

St. Lucia

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 12 January 2019



Lesser Antillean Bullfinch



Purple-throated Carib



Grey Kingbird



St Lucia Dove

Report and images by Neil McMahon



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Neil McMahon (leader) with 11 Naturetrek clients

Summary

The January trip to St Lucia didn't disappoint: a combination of superb warm weather, multiple sightings of Sperm Whales, a large pod of Pantropical Spotted Dolphins and sightings of all the endemic and near-endemic birds on this idyllic Caribbean island provided some exciting highlights! We tried hard to identify the butterflies and lush flora on our travels with daily excursions from our luxury accommodation and resort at Anse Chastanet.

Our local guides provided opportunities for appreciating the local history as well as natural history, and everywhere we went people were incredibly friendly and interested in our pursuits of wildlife. We peered into a bat cave which catered for the daytime roosting of hundreds of Lesser Antillean Fruit Bats, we watched a Boa Constrictor gliding ever so slowly through vines 20 feet above us and enjoyed daytime views of Common Opossum and Asian Mongoose. Our own beach boasted a fishing Osprey, a wintering Belted Kingfisher and Brown Boobies which preened and fidgeted on the cliffs. The shallow waters and reefs attracted a myriad of dazzling fishes, with many of us taking to the water to appreciate them whilst snorkelling - parrotfish, trumpet fish and angel fish to name but a few.

Our visits included mini expeditions into the central island rainforests where we saw St Lucia Parrot (now called St Lucia Amazon) and Rufous-throated Solitaire and to the dryer Atlantic forests for the rare White-breasted Thrasher. We also visited the active sulphur springs which prove the volcanic origins of this island, situated within the Lesser Antillean string of islands of the eastern Caribbean. Add to that a forest-canopy gondola ride, visiting birding hot spots and visits to gardens and areas of horticulture to admire the range of vegetables and fruit utilised at our resort, we felt as if we had enjoyed a very large slice of what St Lucia had to offer!

Our resort is renowned for fine cuisine, eco-friendly and sustainable tourism and very comfortable accommodation with a range of all-inclusive facilities on-site to appreciate and it certainly did not disappoint!

During the course of the nine-day luxury extravaganza we saw over 60 species of birds, with perhaps our best views of many of the specialities right within the Anse Chastanet complex, particularly at breakfast time when many of our local feathery friends showed particularly well! And yes, there were times when the Lesser Antillean Bullfinches, Bananaquits and others were just as happy to eat our breakfast as we were!

Day 1

Friday 4th January

Eleven participants and a Naturetrek tour guide met at the Anse Chastanet Resort on the west side of St Lucia during the afternoon. Group members had arrived at this stunning West Indian island on three different flights, arriving at Hewanorra Airport in the south within two hours of each other. Three incoming flights made this tiny airport busy, but eventually we were free of the customs and passport control scramble and took a sedate but interesting hour-long drive to the Anse Chastanet resort situated near the small vibrant town of Soufriere. The conditions were warm, humid but pleasant, and a far cry from the cruel edge of the Northern Hemisphere winter we had left!

Well-maintained roads, right-hand-drive vehicles being driven on the left, clean villages and towns mostly absent of litter and the lush green foliage of the trees, vines and creepers were all very welcoming. As were the peppermint-scented flannels and cool bottled water made available to us at the airport!

Initial sightings of birds included the Carib Grackles, Grey Kingbirds, Broad-winged Hawk, Cattle Egret and a Yellow-crowned Night Heron.

The remainder of the afternoon was taken up with room allocation, administration and an opportunity to relax before the sun disappeared below the waves at about 5.50pm St Lucia time (UK time is four hours ahead). The first of many superb dishes reflecting the diverse cuisine were enjoyed and, after a very long day of travelling, it was time to retire.

