

St. Lucia

Naturetrek Tour Report

5 - 13 January 2018



Purple-throated Carib by Ed Drewitt



Scaly-breasted Thrasher by Ed Drewitt



Western Osprey by Ed Drewitt



Lesser Antillean Saltator by Ed Drewitt

Report compiled by Ed Drewitt
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Summary

The hot and sunny Caribbean is the perfect place to visit in the New Year, and St. Lucia is no exception. During our nine-day tour we encountered all the country's endemic birds from the St. Lucia Warbler to the St. Lucia Amazon (Parrot), as well as species that are found just in the Lesser Antillean islands such as the saltator and the bullfinch. We stayed at the luxury Anse Chastanet hotel where many of these species can be seen and visited rainforest reserves to see birds such as the sought-after Rufous-throated Solitaire and the Pearly-eyed Thrasher. A sky ride in the forest near Castries provided the opportunity to look down onto the forest and be at eye level with stunning hummingbirds such as the Purple-throated Carib. And a trip to the dry woodland in the east revealed the endangered White-breasted Thrasher. Finally, the sea provided the perfect opportunity to see over 200 Pantropical Spotted Dolphins just off the Pitons, the iconic volcanic landmarks that depict St. Lucia.

Day 1

Friday 5th January

London to St. Lucia; 28°C

Leaving behind a wet Gatwick our group of five and Ed headed off to St. Lucia, first flying across southern England. Flying at 8,000 metres we headed west along England's sunny south coast passing Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight, Poole Harbour, Chesil Beach and the Exe Estuary before flying over cloud as we passed Dartmoor and into Cornwall. The rest of the eight-hour journey was over sea, passing over the western islands of the Azores.

We arrived mid-afternoon on a hot bright day at Hewanorra Airport on the southern tip of St. Lucia, ready for our transfer to the hotel. Getting through security and customs took no more than 15 minutes. After a refreshing cool peppermint-water flannel and drinking water, courtesy of our hotel, we boarded our transfer car and headed up the coast to our luxury hotel, Anse Chastanet. We were soon heading north along the scenic tour of the south-west coastline of St. Lucia, passing through Vieux Fort, Laborie, La Fargue and Soufrière on the way. For most of the journey, Gros Piton and Petit Piton, local volcanic landmarks, were always evident. Our first birds were Carib Grackles, feeding on the ground near the airport and Cattle Egrets feeding under cows in one field.

Leaving Soufrière, we slowly travelled along a track looking back down at the town with superb views of the Pitons as a backdrop. After 10 minutes or so we reached Anse Chastanet. After a refreshing non-alcoholic cocktail known as the Bentley, amazing views looking down to the beach, an obliging Zenaida Dove in a nearby tree, and paperwork signed, we were led to our luxury rooms to unpack and relax.

We met for dinner at 6.30pm 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. Lesser Antillean Whistling Frogs called in the background - their chime-like regular calls distinctive along with the grating sounds of crickets singing.

Day 2

Saturday 6th January

Anse Chastanet and Anse Mamim; 27°C

After a night to catch up on sleep we awoke to the sounds of Zenaida Doves and Grey Kingbirds as the dawn chorus. A fine buffet breakfast of fruits and cereals greeted us, as well as a wholesome à la carte cooked menu. Carib Grackles and Lesser Antillean Bullfinches perched nearby in the hope of stealing some breakfast titbits.

After an orientation briefing from the duty manager, Jonathan, at 9am we met with our hotel wildlife guide, Meno, to explore the forest estate behind the hotel and along to Anse Mamim beach. During the three-hour walk we had an incredible time seeing two of St. Lucia's endemics, the St. Lucia Warbler and the St. Lucia Pewee (now often included in Lesser Antillean Pewee).

As we began the walk in light rain two Common Ground Doves and two Zenaida Doves were feeding on the ground. The odd Grey Kingbird hawked insects nearby and frigatebirds drifted overhead, enjoying the breeze above the hills. Meno pointed out the discrete termite tunnels running up rocks and trees, camouflaged to look like tree roots. At least two Caribbean Elaenias, a type of flycatcher, fed up in the trees near a Scaly-breasted Thrasher, and Chris spotted our first Antillean Crested Hummingbird of the tour. A few St. Lucia Warblers foraged nearby, giving short glimpses, although one showed well to Sandra before chasing off a bullfinch.

Meno pointed out some small bromeliads growing on the tree and the young Silk-cotton trees covered in spines, giving them the local name of the 'ouch ouch' tree. We saw all sorts of other familiar plants familiar by name including a pumpkin vine, Almonds, Morning Glory and Bougainvillea. By a pond, the brightly coloured pink round flowers of *Mimosa* adorned the ground; their leaves quickly fold up when touched as protection from being eaten.

