

St Lucia

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 12 January 2013



Fraser's Dolphins by Ed Drewitt



View across St Lucia by Ed Drewitt



Crested Hummingbird by Janine Marchant



Tropical Mockingbird by Janine Marchant

Report compiled by Ed Drewitt
Images by Ed Drewitt and Janine Marchant



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 Leader:	Ed Drewitt
Participants:	Karen Morris Janet Ettershank Peter Wrightson Liz Wrightson Richard Tucker Jacqui Tucker Janine Marchant Paul Marchant Linda Forrest Andrew Forrest Malcolm Pemble Linda Pemble

Introduction

With hot sunshine, blue seas and plenty of birdlife, this 9-day tour was a great way to start 2013. The island's rich birdlife, thick, mountainous rainforests, and clear, blue seas brimming with fishes, provided a memorable week's holiday for our group of 12. The endemics St Lucia Parrot, St Lucia Warbler, St Lucia Oriole, and St Lucia Black Finch all put in a good appearance while Banaquits, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and other common birds joined us at close hand at breakfast and lunch, attracted by sugar and the chance of a free lunch!

We were rewarded with over 300 Fraser's Dolphins feeding around the boat while the rainforest skyride gave everyone the chance to see all the different levels of a rainforest – we even rose above the emergence level! By sea, foot and vehicle, we were able to experience St Lucia at its best and savour some incredible local Caribbean foods and courses. Snorkelling was a very popular too and during the afternoons many of the group chose to snorkel off the beach, seeing hundreds of colourful fishes, sea fans and corals.

Day 1

Friday 4th January

29°C; London to St Lucia

We left behind a grey day in Sussex, and with extra fuel on board to help us battle the strong winds coming up from the Azores, we headed west through Cornwall, over the Atlantic south of Ireland and then flew south-west past the Azores and on to the Caribbean. We arrived on a hot, steamy day at Hewanorra Airport on the southern tip of St Lucia, ready for our transfer to the hotel. Once through arrivals, which took extra time as unusually three planes arrived at the same time due to the weather systems, we were greeted by hotel staff and spent the hour's transfer on a scenic tour along the south-west coastline of St.Lucia, passing through Vieux Fort, Laborie, La Fargue and Soufrière on the way. For most of the journey, the Gros Piton and Petit Piton, local volcanic landmarks, were always evident. Before the light faded, the odd Grey Kingbird could be spotted on electricity wires, while a few Carib Grackles fed by the roadside.

The luxury hotel resort Anse Chastanet, lies just beyond the village of Soufrière. After a refreshing non-alcoholic cocktail known as the Bentley, amazing views looking down to the beach, and paperwork signed, we were all led to our luxury rooms to unpack and relax. We then met for dinner at 7.15pm in the Treehouse Restaurant, and despite the long day, it was a chance for everyone to meet informally, and enjoy some exquisite local food and courses.

The night was a wet one, with rain moving in from the mountains further north-east of the hotel. The squeaks of the whistling frogs were constant throughout the night along with the pitter patter of rain. However, as dawn broke the rain eased off, and despite some heavy squalls during breakfast, the sun shone and the temperature quickly rose.

Day 2

Saturday 5th January

Anse Chastanet and Anse Mamim

As dawn broke, breakfast was a leisurely affair to allow the group to relax, unpack and catch up on sleep. A fine breakfast of hot and cold foods greeted us in the Treehouse Restaurant where we also got our first good views of the local avian residents. Near the hot food area, the balcony was busy with Bananaquits feeding on sugar which the omelette chef had laid out for them a little earlier. Lesser Antillean Bullfinches perched on the table or chairs looking for a free meal, while the larger, starling-size Carib Grackles with their twisted tails were ever present. The odd iridescent Shiny Cowbird made a brief visit before the breakfast room got too busy.

At 10am we had a briefing from the duty manager to know where things are and what is available. Down by the scuba diving shop we even had the pleasant surprise of meeting Len Goodman, the lead judge on the BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing!* After the welcome orientation talk we had a refreshing and delicious lemon squash before exploring the hotel grounds – we walked as far as Anse Mamim Beach.

A few Zenaida Doves with their warm, purple sheen on their neck, and at least or four Common Ground Doves with their peppered heads were feeding under the trees. Our first marine bird was a stunning Brown Booby with its bright white chest and dark, chocolate brown body. It was gracefully flying over the water – a contrast to clumsy walking on land, hence their name booby, derived from the Spanish word bobo mean fool or clown. However, they are still able to negotiate very small spaces on cliffs with remarkable accuracy.

Out at sea we caught sight of a single Magnificent Frigatebird, the kite of the sea, with a long scissor-shaped tail and long, angled wings. In the hot sunshine, a patch of white-flowering plants were attracting dozens of butterflies of at least ten species, including the Caribbean Buckeye (with many 'eyes'), Long-tailed Skipper, the highly migratory Great Southern White, the unmistakable, bright orange Gulf Fritillary, Large Sulphur, Little Yellow, Disjunct Scrub Hairstreak, Caribbean Scrub Hairstreak, and even a superb Painted Lady. Meanwhile, a Peregrine flew across the tops of the cliffs – a migrant from northern parts of North America. A small group of Black-faced Grassquits flew up from some grasses – the males a dark, sooty black colour and look like they have been dipped in black power.

