10)

After the first three at Cayo Coco another three were recorded at Zapata sites

145 Northern Waterthrush *Seiurus noveboracensis* (6:10)

Two at the lake near Moron were followed by another six at Zapata sites

146 Louisiana Waterthrush *Seiurus motacilla* (1:10)

One was briefly along a stream at La Guira NP

147 Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas trichas* (7:10)

About 25 were recorded at widespread sites with the largest concentration at La Turba where many others were heard but not seen

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

Locally common with up to 10 at La Guira and a couple of sites in the Zapata area

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

Only found on Cayo Coco where it was fairly common; about 20 were seen at three sites there

150 Hooded Warbler *Wilsonia citrina* (1:10)

One was very fleetingly seen at a drinking pool at Bermejas

151 Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra rubra* (2:10)

Females were at Sabsalon and Sopillar

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

Locally common at La Guira and on the northern cays with a couple more at Zapata.

A Caribbean endemic that also occurs on the Bahamas and Cozumel (off Mexico); this species was recently split from the more widespread 'Stripe-headed Tanager/ Spindalis' which is now regarded as four species distributed throughout the Greater Antilles but only *S. zena* occurs on more than one island and is polytypic

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

The eight or so recorded were divided between La Guira and Sabsalon.

There is uncertainty about whether this species is a wild native of Cuba or was once introduced as an exotic cagebird

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

After some work a pair were finally tracked down at La Belen and showed quite well, even perching for the scope briefly.

Has been introduced on New Providence on the Bahamas

155 Yellow-faced Grassquit *Tiaris olivacea olivacea* (8:10)

Quite common and widespread in disturbed habitats with over 70 noted

156 Cuban Bullfinch *Melopyrrha nigra nigra* (4:10) e

After about 20 were found at La Guira this species was seen in smaller numbers at Cayo Coco, La Belen and Bermejas.

A Caribbean endemic that also occurs on Grand Cayman

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

At least two were at the Ecological Trail car park on Cayo Coco; others (of the Zapata Swamp nominate subspecies) were heard but not seen at La Turba.

Classified as ENDANGERED by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to its very small populations size (estimated at 250-1000 birds) and ongoing habitat loss. There are three discrete subspecies, that on Cayo Coco is the most stable population but is vulnerable to habitat loss resulting from the expansion of the tourist industry in the northern cays. A third subspecies occurs in Guantanamo Province; each subspecies appears ecologically distinct.

[Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* (1:10)

A single female was at the hotel garden on Cayo Coco. (LO)]

158 Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* (1:10)

Two or three females or immatures were at the Ecological Trail drinking pool at Cayo Coco.

This species is classified as NEAR THREATENED by Birdlife International/ IUCN due to population declines associated with habitat loss and capture for the cagebird trade

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

Four were found at La Turba though views were mostly rather distant

160 Tawny-shouldered Blackbird *Agelaius humeralis humeralis* (4:10) e

Most of the unidentified Blackbirds seen where perhaps this species but positively identified birds included 10 at La Guira, 20 at La Belen and 10 at Zapata; finally, a pair were in the departure hall at Havana Airport!

Elsewhere this species occurs only in Haiti where it is rare, possibly even extinct

161 'Cuban' Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella (magna) hippocrepis* (4:10) e

A couple showed well near San Diego del los Banos and a handful more were seen during journeys.

The taxonomic status of birds on Cuba (where there are probably two subspecies, one still undescribed) requires further study and a split from Eastern Meadowlark is possible as there are reportedly marked vocal differences

162 Cuban Blackbird *Dives atrovioacea* (4:10) E

Ten at La Guira were followed smaller numbers at Cayo Coco, La Belen and Zapata

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

Very common and widespread with hundreds seen

A Caribbean endemic that is widespread in the Greater Antilles

164 Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis* (1:10)

About 50 were at La Belen and one was at Sabsalon

165 'Cuban' (Greater Antillian) Oriole *Icterus (dominicensis) melanopsis* (4:10) e

Six on Cayo Coco were followed by a further 6 at La Belen and Zapata.

Greater Antillean Oriole was formerly included in Black-cowled Oriole *I. prothemelas* and a further split to create an endemic Cuban Oriole *I. melanopsis* is now proposed by Garrido, Wiley and Kirkonnell (*Ornitologia Neotropical* (16: pp.449–470)) who suggest Greater Antillean Oriole would be better regarded as four separate Caribbean species based on differences in voice and appearance

Non-native bird species recorded:

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*

Rock Dove *Columbia livia*

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Tricoloured Munia *Lonchura malacca*

Other fauna

Various unidentified Lizards were seen, Cuban Tree Frogs were noted at a couple of sites and huge numbers of Land Crabs were an ever present feature at Zapata