We suddenly had stunning views of a Mangrove Cuckoo fanning its tail after the rain. This large cuckoo has a peach-coloured breast, sandy-coloured back and striking tail feathers, mostly black with white tips. Further along we saw one just above us calling to another hidden amongst the leaves.

As we headed round a corner to a pool, a very obliging St. Lucia Pewee flew round in circles under a tree catching insects. Like the cuckoo, it had a soft, peach-coloured breast and not unlike a Robin in shape and tameness. The pewee also has large eyes like our Robin, probably to help it forage during dusk and dawn when the light levels are low.

At the pond a few Common Gallinules, a different species which looks identical to our Moorhen, were resting or swimming. Lilies were in full bloom with stunning large white or pink blooms. A Scaly-naped Pigeon was almost hidden in the trees. About the size of a Woodpigeon, it is blue-grey with iridescent, purple neck feathers and a red eye.

In the hot sunshine a crested hummingbird was feeding on the flowers of Bougainvillea and Chris and Meno called a brief Lesser Antillean Saltator as it flew into the bushes below the flowers. A Gulf Fritillary butterfly, long-winged and bright orange flew around the shrubs very quickly, joined by small numbers of sulphur and white butterflies. Meno picked the leaves of a lime tree and a lemon tree for us to compare the aromatic aromas. The lime leaves won, giving off a cleansing, crisp zesty smell.

Nearby we suddenly had a bonanza of birds. A House Wren came within a few metres, showing off its white chest and warm, rusty-brown back while singing. Above was a Bananquit and an equally striking St. Lucia Warbler. Both have a blend of the same colours, just in a different pattern. A Black-whiskered Vireo was foraging towards the back of the trees, again giving close views alongside another Antillean Crested Hummingbird. Just before we headed back along the track we spotted a Long-tailed Skipper butterfly.

Further along we encountered a Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, a little smaller than the Grey Kingbirds with a yellow belly and fine brown edges to its wing feathers. It perched nearby giving excellent views. Further down the track we stopped by a reservoir that was used in the 1700's to deliver water to sugar kilns using in the days of sugar plantations and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Just above some Coconut trees we watched a perched Broad-winged Hawk.

As we neared the end of our walk we entered what is now an area of secondary woodland growth with some managed open areas. The solemn call of the secretive Ruddy Quail-Dove could be heard in the background. And a Grey Trembler sang briefly above us out of view. Some Cocoa trees have recently been pollarded to encourage new growth. 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, flowering Africa Tulip trees, Ginger Lilies, Blue Maho and the national tree of St. Lucia, the Calabash Tree. Some of the larger, older tulip trees were planted during the sugar-plantation times to shade the sugar-cane plants.

We caught a water taxi back to Anse Chastanet - just a short journey away - and arrived back around 12.30pm, in good time for a rest at lunch and a chance to indulge on the sandy beach or snooze in our beautiful rooms.

We met again at 6.30pm 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 3

Sunday 7th January

Des Cartier; 27°C

After a calm night we met together at 5.30am and headed south with our driver Clyde, and then east to the rainforest track known as *Des Cartier*, part of the Quillesse Rainforest Reserve. It was named after a Mr. Des Cartier who oversaw the making of a horse-drawn track through the forest in 1847. For the first half an hour the journey was in the dark; gradually the sun came up and we meandered up the hills and into the mountains, passing various Banana plantations. In amongst the Banana plants there was plenty of the sought-after Dasheen (a root vegetable) and ripe grapefruits hanging on their trees.

We waited briefly on the main road for our experienced guide Adams Toussaint and his colleague Willow. By 7.15am we had arrived at the reserve and we spent the next three hours walking a few kilometres and back, exploring the tropical rainforest (c. 1800 feet or 550 metres 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. Despite being in the rainforest we had a sunny, hot morning and visibility was excellent across the valley.

Not long after we began we had good views of a Rufous-throated Solitaire, a slender, Starling-size bird with the most incredible repertoire comprising just a few single prolonged notes that pierce through the forest air. A

Pearly-eyed Thrasher was high above us with a stick in its beak and a male St. Lucia Black Finch, another endemic, was feeding on the forest floor. Although it is the same size as a Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and black, it lacks the red chin and has pink legs. It is in fact completely unrelated and its nearest relatives, Darwin's Finches, are in the Galapagos Islands. They are all thought to originate from the Black Finch's genus.