On our walk back we stopped to look at the butterflies again, notching up a few more species including Hanno's Blue, and Broken Dash Skipper. A few also saw Broad-winged Dragonlets, each translucent wing with a black square.

The cliffs themselves were fascinating – a conglomerate rock made up of pumice and other volcanic boulders of various sizes ‘cemented’ in with a fine mud. Over millions of years the whole mass of mud and boulders has turned into one whole lump of rock, and is now slowly being eroded by the sea and weather. There were various trees of interest too including Red Birch, Tamarind and Mango.

After a delicious a la carte lunch in the Trou Au Diable beach restaurant, we met our hotel guide and local naturalist Meno. Some of the group re-traced their steps from the morning while others took a quick wet hop on and off the hotel’s shuttle dive boat to Anse Mamim, a former sugar plantation from 200 years ago. Now it is an area of secondary woodland growth with some managed open areas and a small reservoir of water. Artefacts and remnants of buildings left in situ leave reminders of the once lucrative sugar trade and associated slavery that once took place here. The area is now full of Coconut Trees, Africa Tulip trees, Ginger Lilies, and the national tree of St Lucia, the Calabash Tree. We saw wild orchids growing as parasites from the bark of trees. Meno guided us through the plantation, telling stories about many of the plants his grandmother used to heal him with when he was sick. From rubbing and smelling local Bay Tree leaves, to trying some fresh cocoa milk from a Cocoa Pod, we got the chance to touch, smell and taste some of the locally grown fruits and nuts which we take for granted in supermarkets back at home. Some of the group even had a cocoa seed spitting competition – a past time Manu and friends took part in as children. Peter won and managed to spit his the furthest! A new game for the Olympics perhaps?!

Alongside the plants there was plenty of birdlife. Close to the beach, by a river running in to the sea, a Spotted Sandpiper was busy preening and bobbing. The odd St Lucia Pewee was calling, ‘pee-wee’, and as we walked into an open area we had lovely views of one, our first St Lucian endemic for the trip. This robin-size bird is a type of flycatcher and was certainly living up to its name as it flew out to catch an unsuspecting gnat. Nearby a juvenile Broad-winged Hawk was perched on a low tree branch, giving great views of its heavily streaked chest before flying off. It was easy to see why it had its name – its wings were incredibly broad and Sparrowhawk-like. A Grey Tumbler and a Lesser Antillean Saltator were also heard while a Little Blue Heron flew upstream. Lesser Antillean Bullfinches and Bananaquits were common, especially around feeders near the old buildings. A Spectacled Thrush flew through the trees and a male Antillean Crested Hummingbird perched on a branch. During our walk we also had views of a few different Purple-throated Caribs and the bright yellow-breasted St Lucia Warblers, our second endemic bird for the trip.

On some open grassy area Manu showed us a species of Mimosa, a tiny plant with folds up its leaves when touched. We also got to scrunch and smell the aromatic scents of the leaves of Lime, Grapefruit and Tangarine trees. Meanwhile, other animals included the Antillean Skimmer, a large red hawker dragonfly, and Red Bees busily protecting a magnificent nest and the yellow-coloured honeycomb. Apparently it has been there for 20 years, snugly fitting in the conglomerate rock. A rotting branch was covered in a fungus which looked just like supermarket Oyster Mushrooms. Meno impressed everyone when he picked the tip of a fern and pressed it on his forearm. As he removed the fern, a clear silver print was left on his arm – hence the name of the plant, Tattoo Fern.

With some time left to relax and rest, we finished the evening off at the Beach Grill restaurant on the beach with the sound of gently breaking waves and a pleasant breeze. Some of the group had been snorkelling while others had been enjoying afternoon tea or a lie on the beach. Watts’ Anole Lizards were commonly seen all around the hotel grounds.

Day 3

Sunday 6th January

Des Cartier

With everyone up and ready at 5.45am, we waited for both buses to arrive and then headed south and then east to the rainforest track known as Des Cartier, part of the Quilesse Rainforest Reserve. Grey Kingbirds were commonly perched on the electricity wires along with the odd American Kestrel. At one location over 20 Cattle Egrets were gathered together on wires – they looked like a collection of white plastic bags! We meandered up hills and into the mountains passing more banana plantations. In amongst the banana plants there was plenty of the sought after dasheen (a root vegetable), plantain (look very similar to bananas), cashew nut, avocado and mango trees. One mango tree had a nice selection of ripe fruits while nearby grapefruit trees were full of yellowing fruits.

At the reserve car park our hotel guide Manu took us a few kilometres into the tropical rainforest (c. 1800 feet above sea level) where we got to see some incredible trees, ferns, epiphytes, bromeliads, and other plants which looked a fresh, lush green colour in the dappled light. The start of the walk was quite windy and was followed by a heavy shower. However, once this had passed the forest suddenly came alive with birds. A few St Lucia Warblers were singing – they sound a little like a Wren. Below us in the valley we heard two or three Red-throated Solitaires with their single, drawn out note transmitting through the forest. Manu showed us resin from the Incense Tree. The sap/ooze from the tree is dried, powdered and used in the Catholic churches in St Lucia where the smell of incense is wafted around during services. As we edged closer to some clearings produced by land slips during a hurricane a few years ago, a very obliging male St Lucia Oriole was busy foraging in some dead palm fronds, oblivious to all our binoculars and scopes! We could see how his orange-yellow and black plumage kept him cryptic in this type of habitat. His steely-grey legs certainly contrasted with his plumage.