Day 2

Saturday 5th January

Breakfast at Anse Chastanet starts from 7am, so after sampling a variety of very nice options we met up with local bird guide Meno for our 8.30am excursion. This very charismatic and energetic naturalist took us for a slow and very instructive walk from the resort, along the beach and to the remains of a historic sugar plantation and processing area, now returning to secondary and primary forest. By the time we had reached the bottom of the steps down to the beach, we had encountered Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Antillean Crested Hummingbird and Lesser Antillean Saltator. Magnificent Frigatebirds soared and arched over the sea and neighbouring forest and further out, we espied passing Pomarine Skuas. We enjoyed close views of a Mangrove Cuckoo, encountered Black-faced Grassquits and saw a distant Belted Kingfisher perched up on rocks.

By this time Meno, our man of the forest, had already told us all about his Grandmother and how she had taught him about all the medicinal qualities of the trees and shrubs all around, and he attempted to instil his knowledge in us by pointing out a variety of leaves, pods and seeds and allowing us to smell the different scents of crushed leaves of citrus, coriander, Caribbean bayleaf and others.

Further birds spotted included Little Blue Heron, a Green Heron and Spotted Sandpiper as we reached a small reservoir built to supply water to the ancient mills for the initial extraction techniques of raw sugar 200 years ago. Lesser Antillean Bullfinches were everywhere but we also found endemic island birds in the shape of St Lucia Warbler, St Lucia Pewee and St Lucia Black Finch. Our fourth endemic bird was a showy male St Lucia Oriole.

Other plant life pointed out were the Calabash Tree (St Lucia's national tree) and local examples of Mahogany, Tulip Tree, Breadfruit Tree, Mimosa, Gumbo and Almond Tree. Recognisable fruit trees included Pineapple, Grapefruit, Tangerine, Lemon, Lime, Mango and of course Banana. The exporting of locally grown Bananas still provides an important income to this small independent nation.

A movement in the branches caught our eye and there in broad daylight was a Common Opossum walking up some vines, occasionally pausing to munch something and then moving slowly upwards until out of sight. These introduced marsupials are normally active only at night but on our way back we saw him/her again, providing excellent views.

After walking through the merged secondary forest/fruit orchard we descended down to the beach and took a short boat trip back along to our resort. A quick look at a small Brown Booby colony revealed no birds in residence!

On our return we refreshed and undertook a general orientation briefing from one of the managers (Jonathan) as well as specific briefings from people managing the yoga and water-sport opportunities. So much going on in such a small arena made it a little overwhelming but then this is a holiday resort! After a pleasant lunch in one of the restaurants, the remainder of the afternoon provided an opportunity for exploring the immediate area, swimming and snorkelling for those who felt like some exercise and an opportunity to catch up on some sleep or research for others. The Wi-Fi connection is strong and available in all the rather opulent rooms. The rooms are also equipped with Espresso coffee makers, kettles, fans, a security box, fridges and most have a small veranda or balcony with a sea view.

All of a sudden it was 5.30pm and we all met up again to go through the week's itinerary and make a start on our wildlife checklist. Chris then pointed to a movement on a tree just beyond where we were sitting, and there a silhouetted form of another Opossum could be seen making its way down a vine.

Evening meals are available from 6.30pm so we took the opportunity to partake at this time as many were still a little weary from the previous day's travelling. The food was exquisite but the service was slow by Western Europe standards and it took some two hours to choose and be served up the delicious and diverse food on offer. The hotel and resort prides itself on utilising self-grown vegetables and fruits from their gardens and orchards.

Day 3

Sunday 6th January

We all gathered at 5.30am with a view to undertaking some birding in a variety of locations on the east and south sides of the island. With our packed breakfasts and lunches on board, two taxis motored around the south of the island, passing through Soufriere and Vieux Fort, and then north along the coastal road on the Atlantic east coast to overlook the fishing settlement of Dennery (arriving just after 7am). Here we met Vision our local guide for the day and ate our packed breakfast overlooking Dennery Bay from Mandele Point. David Malcolm's sharp eyes picked out a Green Heron feeding on the slope below us.

We then progressed a short distance south, stopping to examine a squashed snake in the road, which was apparently a juvenile example of the local Fer-de-lance, called a St Lucia Viper (or Lancehead). This is a very venomous and dangerous snake but not often seen and mostly restricted to the dryer east side of the island. More stops checking the scrub and secondary growth were with a view to seeing the threatened and near-endemic White-breasted Thrasher. Most of us saw this skulking bird but it rarely remained on view for more than a few seconds at a time and remained obscured deep in the bushes. A bird of thrush-like proportions with a longish tail, solid brown upperside and clean white underside with a slightly decurved bill and bright eye, this species is restricted to two small regions in St Lucia and one area on the island of Martinique.