We past huge magnolia trees, introduced Blue Maho trees, bromeliads, club mosses, vines (including Vanilla Vine), an array of ferns, lichens and *Selaginella* or spikemosses. Banaquits were common in the trees above as were Lesser Antillean Crested Hummingbirds and Purple-throated Caribs. At least three Black Witch moths were flying around. A Grey Trembler and a St. Lucia Oriole gave tantalizing views in a tree above us.

We stopped at a viewpoint, an opening in the forest looking down towards a river. A Caribbean Elaenia and Pearly-eyed Thrasher were calling nearby. This was the place to see parrots and over the next hour we had half-a-dozen sightings of pairs flying down below or above the forested mountain opposite. They soon disappeared as they landed. In flight we were able to admire their green bodies, blue wings and crimson red wing patches in flight.

To Ed's great delight we had one of the best views he's ever had of a Rufous-throated Solitaire. Singing close to the viewpoint, an individual stayed nearby feeding on ripe berries. We watched the bird singing and circling round to pick single berries off a fruiting tree. It was a great chance to see its yellow legs, blue-purple plumage, white facial markings and rufous throat.

During our time here at the viewpoint we also saw a fly-catching St. Lucia Pewee, Purple-throated Caribs, more parrots, St. Lucia Warblers, a bright orange Flambeau butterfly, a flowering pink ground orchid known as David's Orchid, and a Scaly-breasted Thrasher. The Goldfinch-like twitter calls gave away the Lesser Antillean Euphonia, a multi-coloured, finch-like bird. A few were above us keeping out of view, although one came down nearby and was seen by Chris and Adams. A Broad-winged Hawk circled right in front of us; smaller than its related Common Buzzard we see in the UK, this had distinctive black lines outlining its wings. The odd Lesser Antillean Swift also fluttered overhead.

We headed back down to the vehicles, stopping for a foraging Lesser Antillean Flycatcher which snapped its beak when it caught prey. With our packed lunches in hand, we travelled just under 30 minutes to a site just south of Dennery. By the roadside we walked into dry woodland, a very different habitat to the rainforest we had just been in. A Grey Trembler was singing nearby; it has a beautiful, sweet song. A St. Lucia Warbler, a Caribbean Elaenia and a grackle were in the trees nearby as Adams looked for a special bird here, the White-breasted Thrasher. This species is currently listed as a subspecies, sharing lineage with another subspecies in neighbouring Martinique. However, recent DNA work is suggesting the bird is its own species outright, and this would make it a new endemic for St. Lucia. The endangered thrasher only lives in two places on the island: this 600-acre site and another area in the north of the island.

Despite being endangered and in decline, it didn't take long before we were encountering the species. It is a very shy bird and never comes out into the open. We saw or heard up to six individuals as we passed through their different territories. Most sightings were brief and involved looking through the tree and branches to spot them. However, it was rewarding to see this Dipper-marked bird in its habitat, perhaps helped by the fact this area is good for snakes; this puts people off chopping down trees or developing the area. As we neared the vehicle we

saw a male St. Lucia Oriole, at first perched and then flying through the trees, showing off its striking yellow-and-black plumage.

With the sunshine now getting very hot, we headed for our last stop, the Vieux Fort wetlands (Aupicon), a large brackish lake just on the edge of the town. This gem of a place is the largest lake in St. Lucia and attracts a wide range of water birds that are not seen across the rest of the island. Adams is working closely with the Government and landowner to classify it as a nature reserve or national park. As we arrived an Osprey was flying away from us towards the sea. The water levels were high and there was a pleasant strong breeze. At least half a dozen Common Gallinules and Caribbean Coots were foraging close to the edge of the lake, amongst the sedges. A flock of 15 Lesser Scaup, wintering here from North America, were bobbing together at the back of the lake. Other birds included a few Pied-billed Grebes, two Great Egrets, a Snowy Egret, a Cattle Egret and a Green Heron.

After a busy day seeing all the country's endemic birds and much more, we headed back to Anse Chastanet, arriving around 2.15pm. There was plenty of time for a relaxing late afternoon; we finished the day with a lovely à la carte meal in the Treehouse Restaurant before retiring for the night, ready for a later 9am start to go dolphin watching.

Day 4

Monday 8th January

Dolphin Watching off the coast of Anse Chastanet and Soufrière; 28°C

This morning we set off from Anse Chastanet beach on a catamaran to go dolphin watching. We set off at 9am with our boat guides Andrew and Nigel and headed up to three miles out north-west, searching. The sea was very quiet with no seabirds or cetaceans to see; food must have been elsewhere in the Caribbean Sea. However, we enjoyed lots of flying fishes gliding over the water and memorable views of the Pitons and mountains of St. Lucia.