At a clear opening looking out across the forest we had incredible views of St Lucia Parrots – over half an hour or more we saw at least eight, some close, and others passing by in pairs. This part of the forest was sheltered from the winds and favoured the parrots' presence, as they don't like the wind. We had the chance to see their blue heads, pale eyes, red wing patches, and light green tails, plus their typical parrot calls. During our parrot-watching session, Purple-throated Caribs were often chasing each other through the trees and ferns and as we departed one individual was sat preening on a branch. Its throat looked more red than purple, and we could see its long tongue sticking out as it preened. The tongue is used for drinking nectar from long colourful tubular flowers. A Pearly-eyed Thrasher and a Mangrove Cuckoo also flew across the opening and were seen briefly. Adams Toussant from the Forestry Department joined us towards the end and gave us a little more insight into the parrots – there are thought to be only around 2,000 living in the rainforests of St Lucia. As we headed back we heard two or three St Lucia Pewees calling while the off bright-orange Flambeau butterflies flew past.

Leaving Des Cartiers we followed Adams and headed for Moule A Chique, a large hill on the southern tip of the island. From here we had remarkable views of the island and could see the rain cloud formed by the mountains drifting towards the west of the island (and our hotel!) in the prevailing wind. From here we looked down to the sea keeping our eyes open for a special seabird, the Red-billed Tropicbird. It was very windy and not ideal for them, but with a little patience we saw at least half a dozen flying low over the sea – they were bright white, elongated seabirds with long, streamer-like tails. They were either heading out to sea or coming towards the cliffs below the lighthouse where they breed. A female frigatebird drifted past giving excellent views of her long-angled profile, white head, and pale patches on the tops of her wings.

We headed back to the hotel for a late lunch and dined on a variety of starter and mains from the a la carte menu before relaxing for the afternoon. We finished the evening with a lovely meal in the Treehouse Restaurant before retiring for the night ready for a later 9am start to go dolphin-watching.

Day 4

Monday 7th January

Dolphin Watching off the coast of Anse Chastanet and Soufrière; 29 C

It was a bright morning with a few showers, and at breakfast more of the local birds came out of the forest to greet us. Looking out over the nearby trees were bullfinches, grackles and at least 30 Bananaquits. After breakfast we met at the beach at 9am and boarded our catamaran to go dolphin watching. As we ventured out to sea it was very warm, sunny and ideal for spotting cetaceans. It wasn't long before we had our first dolphins in the distance. The sea was relatively calm and absent of any 'white horses', so once we had white splashes towards the horizon we knew we had dolphins. As we sailed towards them, we could see there were lots of them. They were Fraser's Dolphins, and for the next 45 minutes we watched as 300 plus fed around us. As one group of 50 surfaced and went back under, another 50 – 100 would quickly do the same. They often all disappeared together, feeding down to 600 metres below the surface before coming up for air en masse. At times the water 'boiled' as the dolphins chased and fed on fish close to the surface. The school contained many smaller, young animals which leapt right out of the water when they came up to breathe. In the right light we could see the pink bellies of these medium-size dolphins. The easterly winds meant the sea was calm just out of Anse Chastanet, but became choppier the further south we sailed.

We left the dolphins and continued to scan the sea. We saw plenty of flying fish jumping out of the water, some very small while larger ones were often mistaken for birds gliding across the sea. As we slowly headed back a Royal Tern frequently joined us – occasionally dipping in to the water to try for a fish. Various Brown Boobies also drifted past and one individual kept circling around the boat giving excellent views of his plumage. It often tried to catch the flying fish, flying into the water at an angle and pelting towards the fish just below the surface. A few frigatebirds were also seen, and as we came back to Anse Chastanet we watched 10 Brown Boobies perched on the cliffs very close to the bay.

After a two and half hours at sea, it was time for lunch. Many of the group stopped for lunch at the Trou Au Diable beach restaurant before retiring for the afternoon and doing their own thing. Mangrove Cuckoos were in the woodland surrounding the hotel rooms along with Zenaida Doves, Common Ground Doves, Tropical Mockingbird, Shiny Cowbirds, Bananaquits, Lesser Antillean Bullfinches, Caribbean Elaenia and St Lucia Warbler. The reefs provided an excellent chance to see hundreds of different tropical fishes and even a small group of Caribbean Reef Squids. We met again for a relaxing evening in the hotel's Apsara Restaurant – a delightful mix of East Indian cuisines Caribbean style. And for those wanting the beach grill menu, this was also available.

Day 5

Tuesday 8th January

Millet Trail; 28°C

We left at 5.45am and had heavy rain throughout most of the journey to Millet Trail, a rainforest reserve.