Whilst trying hard to obtain a view of this bird, other birds queued up in front of us with startling good views of the vivid yellow St Lucia Warblers, St Lucia Pewee and even a couple more St Lucia Black Finches! Mangrove Cuckoo, Lesser Antillean Saltator and Antillean Crested Hummingbird were all relegated to 'also rans'. In the

meantime Chris was getting into the swirling forms of the local butterflies and managed to identify several with examples of Great Southern White, White Peacock, Common Buckeye, Julia and Little Yellow all on show. We also began to notice the common local lizards which appeared to be mostly St Lucia Anole. Rapidly-moving dragonflies and damselflies sadly eluded efforts at identification!

With time marching on we decided to abandon obtaining further views of the rare thrasher and drove on and up along increasingly narrow roads to the Des Cartiers Rainforest Trail. Here the trees grew tall and stately and George's interest in trees and all things growing went into overdrive as Vision discussed examples of both native and introduced species. With national independence only as recently as 1979, it was wonderful to hear the pride and commitment deep within Vision's countenance narrative as he provided examples of economic and environmental issues as they have manifested themselves both on the island and within the eastern Caribbean as a whole. It was particularly enlightening to hear him talk about local issues and influences, putting them in both a local and international context and with lots of holistic intelligence.

We walked along the trail, some of it along ancient routes over the hills and through the rainforest taken by travellers moving east to west across the width of the island, and utilised by both French and British forces at times of strife between both nations over disputed territorial rights. The track was well maintained but wet and slippery in many places, but by walking slowly and steadily we made progress to a small look-out over the rain forest. En route, a variety of trees, vines and shrubs and their respective pods, seeds and flowers were pointed out by Vision. We could hear St Lucia Amazons, we could hear the melancholy shrill song of the Rufous-throated Solitaire and a couple of Purple-throated Caribs (hummingbirds) came down to inspect us.

On arrival at the rather restricted look-out, we pretty much immediately saw two St Lucia Amazons and they completed a couple of fly-pasts for us. Even though you could hear them coming (and going!), photographing them in flight was a challenge! A few other individuals were seen flying around further away; this area of the forest is an important roost site for this endangered bird that may now only number 2500 free-flying individuals. The good news is that this bird is slowly increasing, as in the 1970s the wild population had been reduced to just a few hundred birds. A massive education programme was launched nearly 50 years ago to inform the people of St Lucia about the plight of their national bird which was suffering from habitat destruction, and today's population of these long-lived birds is still small but much enhanced due to the efforts of the conservationists of the day.

Other birds on view included a superb close view of a beautiful Rufous-throated Solitaire, perched in some shrubbery close to the viewpoint. Two colourful Antillean Blue-headed Euphonias flew into the same bushes and then departed without everyone being able to appreciate the subtle blues, greens and yellow colours on display. A couple of Pearly-eyed Thrashers visited a fruiting tree below us, as did Scaly-breasted Thrashers and Scaly-naped Pigeons. A Broad-winged Hawk rode the air currents below us and a small party of Lesser Antillean Swifts did much the same thing. A variety of small birds gave fleeting views as they flitted past us.

Our steady walk back brought us back to our waiting transport, but first it was time for our packed lunch which we munched with a crowd of Lesser Antillean Bullfinches watching over us and taking advantage of any scraps! After our picnic we drove back down the track and on to the coastal road, heading south towards the airport, and then visited a wetland area at Aupicon. Here, a mostly freshwater lake attracted breeding Pied-billed Grebes, Antillean Common Gallinules also with young, White-shielded Coots (formerly called Caribbean Coot and now

considered to be a race of American Coot) and a duck flock made up of Lesser Scaup and Ring-necked Ducks. Birds of the margins included a Belted Kingfisher and all three egret species of Great, Snowy and Cattle. Sharp eyes picked out a couple of Tri-coloured Herons in distant bushes, a flying Little Blue Heron with smaller birds including another Mangrove Cuckoo and our first Green-throated Carib.