Towards the end of our trip we headed to the bay at Soufrière and a special sea cave. A vertical split in the cliffs forms a home for over 5,000 Antillean Fruit Bats. They were easy to hear as their squeaks amplify with the sheer numbers present. There were hundreds just at the entrance to the cave, and we watched as some stretched their long wings, fluttered to a new perch, or tussled for a new space to hang. Over Soufrière, the odd Magnificent Frigatebird drifted over. And along the cliffs, a distinctive rock conglomeration of large and small volcanic boulders gave home to many different trees and cacti, providing a wide palate of green hues against the bright-blue sea beneath.

As we headed back along the coast and round to Anse Chastanet we honed in on the distinctive white guano of the Brown Boobies which was evident along the cliffs – one immature Brown Booby was present and having a preen.

After three hours at sea, it was time for lunch and a relaxing afternoon on the beach or snorkeling.

We met again in the beach bar for dinner at Apsara.

Day 5

Tuesday 9th January

Millet Trail; 28°C

After a mix of a starry night sky and rain, we left in the dry at 6am and headed north to Millet Trail, a rainforest reserve, passing lots of tree ferns and lush forest along the way. We passed through the banana plantations of the Roseau Valley along the way and climbed higher and higher, along a narrowing road with houses on stilts on either side. We arrived at the reserve's main building where we were joined by our guides Pamela and Justin who work for the forestry department. As we started on our walk we watched a pair of Black-faced Grassquits feeding on the path; they were incredibly cryptic. Entering the rainforest trail, we had close views of a male St. Lucia Black Finch feeding on coconut left out on stakes for the forest birds. Shortly he was joined by a female who resembles a female Lesser Antillean Bullfinch but has pink legs and a greyer head.

Since Hurricane Tomas in 2010 the forest services have been providing the half coconuts wedged on spikes along the walkways – this has been to help supplement the local birds with food and has become very popular with them. During our morning we saw half-a-dozen black finches, often feeding on or below the coconut feeders.

A little further along a Grey Trembler was perched up in a tree and sat there for a while, changing positions occasionally. It kept opening its bill as if it was trying to regurgitate a pellet. With no woodcreepers or woodpeckers on the island, this relative of the thrashers takes up a similar niche to these groups of birds, using its long down-curved beak for probing into rotting wood and bark. As we moved on it came down to feed on a coconut.

A male St. Lucia Oriole came in to a tree above us, showing off his yellow bottom and black belly. He moved to a better position where we could see his steely grey legs and other body markings as he preened. A Pearly-eyed Thrasher, Purple-throated Carib and a female Antillean Crested Hummingbird were also perching just off the path for us to see.

As we looked out across the views of the mountains, forest and a reservoir three St. Lucia Anole Lizards were sat vertically on bamboo stems while the sound of a mobile phone bleeping in the background was in fact the calls of crickets.

Although mostly shrouded in low cloud, across the hill from our viewpoint was the mountain slopes of Mount Gimie (950 metres or 3000 feet), the largest mountain in St. Lucia. Before we headed back along the path a Mangrove Cuckoo called above and was sat out in the sunshine.

We retraced our steps, paused for a break and ventured down another route in the forest. Back in 1995, this area used to be cultivated by farmers with houses nearby. When the reservoir was built the government gave the local people money to move elsewhere as they didn't want the water becoming contaminated by chemicals from the farming practices. The area was replanted and now, 19 years later, the secondary woodland is tall and thick. Some of the original, older Mango trees still remain.

Here we passed a cultivated stand of colourful 'Caribbean Pink' *Antburiums* with beautiful tongue-like flowers. Further along the track the coconuts were attracting a few bullfinches, black finches and Grey Tremblers; we saw at least four tremblers. We watched as they used their long, thick beaks to probe the soft coconut flesh.

Above us were the loud, squeaky calls of the Bananaquits; they were coming from just one tree. Looking up, a single Mahogany tree was in full flower and the Bananaquits were feeding on the flower nectar. Another oriole called through the trees while a few Purple-throated Caribs rested on branches. Their bodies are black while their wings and tails are iridescent, reflecting all types of shiny green and blue colours. As we walked back up the steps the crow-like call of a Pearly-eyed Thrasher, a Jay-size bird, revealed itself briefly before disappearing back into the forest.

We retraced our steps back to the centre where a Lesser Antillean Saltator was feeding on some ripe bananas on a tree. After a rest, nibble of lunch and drink, we headed back to Soufrière, through the villages of Anse la Raye and Canaries, arriving back at Anse Chastanet around 12.30pm.