However, as the sun came up and the easterly wind increased in speed the rain moved on, and by the time we reached the reserve the rain had stopped. Our guide for the trip was Charmain. While eating our packed breakfasts, a few Black-faced Grassquits fed on the ground and Grey Kingbirds perched on the nearby wires. We walked a few hundred yards along a path into an opening looking out across the forest, mountains, and a huge reservoir below. There were some incredible stands of tree ferns on the mountain slopes. Along the track halved coconuts have been put on stakes as bird food – shortly after Hurricane Tomas struck, many birds had little food to forage for and took to feeding on the coconuts instead. Many have become habituated to these, including the St Lucia Oriole.

Despite the wind and with a little patience, some birds began to reveal themselves. With a little pishing to attract the birds, Bananaquits were usually the first to find out what the sound was, followed by the Lesser Antillean Bullfinches. On this occasion a female, and later a male, Antillean Crested Hummingbird perched nearby - the male's green crest very visible. A Lesser Antillean Saltator also appeared but remained elusive for the group. Two Broad-winged Hawks were riding in the winds, and two St Lucia Parrots flew past noisily. When we looked towards the other side of the ridge we were stood on, we had fine views of a few Green-throated Caribs. These tiny hummingbirds are less easy to see but the winds meant they were less active and were stopping to perch for longer. With the scope on an individual, everyone was able to see the bright green iridescent colours over the body of the bird and the shiny-blue tail and rump.

Manu, our hotel guide, who had also joined us, was showing us the marble-size orange fruits known locally as gwigwi from a palm tree. The nuts inside are really hard and loved by the St Lucia Parrots. Manu split one open with his teeth to reveal a coconut like flesh. Meanwhile, the odd Red-snouted Tree Frog called for a short period – they sounded like a mobile phone text coming through! As we wandered back we found a female Black Finch. Her pink legs distinguished her from the Lesser Antillean Bullfinch which has dark, grey legs. She came down to some coconut before being chased off by the bullfinches. We spent the next half an hour wandering down into another part of the forest to an opening where a landslide had occurred a few years ago. We passed a lovely stand of pink Inferior Lily. A Mangrove Cuckoo was making us work hard to see it, calling above us in the canopy but being elusive. The coconut feeders meant we found another female Black Finch with the bullfinches, and on the walk back up to the centre a Grey Trembler fed for a few minutes before flying off as a falling yellow leaf spooked it.

On our journey back, we drove slowly back down the narrow roads and saw various Cattle Egrets resting by the roadside. Grey Kingbirds were numerous and the odd American Kestrel was perched on overhead wires. A few road kill Southern Opossums were seen on the journey – these are not thought to be native, introduced sometime during the past 2,500 years. After taking some photos of Soufriere and the Pitons from a viewing point, we arrived back around 12.40pm ready for some lunch and a rest. At the beach restaurant, Janet and Karen arrived excited as they had just found a land crab in their room, and had filmed it before ushering the crustacean back out into the wild! That afternoon other wildlife was also spotted including a Lesser Antillean Saltator, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, and Belted Kingfisher.

After a rest in the afternoon we met together in the evening on the beach for a lovely meal, a unique menu for the evening, and cocktails (particularly good rum punches!) as part of Tuesday's Manager's Cocktail party! Before dinner we also got to chat with a few of the managers and Karolin, the owner of the hotel resort.

Day 6

Wednesday 9th January

Emeralds Estate and Sulphur Springs; 29°C

After heavy rain we had a delayed start and while we were waiting for the buses we watched the birds from the bar including Zenaida Doves, Antillean Crested Hummingbirds, and Carib Grackles. We then drove a short distance down the road to Anse Chastanet's very own 550-acre organic farm Emeralds, where all the fruits and vegetables for the hotel's restaurants are grown. Our guide and head grower Paul showed us the different fruits and vegetables being grown and we tasted a few including the fruits of the Surinam Cherry tree which are bright green, orange or red fruits and taste both sour and sweet. We saw the tropical American Soursop, the fruits of which are like an egg-shaped green melon with soft spines; a Cinnamon Tree; common herbs including garlic chives; banana and plantain trees; fruiting mango trees, micro salad (picked within four days of being sown) and other vegetables. Some large, black and yellow Golden Web Spiders had spun webs in nearby herbs and a little earlier we had watched a Mole Cricket digging in to the ground – these are a big pest in the Caribbean and sadly this one didn't last much longer.

The head chef, Jonathan, who oversees the menus for the whole hotel estate then did a cooking demonstration showing us how to make a simple savoury dish. The final result was: lightly browned sustainably-caught marlin accompanied with rice cooked in coconut milk, and a salad of finely sliced courgette, pepper, candy-striped beet, green tomatoes, and unripe mango. Jonathan was a brilliant presenter and along with his light humour he helped show how to make the dish ourselves, and tips on how to prepare a range of foods. We finished with small cubes of ripe Julie Mango, the most sought after type of mango on St Lucia, and learnt how to tell when one is ripe. Both the demonstration and the food were very much enjoyed by everyone.