Moving on we found ourselves alongside the shoreline at Vieux Fort in search of waders or 'shorebirds'. Straightaway we found good numbers of Black-bellied Plovers (Grey Plovers) and Semi-palmated Plovers plus a couple of Ruddy Turnstones and a distant fly-past Royal Tern. A short walk to a small inlet proved profitable with Green Heron, both colour phases of Little Blue Heron and Snowy Egret. More waders included Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs standing alongside each other, up to four Spotted Sandpipers and a Hudsonian Whimbrel. A flock of American Barn Swallows were hawking insects over the bushes nearby and distant scanning provided views of distant Red-billed Tropicbirds settling on a rocky outcrop called Maria Islands.

We returned to the vehicles and checked a small marshy area next to the airport and coastal road which also supported a range of birds which included Blue-winged Teal, Wilson's Snipe, Solitary Sandpiper and another Lesser Yellowlegs. This was our final birding destination for the day, so we said good bye to Vision and drove the hour's drive back to Anse Chastanet. Birds en route included typical roadside birds such as American Kestrel, Broad-winged Hawk, Grey Kingbird, Carib Grackle and a few more herons and egrets. Arriving back just after 5pm, we had time to spruce up before our 6.30pm evening meal and, of course, the regular Naturetrek checklist, which quite rightly was becoming more inflated with wildlife disciplines other than just birds! After a long day out in the field all participants were justified in having a good night's sleep!

Day 4

Monday 7th January

We had a much easier start today and even had time to enjoy the amazing breakfast options at the resort! And the Treehouse Restaurant provides an elevated platform to watch some St Lucian specialities such as Scaly-naped Pigeon, Grey Kingbird, Scaly-breasted Thrasher and even Grey Trembler, as well as the more usual Bananaquits, Lesser Antillean Bullfinches and Carib Grackles which will happily share your breakfast with you!

At 9am we boarded a boat down at the small quay next to the resort beach and gently motored out to sea. The excursion is labelled as a whale-watching trip but I think our expectations were not that high! We had travelled barely a mile out when the flanks of dolphins some way ahead of us could be discerned. Naturally we steered towards them and soon we were among a well scattered pod of Pantropical Spotted Dolphins, perhaps the most likely cetacean to be encountered in these waters. These slim, lithe, pelagic dolphins were clearly comfortable in our presence, even when 'our find' attracted a variety of other craft to the area too. As we watched they played in the warm waters, their essentially soft grey colours showing well as they zoomed along at speed just under the surface. From the size differences and actions, it was clear there were quite a number of young animals present and, in all probability, there were some 50 or so individuals in total. They regularly broke the surface, tail splashed and careered around in all directions. Several acrobatic individuals jumped well clear of the water which must have counted as just sheer exuberance! At one stage a lone Brown Booby flew low over the active pod but didn't linger.

At least one 'blow' of water was noticed towards the horizon and we moved off in that direction. Before we were able to get close, there appeared to be just one animal spouting and we could see that this behaviour belonged to

a Sperm Whale. It was on the surface, inhaling and exhaling in preparation of a deep dive. Our boat kept well back to allow some space for the biggest toothed whale in the world, and not surprisingly, other boats began to materialise. The bulbous fleshy area around the blowhole was perhaps a little too big for a female, but as we neared and saw more of the hard plate ridges of the tailstock and vertebrae as the animal changed position in the water, it then slowly inverted itself to dive down deep, showing the classic disappearing fluke as it did so! Wow!

With the whale clearly not going to reappear anytime soon we relocated our dolphins and continued to enjoy their hyperactivity! There seemed to be no birdlife at all this far out so we headed closer to the coastline near Soufriere and watched a group of Magnificent Frigatebirds scooping up some unknown food from the water's surface. Huge and pterodactyl-looking, these nimble but intimidating piratical beasts dominate the St Lucian skies and coasts. A Pomarine Skua (or Jaeger) complete with tail 'spoons' joined the fray briefly but quickly disappeared – it must feel out-gunned in these waters!