Back at Anse Chastanet everyone was able to relax for the afternoon in the sunshine. 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 10th January

Castries and Aerial Tram Tour, Rainforest Adventures, near Chassin; 27°C

After a 7am breakfast, we met down by the beach at 8am and headed out with Desir (Moby Dick) and his assistant Graham. We 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 or objects such as a dragon and a pyramid. There were heavy rain showers along the journey which buffeted us with our towels and waterproofs!

During the boat journey we saw small numbers of Magnificent Frigatebirds and five Brown Boobies, stopping to see a few of the latter perched on the cliffs. Their white guano stands out a mile on the dark volcanic cliffs, although the birds themselves are cryptic; you don't see them until very close. Most were juvenile birds with dark breasts and one was adult with a white breast. Frangipani Trees were all in flower along the coastline, dotted amongst the coastal forest with their bright white blooms. We stopped to see both a Peregrine and an Osprey perched one above the other in a cliff tree. And as we arrived in Castries two Ospreys flew overhead. As we left the boat, a Green Heron flew off from the jetty and landed nearby on a boat's tethered ropes.

In Castries, we were greeted by our taxi driver, Junior, who drove us up into the mountains to the Rainforest Sky Ride in Chassin. After stopping to pick up a few other customers, we arrived half an hour later at the Rainforest Adventures Aerial Tram tour and met with our guide wildlife guide Jesse. Before getting on our carriage we explored the beautiful gardens of flowering plants, many you see in vases in excellent restaurants in the UK. First, we were introduced to the Love Apple or Mountain Apple tree which was dropping ripe fruits. In the tree above we watched a Grey Trembler, a Scaly-breasted Thrasher and a Pearly-eyed Thrasher. We then looked for

more birds amongst the *Heliconias* and other exotic flowers such as Cat's Whiskers, Poor Man's Orchid, St John's Bush, David's Orchid and Ginger Lilies. We finally caught up with a Green-throated Carib, our third species of hummingbird to see on St. Lucia. It was feeding on the pale-blue flowers of a Sky Vine. Nearby a male Purple-throated Carib was defending 'his patch' and looking dapper even in the shade. A Broad-winged Hawk was stood out on a tree preening, looking relaxed and unperturbed by us looking on.

We headed back to the sky ride and got into a carriage which took us on a on a gentle one-hour tour through and over the rainforest. Just as we started, a Caribbean Elaenia was foraging amongst some Ginger Lilies. Jesse gave a fascinating running commentary throughout. We were already 600 feet (180 metres) above sea level and we travelled up to 1400 feet (425 metres), passing from the forest floor with openings covered in spikemosses, through the understory of ferns and tree ferns, and 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 island of Martinique was also clearly visible.

Purple-throated Caribs were common and males were often sitting on their favourite perches near where the carriage passed. Half a dozen Lesser Antillean Swifts flew amongst the forest's emergence level and at one point we were riding above them as they foraged above the trees. Two Mountain Land Crabs were out on rocks in the river, bright yellow with their pincers raised.

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. The Blue Maho, a tree introduced from Jamaica in the 1950's 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 shriveling up and developing into a fruit. This whole process can happen within a single day. The tree wood itself is used in the furniture business.

We stopped at the top and went for a 15-minute walk through the forest, finding St. Lucia Warbler, an Antillean Crested Hummingbird, a pair of St. Lucia Black Finches and Pearly-eyed Thrashers. An Antillean Euphonia called briefly. We also stopped to admire different palm trees and some impressive buttress roots of some very tall trees.

Back on the carriage we headed above the emergence level and back down through the canopy. A pair of Pearly-eyed Thrashers chased each other in front of us. At this level we were able 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. A pair of Antillean Euphonias was feeding on the small yellow berries on one mistletoe bush.

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, *Heliconias*, Strangler Fig trees, Wild Nutmeg trees, Fig trees and Vanilla vines. We were shown Lansan or Frankincense trees which produce a white sap that can be lit and used by churches for its perfumed smoke. And the seed cups are fragrant too and used to keep the insects away. The Cinchona tree was also common and produces quinine in its bark. The Monkey Paws tree, a *Marygravia* woody vine, produces a complicated green flower arrangement that looks like an

umbrella. The Swizzlestick Tree or Bwa lèlè has an arrangement of five branches coming out of the trunk at regular intervals - the branches may be cut to within a few inches of the thin stem which is cut to a foot in length. This may then be used as a whisk as just one example. Hanging vines of the wild passion fruit stream down from the trees and can be swung from like the fictional Tarzan.