Around the estate there had been a few birds around too - mainly a few Grey Kingbirds and Carib Grackles. On the journey to Emeralds some of the group spotted an Osprey flying over Soufriere beach. We then set off to Sulphur Springs, the world's only drive-in volcano. It is in fact a collapsed volcano known as a caldera, rather than a coned volcano, which we may be more familiar with seeing on TV. We had the opportunity to stand by the barriers to see the bubbling water and smell the hydrogen sulphide. The whole crater is 12 kilometres square, and includes the town of Soufrière. It was produced by eruptions 32 to 39,000 years ago, and today the hot magma is only 2.5 miles below the surface although the volcano hasn't erupted since 1766. Our guide was Theodora who told us about the history of the volcano and more detail about the type of rocks and terrain we were looking at. The water itself (which is seawater) was a dark grey colour – a combination of the hydrogen sulphide reacting with iron to produce iron sulphide. It was bubbling up at 100 degrees Celsius and steam was rising up and across the rocks. We looked across the Moon-like terrain made of pumice or calcium sulphate.

Some of the group walked up the many steps to the interpretation centre to find out more about the geology and see a five-minute film. The Pitons which overlook our hotel and beach are in fact solidified lava plugs – thousands of years ago, the lava rose up and solidified to form the Pitons but never collapsed, unlike the caldera at Sulphur Springs. Those who stayed below saw three Broad-winged Hawks soaring in the wind while an American Kestrel was perched on wires back in town.

Paul had spent the morning around the hotel grounds and managed to get some brilliant views of St Lucia Pewee, Caribbean Elaenia, Mangrove Cuckoo, House Wren, and Little Blue Heron.

The group spent the afternoon having lunch and enjoying the beach and sunshine in their own way before we met together in the Treehouse Restaurant in the evening and enjoyed some amazing dishes, cocktails and conversations. That afternoon the snorkelling was enjoyed by many, and Jacquie even spotted and photographed a Caribbean Reef Octopus!

Day 7

Thursday 10th January

Castries and Aerial Tram Tour, Rainforest Adventures, near Chassin; 29°C

After an early breakfast we met our skipper Desir and his one-man crew, and took a guided boat tour along the coastline north before being dropped off in Castries for our trip into the forest. Along our way we passed Canaries, Ti Kaye Village, Anse La Raye, the Roseau Valley, and Margot Harbour before being entering the port of Castries. Desir has a creative imagination and pointed out rock formations which looked like animals, objects or people. During the journey we saw small numbers of Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Boobies.

In Castries, we were met by four huge, cowering Cruise liners which we passed before docking and being greeted by our taxi driver, Junior, who drove us up into the mountains to the Rainforest Sky Ride in Chassin. Just prior to meeting Junior, we looked at a nearby Cattle Egret colony containing more than 50 nests. It wasn't long before we were in two separate carriages taking us on a gentle one-hour tour through and over the rainforest. We were already 600ft above sea level and we travelled up to 1400ft passing from the forest floor, through the understory of ferns and tree ferns, into the canopy. As we came back down over the emergence layer we also had incredible views over the north of St Lucia, seeing both the Caribbean and the Atlantic coast at the same time.

The variety of plant and animal life was fascinating. Passing an area of introduced Norfolk Pines, originating from the Norfolk Island of the Pacific, we travelled through native forest and learnt about the different trees and their medicinal or everyday uses. We spotted all three species of hummingbirds. Purple-throated Caribs were most common at the canopy level. The odd St Lucia Warbler was singing, and St Lucia Pewees were calling throughout the rainforest. The Blue Mahoe, a tree introduced from Jamaica in the 1950s to replace those fallen in hurricanes or through deforestation, was in flower across the rainforest. They sported a mixture of yellow, orange and red flowers. Yellow is for when they just emerge, orange is when they are pollinated, and red is prior to them shrivelling up and developing in to a fruit. This whole process can happen within a single day. The tree wood itself is used in the furniture business.

Being at canopy level enabled us to see and appreciate the bromeliads living along the branches of many of the older trees, various fruits such as the nutmeg, and the green branches and leaves of the parasitic mistletoe. We passed the Whisking Tree, named after the wood being used to make whisks. Water vines hugged the trunks of trees – so called because if cut at a 45 degree angle, water can be extracted from the vine and used for drinking. There were prehistoric-looking tree ferns, strangler figs (one causing a tree to lean) and vanilla vines.

After the ride we had a 15-minute walk through the forest to see the foliage from ground level, including the Incense Tree, the Honduras, the West Indies Mahogany Trees and various Heliconias. Groups enjoying zip-lining through the forest were nearby and their Tarzan-like calls echoed through the forest!

As we neared the end of our walk, we passed an area that had been planted specifically for hummingbirds, with lots of plants with colourful, tubular flowers. There were also nectar feeders attracting mainly Purple-throated Caribs just metres away, plus one of two Green-throated Caribs, and Antillean Crested Hummingbirds. The odd Bananaquit was also getting a look in and a Black-faced Grassquit was feeding on the ground.

After a quick refreshment and stop in the gift shop, we headed back down the mountains to Castries, with glorious views of the landscape below us. Grey Kingbirds were common on the overhead wires along with a few American Kestrels. We stopped for a packed lunch on the boat and took cover during a few brief showers. Some of the group then walked a short distance to the Cattle Egret colony where young egrets of various ages were sat in their nests, some already fledged. A few Common Gallinules were also lurking beneath the bushes, and below the colony a bright, white Snowy Egret was walking across the lily pads. Meanwhile, a superb Green Heron was hiding below the dangling branches of the colony's tree.

Heading out to sea and along the coastline we dipped into Margot Harbour (where there were some mighty sailing boats and houses). Half way back we stopped to see some Brown Boobies, an adult and three juveniles perched on the rocks, while the occasional Royal Tern flew past. A few frigatebirds and boobies were seen on the rest of the journey. As we approached Anse Chastanet we took an opportunity for people to be photographed at the front of the boat with the Pitons behind them. We then stopped by the Brown Boobies perched on the nearby cliffs – some were preening and those that were hot were fluttering their gular pouches (throat skin) to keep cool.

We docked at 3pm and relaxed for the afternoon before our last delicious dinner of the holiday in the Treehouse Restaurant at 7pm. The drier evening saw plenty of bats, probably Antillean Fruit Bats, flying low over the trees near our rooms.

Day 8

Friday 13th January

Walk along road to Bouton; 29°C

With a dry night and morning, eight of us met at 6am and travelled a few miles on the edge of Soufriere towards Bouton to catch up with some more local birds. Picking up Meno on the way, we were there by 6.20am and birding along the road. The odd Woodpigeon-like Scaly-necked Pigeon flew passed briefly and a mango tree with ripe fruits was attracting at least two Antillean Saltators, a grassquit and a bullfinch. The occasional tree frog was 'beeping' in the background. Nearby Golden Apple trees (different to the UK ones!) provide fruits which are a favourite with the parrots – but sadly not today. Meanwhile, on the road a Spectacled Thrush was feeding – it looked just like a female Blackbird from a distance! Above us on the electricity wires an American Kestrel flew in with a lizard. We watched her swallow it until only the tail was sticking out of her beak! We then moved down the road to see some St Lucia Orioles which Meno has located. There were at least four in all, distributed throughout the nearby trees and bushes – we could hear harsh call, and occasionally had views of their black and bright yellow-orange plumage. We walked back up the road and during a quick shower glimpsed a St Lucia Warbler and a Caribbean Elaenia. We walked across the road and up a steep track, spotting a few lovely pink orchids along the way. The fluty song of a Grey Trembler transmitted across the valley while a Scaly-breasted Thrasher gave very brief views in a tree. We heard a St Lucia Parrot a couple of times but it was keeping hidden. As we came back to the vehicles, a St Lucia Pewee was flycatching in front of us, and gave everyone a chance to see this lovely, orange-red chest bird a little better.

We arrived back for breakfast and a chance to watch the grackles, cowbirds, bullfinches and Bananaquits feeding around us for the last time. The rest of the day was spent packing suitcases, going for a swim or snorkel, and preparing for the trip home. In the nearby reef, the long, thin Houndfishes were moving around in large groups, looking for potential small fish to snatch up and eat. We met just before lunch to say our goodbyes and go through our final checklist.

After a lovely lunch, Janine and Paul took their taxi to the airport at 2pm. Richard and Jacquie were staying on an extra four days. The rest of the group along with Ed took a later taxi for the British Airways flight that evening. Just before leaving the hotel an Osprey was soaring by the cliffs over Anse Chastanet. On our way out of the hotel towards Soufriere a Small Asian Mongoose scuttled along the track before disappearing into the grass – it was like a small, furry sausage!

On the way to the airport every half a mile there were two or three Grey Kingbirds and sometimes pairs of American Kestrels – we must have seen at least 20 – 30 kingbirds! As the light began to fade, small Common Free-tailed Bats were feeding over houses and countryside for 10 – 15 miles on our approach to Vieux Fort. They were very numerous and we must have seen over a 100. In the distance we could see the island of St Vincent, partly shrouded in cloud. As we drove along the sea front by the airfield a roosting colony of Cattle Egrets were gathering in a bush while a Great Egret flew across the road.

After a slightly shorter flight back to Gatwick Airport, everyone made their way home safely after a relaxing, hot, sunny holiday seeing St Lucia's endemic birdlife and many other plants and animals. A contrast to the cold weather and threat of snow which greeted us as we arrived back in London the following day!

Day 9

Saturday 14th January

Arrival back in the UK

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Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	January								
			4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
1	Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	✓	20+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	12+	✓
2	Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>		✓	✓	4	✓	✓		6	✓
3	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>									1
4	Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	1						1	1	
5	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>								1	
6	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			1		1				
7	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		80+	50+
8	Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>								1	2
9	Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax violacea</i>				1		1	1		
10	Osprey	<i>Pandion hallaetus</i>						1			1
11	Broad-winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>		1	1		2	4	2		1
12	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>			6+		✓	2	2+		10+
13	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1							
14	Antillean Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata cerceris</i>								2	
15	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>		1							
16	Royal Tern	<i>Sterna maxima</i>				1				2	
17	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓					4	
18	Scaly-naped Pigeon	<i>Patagioenus squamosa</i>		1	2+	✓	2+				2+
19	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			1			1			
20	Zenaida Dove	<i>Zenaida aurita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Common Ground Dove	<i>Collumbina passerina</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓			
22	St Lucia Parrot	<i>Amazona versicolor</i>			8		2			2	h
23	Mangrove Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus minor</i>		1	1		2	1	1		h
24	Lesser Antillean Swift	<i>Chaetura martinica</i>			2+					✓	
25	Purple-throated Carib	<i>Eulampis jugularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6+	✓
26	Green-throated Carib	<i>Eulampis holosericeus</i>					2+			1	
27	Antillean Crested Hummingbird	<i>Orthorhyncus cristatus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>		1			1			1	
29	Caribbean Elaenia	<i>Elaenia martinica</i>						1	2		2+