At 1pm we headed back down the mountains to Castries and our boat. We stopped for packed lunch in the hot sunshine, looking across to a huge cruise ship that had docked earlier that day. Just before we left we looked at a nearby Cattle Egret colony containing more than 50 nests in some trees by a lily pool.

Sailing back south we enjoyed seeing several more frigatebirds and boobies. Dark clouds loomed over the Roseau Valley and for the remaining journey we got very wet as the heavy rain poured down. It stopped just before we got back to Anse Chastanet at 3pm.

We met again for a relaxing evening in the hotel's Treehouse restaurant and to share stories of today's adventures.

Day 7

Thursday 11th January

Emeralds Farm and Sulphur Springs; 28°C

After breakfast we met at 8.30am and set off to Sulphur Springs, the world's only drive-in volcano just on the other side of Soufrière, 15 minutes from where we were staying. 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. The name comes from Spanish for large cooking pot and similar features are found in Yellowstone National Park in the USA and Rotorua in New Zealand.

During a heavy shower (which lasted some time!) we met with our guide, John, and stood by the barriers to see the bubbling water and smell the hydrogen sulphide. There was a lot of steam today rising off the hot pools. The whole crater is 12 kilometres square, and includes the town of Soufrière. It was produced by eruptions 32,000 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. The water itself (which is seawater) was a dark grey colour and takes up to 20 days to reach this point. The dark colour is a combination of the hydrogen sulphide reacting with iron to produce iron sulphide. One bubbling pool had only appeared a few weeks ago. It was bubbling up at 100°C and steam was rising up and across the rocks. On very high Spring tides the higher water pressure creates geysers. We looked across the Moon-like terrain made of pumice or calcium sulphate with some sulphur giving it a yellow tinge. There are 24 vents in total and the activity of both the volcano here and other islands is monitored regularly by scientists based on Trinidad.

The Pitons that 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.

We walked with John up to the interpretation centre where we watched a short film about Sulphur Springs and read more information about the site. 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.

After an introduction from bee-keeper Scott, one of the gardeners, Bryton, showed us the different fruits and vegetables being grown here for Anse Chastanet and Jade Mountain hotels. We tasted fresh Tree Sorrel fruits - sour and juicy - and a plant with sweet-tasting leaves (*Stevia rebaudinana*) which they are trying to refine to use instead of sugar. We saw the tropical American Soursop, the fruits of which are like an egg-shaped green melon with soft spines; a Cinnamon Tree; a Starfruit tree; common herbs including flowering Tarragon; banana and plantain trees; Lemon Grass, a fruiting Mango tree; micro salad (picked within four days of being sown) and other vegetables. There were also lots of ornamental plants being grown including orchids, *Croton* and *Ixora* which are later used around the hotels. To finish we saw the farm's oyster-mushroom-growing room and fermenting cocoa beans used to make the hotels' own chocolate.

Chef Elijah, who works at the sister hotel Jade Mountain, then did a cooking demonstration showing us how to make an exquisite dish with tuna, prawns and vegetables. The table in front of us was adorned with banana leaves and covered in delicious looking greens and fruits. While we enjoyed some rosé wine, Elijah, showed us how to cook a delicious dish.

To begin, fresh tuna was flavoured with curry spices and rolled in finely chopped herbs; it was then left to marinade. King prawns were sprinkled with curry spices and chopped herbs and also left to marinade. Meanwhile okra was cut along its length and pan-fried seed side down with rosemary and garlic. Cucumber and tomatoes were quartered while large radishes were finely sliced and left in cold water so they became crisp. The tomatoes were sealed briefly on the pan with garlic and thyme, and then their skins removed after. Avocados were spooned into a bowl with salt, olive oil and spring onions. This was added to the cucumbers. The tuna was then seared all around and left, while the prawns cooked in olive oil, rosemary, and a halved chili. The insides of two passion fruits were added with a little water and sugar. Unsalted butter was then added to make a passion fruit buttered shrimp. The prepared vegetables were laid beautifully on long, straight plates for each of us before the prawns and sliced tuna was added, ready for our tasting. Micro-leaves were added as a garnish and the juices from the prawns were drizzled over. The dish was divine and every mouthful delivered such an intense and delicious flavor. We were impressed!

We got back to Anse Chastanet around 1.30pm and had a few hours to enjoy the hot sunshine before meeting at 4pm for the Jazzy Sunset Cruise. This was a chance to look for dolphins in particular while enjoying wine, canapés and champagne at sunset! While there were no dolphins, we had magnificent views of the two Pitons as we hugged the coastline at sunset. Just before the light dropped away completely in Soufrière a Peregrine flew over the boat. We sailed right up to the bat cave again and with the help of a torch we were able to see and hear thousands of Antillean Fruit Bats. After a good boogie as we came back to Anse Chastanet, we met together in the Aspara restaurant just after 7pm and our enjoyed our last dinner meal together.

Day 8

Friday 12th January

Dolphin Watching; 27°C

After our lack of Dolphins on Monday and last night, we had another dolphin trip booked and we set off at 9am on a catamaran with our skipper Nick and spotters David and Thomas.

For the first hour and a half things were pretty quiet although we had wonderful views of the coastline. Heading south in a south-easterly breeze we finally found dolphins not too far off Gros Piton. We had found Pantropical

Spotted Dolphins. They were in feeding mode and so while they surfaced and came to the boat they soon disappeared under for a while. There must have been at least 200 in total, although at any one time we were watching 10 – 30. We spent 15 minutes with them; many were young animals by size and the lack of intense peppering of spots on their skin. They disappeared for a longer period and so we headed back to Soufrière to see the Antillean Fruit Bats in their cave one last time.

Back at the hotel we stopped for lunch enjoying some delicious food. Jo, Chris and Fran were staying on for another week so we said our goodbyes. Richard, Sandra and Ed had a few hours to relax in their rooms before meeting at 4pm at the reception bar and travelling to the airport with driver Clyde at 5pm.

With no queue at check in we were through security within ten minutes or less and waited for our flight.

After a slightly shorter flight (8 hours) back to Gatwick Airport, we made our way home safely after a relaxing, hot, sunny holiday seeing St. Lucia's endemic birdlife and many other plants and animals.

Day 9

Saturday 13th January

Return to the UK

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Scaly-naped Pigeon by Ed Drewitt

Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	January								
			5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>			2						
2	Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>				1		8			
3	Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>		8+	1	✓	6+	8+	3	3	
4	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			3						
5	Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>						1	1		
6	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>			1			4			
7	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	4		2			50+	30		
8	Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>						1	1		
9	Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>			15						
10	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion hallaetus</i>			1			3			
11	Broad-winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>		1				1			
12	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falcon peregrinus</i>						1	1		
13	Caribbean Coot	<i>Fulica caribaea</i>			6						
14	Antillean Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata cerceris</i>			6						
15	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>						1		1	
16	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>			8						
17	Scaly-naped Pigeon	<i>Patagioenus squamosa</i>		1							
18	Ruddy Quail-Dove	<i>Geotrygon montana</i>		H							
19	Zenaida Dove	<i>Zenaida aurita</i>		6+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>						1			
21	Common Ground Dove	<i>Collumbina passerina</i>		✓	✓						
22	St Lucia Amazon (Parrot)	<i>Amazona versicolor</i>			8		H				
23	Mangrove Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus minor</i>		2	H		1				
24	Lesser Antillean Swift	<i>Chaetura martinica</i>			2+			6			
25	Purple-throated Carib	<i>Eulampis jugularis</i>			6+		5+	8+			
26	Green-throated Carib	<i>Eulampis holosericeus</i>						1			
27	Antillean Crested Hummingbird	<i>Orthorhyncus cristatus</i>		3+	5+		3+	1	1		
28	Lesser Antillean Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus oberi</i>		1	1						
29	Caribbean Elaenia	<i>Elaenia martinica</i>		2	3		H	1			
30	St Lucia Pewee	<i>Contopus oberi</i> (now in <i>C. latirostris</i>)		1	1						
31	Grey Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>		2+	✓		1	2	1	4	
32	House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>		1							
33	Grey Trembler	<i>Cinlocerthia gutturalis</i>		H	2		4+	1			
34	Scaly-breasted Thrasher	<i>Allenia fusca</i>		2	2		1	1			
35	Pearly-eyed Thrasher	<i>Margarops fuscatus</i>			1		2	4			
36	Rufous-throated Solitaire	<i>Myadestes genibarbis</i>			2						
37	Spectacled (Bare-eyed) Thrush	<i>Turdus nudigenis</i>			H		H				
38	Black-whiskered Vireo	<i>Vireo altoquus</i>		1							
39	Antillean Euphonia	<i>Euphonia musica</i>			1			2			
40	St Lucia Warbler	<i>Setophaga (Dendroica) delicata</i>		4+	✓		✓	2	H		
41	Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Black-faced Grassquit	<i>Tiaris bicolor</i>		1			2				
43	St Lucia Black Finch	<i>Melanospiza richardsoni</i>			1		6+	2			
44	Lesser Antillean Bullfinch	<i>Loxigilla noctis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Lesser Antillean Saltator	<i>Saltator albicollis</i>		1			1				
46	Carib Grackle	<i>Quiscalus lugubris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	St Lucia Oriole	<i>Icterus laudabills</i>			2		2				