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30	St Lucia Pewee	<i>Contopus oberi</i>		1	h		h	2	h	1
31	Grey Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>						1		
33	Tropical Mockingbird	<i>Mimus gilvus</i>				1				
34	Grey Trembler	<i>Cinclocerthia gutturalis</i>				1	1		1	h
35	Scaly-breasted Thrasher	<i>Allenia fusca</i>					1+			1
36	Pearly-eyed Thrasher	<i>Margarops fuscata</i>			1					
37	Rufous-throated Solitaire	<i>Myadestes genibarbis</i>			h(3)					
38	Spectacled Thrush	<i>Turdus nudigenis</i>		1						1
39	St Lucia Warbler	<i>Dendroica delicata</i>		2+	h		4		✓	✓
40	Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Black-faced Grassquit	<i>Tiaris bicolor</i>		4+			2	4	1	✓
42	St Lucia Black Finch	<i>Melanospiza richardsoni</i>					2			
43	Lesser Antillean Bullfinch	<i>Loxigilla noctis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Lesser Antillean Saltator	<i>Saltator albicollis</i>		h				1		2
45	Carib Grackle	<i>Quiscalus lugubris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Shiny Cowbird	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>				✓		✓		
47	St Lucia Oriole	<i>Icterus laudabills</i>			1					4

Reptiles and Amphibians

1	Watts' Anole Lizard	<i>Anolis wattsi wattsi</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Lesser Antillean or Johnstone's Whistling Frog	<i>Eleutherodactylus johnstonei</i>	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h
3	Red-snouted Tree Frog	<i>Scinax ruber</i>					h			h

Mammals

1	Fraser's Dolphins					300+				
2	Small Asian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>							1	
3	Common Free-tailed Bat	<i>Molossus molossus molossus</i>								100+
4	Antillean Fruit Bat	<i>Brachyphylla cavernarum cavernarum</i>							10+	

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Invertebrates

Crabs

1	Ghost Crab	<i>Ocypode quadrata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Mottled Shore Crab	<i>Pachygrapsus transversus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Land Crab	<i>Gecarcinus ruricola</i>					✓			

Molluscs

1	Marbled Chiton	<i>Chiton marmoratus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
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Spiders

1	Orb Web Spider			✓						
2	Golden Web Spider	<i>Nephila clavipes</i>						✓		

Other insects

1	Mole Cricket	<i>Scapteriscus didactylus</i>						✓		
2	Cockroach									✓

Butterflies, Moths and Dragonflies

1	Large Orange Sulphur	<i>Phoebis agarithe</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Caribbean Buckeye	<i>Junonia coenia</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	
3	The Julia or Flambeau	<i>Dryas iulia</i>			✓					
4	Long-tailed Skipper	<i>Urbanus proteus</i>		✓					✓	
5	Hanno Blue	<i>Hemiargus hanno</i>		✓						
6	Great Southern White	<i>Ascia monuste</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Gulf Fritillary	<i>Agraulis vanillae</i>		✓					✓	
8	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓						
9	Little Yellow	<i>Eurema lisa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Fiery Broken Dash Skipper	<i>Wallengrenia ophites</i>		✓						

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11	Disjunct Scrub Hairstreak	<i>Strymon bubastus</i>		✓							
12	Piplea Hairstreak	<i>Allosmaitia piplea</i>		✓							
13	Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>								✓	
14	Polydamus Swallowtail	<i>Battus polydamus</i>						✓			
15	Disjunct or Gratiola Yellow	<i>Eurema gratiola</i>		✓							
16	Broad-winged Dragonlet	<i>Erythrodiplax umbrata</i>		✓							
17	Antillean Skimmer	<i>Orthemis macrostigma</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Fishes

1	Flying Fish	<i>Cypselurus</i> spp				✓					
2	Trumpetfish	<i>Aulostomus maculatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Houndfish	<i>Tylosurus crocodilus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Great Barracuda	<i>Sphyrnaea barracuda</i>		✓	✓						
5	Sea Bream	<i>Pagrus pagrus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Yellowhead Wrasse	<i>Halichoerus garroti</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Redband Parrotfish	<i>Sparisoma aurofrenatum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Stoplight Parrotfish	<i>Sparisoma viridae</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Princess Parrotfish	<i>Searus taeniopterus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Blue Parrotfish	<i>Scarus coeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Yellowtail Parrotfish	<i>Sparisoma rubripinne</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Queen Parrotfish	<i>Searus vetula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Striped Parrotfish	<i>Scarus iserti</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Yellowtail Hamlet	<i>Hypoplectrus chlorurus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Brown Chromis	<i>Chromis multilineata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Sergeant Major	<i>Abudefduf saratilis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Bicoloured Damsel	<i>Stegastes partitus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Yellowtail Damsel	<i>Microspathodon chrysurus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Yellowtail Snapper	<i>Ocyurus chrysurus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Palameta	<i>Trachinotus goodei</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Blue Tang	<i>Acanthurus coeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Blue Chromis	<i>Chromis cyanea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Spotfin Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon ocellatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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24	Banded Butterfish	<i>Chaetodon striatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Foureye Butterfish	<i>Chaetodon capistratus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	French Angelfish	<i>Pomacanthus paru</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Doctorfish	<i>Acanthurus chirurgus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Bluehead Wrasse	<i>Thalassoma bifasciatum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Slippery Dick	<i>Halichoeres bivittatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Yellow Goatfish	<i>Mulloidichthys martinicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Spotted Goatfish	<i>Pseudupeneus maculatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Fairy Basslet	<i>Gramma loreta</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Caesar Grunt	<i>Haemulon carbonarium</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Smallmouth Grunt	<i>Haemulon chrysargyreum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Blue-striped Grunt	<i>Haemulon sciurus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	French Grunt	<i>Haemulon flavolineatum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Squirrelfish	<i>Holocentrus adscensionis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Redlip Blenny	<i>Ophioblennius atlanticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Sargassam Triggerfish	<i>Xanthichthys ringens</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Ocean Surgeon	<i>Acanthurus bahianus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Peacock Flounder	<i>Buthus lunatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Smooth Trunkfish	<i>Lactophrys triqueter</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Whitespotted Filefish	<i>Cantherhines macrocerus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Porcupine Fish	<i>Diodon hystrix</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Scrawled Filefish	<i>Aluterus scriptus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Spotted Drum	<i>Equetus punctatus</i>								✓
47	Blackbar Soldierfish	<i>Myripristis jacobus</i>							✓	
48	Clown Wrasse	<i>Halichoeres maculipinna</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Schoolmaster Snapper	<i>Lutjanus apodus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Various Goby species	<i>Elacatinus</i> spp		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Caribbean Reef Squid	<i>Sepioteuthis sepioidea</i>					✓			
52	Caribbean Reef Octopus	<i>Octopus briareus</i>						✓		

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Coral/sponge/associated inverts

1	Finger Coral	<i>Porites</i> spp		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Brain Coral	<i>Diploria labyrinthiformis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Common Sea Fan	<i>Gorgonia ventalina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Mustard Hill Coral	<i>Porites astreoides</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Starlet Coral	<i>Siderastrea siderea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Elkhorn Coral	<i>Acropora palmata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Giant Barrel Sponge	<i>Xestospongia muta</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Yellow Tube Sponge	<i>Aplysina fistularis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Long-spined Urchin	<i>Diadema antillarum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Christmas Tree Worm	<i>Spirobranchus giganteus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Bearded Fireworm	<i>Hermodice carunculata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Plants of note

1	African Tulip Tree	<i>Spathodea campanulata</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Almond	<i>Terminalia catappa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Anthurium	<i>Anthurium andraeanum</i>			✓		✓			
4	Avocado	<i>Persea americana</i>								✓
5	Bamboo	<i>Bambusa vulgaris</i>			✓		✓			✓
6	Banana	<i>Musa x paradisiaca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Bayleaf	<i>Pimenta racemosa</i>		✓				✓	✓	
8	Bird-of-Paradise	<i>Heliconia psittacorum</i>			✓				✓	
9	Blue Mahoe Tree	<i>Talipariti elatum</i>			✓		✓			
10	Breadfruit	<i>Artocarpus altilis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Bromeliads		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Calabash	<i>Crescentia cujete</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Cashew Nut	<i>Anacardium occidentale</i>					✓			✓
14	Castor Oil Plant	<i>Ricus communis</i>		✓						
15	Chataignier sp	<i>Sloanea</i> spp			✓		✓		✓	
16	Clusier tree sp	<i>Clusia</i> spp			✓		✓		✓	
17	Cinnamon	<i>Cinnmomum verum</i>						✓		

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18	Cocoa	<i>Theobroma cacao</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Coconut	<i>Cocos nucifera</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Dasheen	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Red Ginger	<i>Alpinia purpurata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Gommier Tree	<i>Dacryodes excelsa</i>			✓		✓				
23	Grapefruit	<i>Citrus x paradisi</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Hibiscus	<i>Hibiscus rosa-sinensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Lansan Tree (Incense Tree)	<i>Protium attenuatum</i>			✓					✓	
26	Lime	<i>Phaeolus lunatus</i>		✓							✓
27	Mango	<i>Mangifera indica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Mimosa	<i>Mimosa pudica</i>		✓							
29	Mistletoe	<i>Phoradendron trinervium</i>								✓	
30	Norfolk Island Pine	<i>Araucaria heterophylla</i>								✓	
31	Nutmeg	<i>Myristica fragrans</i>		✓						✓	
32	Orange	<i>Citrus x sinensis</i>		✓							
33	Plantain	<i>Musa x paradisisaca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Poinsettia	<i>Euphorbia pulcherrima</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Red Birch	<i>Myrcia citrifolia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Rubber Tree	<i>Hevea brasiliensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Soursop	<i>Annoca muricata</i>		✓				✓			
38	Strangler Fig	<i>Ficus spp</i>				✓				✓	
39	Surinam Cherry	<i>Eugenia uniflora</i>								✓	
40	Tangerine	<i>Citrus reticulata</i>		✓							✓
41	Tree Fern	<i>Cyathea arborea</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Vanilla	<i>Vanilla planifolia</i>								✓	
43	West Indies Mahogany Tree	<i>Swietenia mahagoni</i>								✓	