	Common name	Scientific name	January						
			5	6	7	8	9	10	11

Reptiles and Amphibians

1	Watts' Anole Lizard	<i>Anolis watsi watsi</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	St Lucia Anole Lizard	<i>Anolis luciae</i>			1		3			
3	Lesser Antillean or Johnstone's Whistling Frog	<i>Eleutherodactylus johnstonei</i>	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
4										

Mammals

1	Pantropical Spotted Dolphin	<i>Stenella attenuata</i>								200+
2	Small Asian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>			2		1	1		
3	Common Free-tailed Bat	<i>Molossus molossus molossus</i>								
4	Antillean Fruit Bat	<i>Brachyphylla cavernarum cavernarum</i>				✓			✓	✓

Fish

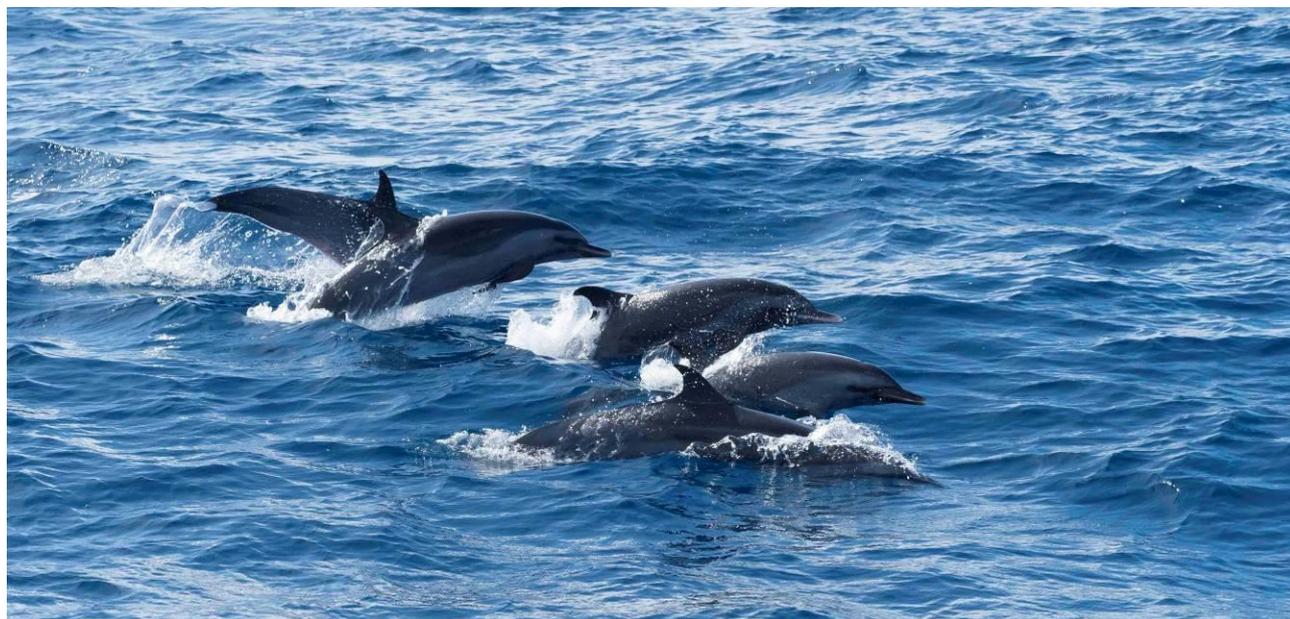
1	Four-winged Flying Fish	<i>Hirundichthys affinis</i>				✓				✓
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Crabs

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

Other invertebrates

1	Long-tailed Skipper	<i>Urbanus proteus</i>		1						
2	Great Southern White	<i>Ascia monuste</i>						1	✓	
3	Gulf Fritillary	<i>Agraulis vanillae</i>		1						
4	Little Yellow	<i>Eurema lisa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Julia or Flambeau	<i>Dryas iulia</i>			2				2	
6	Black Witch moth	<i>Ascalapha odorata</i>			3					
7	Antillean Skimmer	<i>Orthemis macrostigma</i>							1	
8	Kite Spider	<i>Gasteracantha sp.</i>			1					



Pantropical Dolphins by Richard Rolfe