Edging closer to the cliff, we could see a colony of Lesser Antillean Fruit Bats hanging upside down and also flying around in a vertical crevice; this colony is probably the largest on the island and although we could see hundreds of animals it is thought that this colony may contain up to 5,000 individuals. The nesting ledges on the cliffs at the headland were checked as we chugged around to our resort, but just a single Brown Booby was at home.

Arriving back at 'our beach' just after 11.30am, and with no further specific excursions planned for that day, it provided an opportunity for everyone to sample some of the other activities on offer at the resort, which include yoga, various elements of boat craft, swimming, snorkelling, scuba diving, spa activities and others. Snorkelling with the provision of free flippers and goggles to see a myriad of fishes was particularly popular, it being possible to see 100 species of a variety of colours and different shapes in less than an hour, all just feet from the beach or quay (the advantage of a coastal marine preserve).

With darkness enveloping our world by about 6pm, the evening was left to choosing which restaurant to dine in and the compilation of our wildlife checklists and, of course, preparation for our following day's adventure.

Day 5

Tuesday 8th January

We left Anse Chastanet at about 6.20am and drove for about 90 minutes north and then east until we arrived at the forest reserve known as Millet. En route we noticed some small areas of sugar cane, once a common crop in the region but no longer so, as sugar production is now no longer a viable crop on a large scale.

After arriving at Millet we ate our packed breakfast and walked slowly in to the nearby forest with Meno and Pamela as our guides. Along the trail were elevated feeding posts where coconut and similar offerings were maintained for the birds to feed, and hopefully for us to see them a little more easily! Not surprisingly, the Bullfinches were there helping themselves and we also saw St Lucia Black Finches visiting the coconut and at least one St Lucia Oriole did likewise. Broad-winged Hawks were vocal and we saw a pair flying around. We saw fairly fleeting views of Pearly-eyed Thrashers but plenty of Purple-throated Caribs and Antillean Crested Hummingbirds feeding on the flowers. Sadly they hadn't seen any parrots in this area for some time, presumably the birds were elsewhere on the island looking for ripening fruit or similar.

The day before the staff had encountered a Boa Constrictor, a large snake which can be difficult to see on St Lucia. Luckily the serpent hadn't wandered far and we were able to watch the boa as it slowly moved up over some overhead vines, so slowly and well camouflaged that it would have been easily missed had we not known where to look. This individual was perhaps only about nine feet long, and an impressive creature, but they can grow to 15 feet in length!

We walked a short distance down another forested trail and with plenty of neck-craning saw birds such as St Lucia Pewee, now considered to be a race of Lesser Antillean Pewee, St Lucia Warbler, Grey Trembler, more St Lucia Orioles and St Lucia Black Finches and canopy views of a Pearly-eyed Thrasher or two. At the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Forestry and Fisheries building there were rows of potted tree seedlings of a variety of species. Although hurricanes rarely cause extensive damage on St Lucia, a particularly powerful storm in 2010 devastated the island and the upland forests lost a great deal of their trees. Nine years on, they are still growing and planting their replacements.

With nothing further envisaged to see at Millet, we said our good byes and headed back to Anse Chastanet. The upland villagers live a meagre lifestyle and a far cry from the relative luxury of the resort we were returning to, something I'm sure a number of us were later thinking about as we enjoyed another fine lunch at the beach restaurant. A wintering Osprey showed nicely just off the beach.

The afternoon was at leisure, with an optional birding walk along the entrance track to Soufriere. This walk produced some very good numbers of birds, which included American Kestrels, a flock of Shiny Cowbirds, close views of Black-faced Grassquits, lots of Scaly-breasted Thrashers, a Pearly-eyed Thrasher and a Lesser Antillean Saltator. Butterflies included Little Yellow and White Peacock and one or two unidentified specimens all attracted to the grassland flowers. The high point along this track probably provides the best views from the north of Petit Piton and Gros Piton, the iconic St Lucia volcanic spires or upside-down cones that rise majestically from the sea.

Each Tuesday evening there is a cocktail party held down on the beach with some rum punch on tap and an opportunity for some of the managers to socialise with people utilising the resort. However the reality is that the managers and staff don't need this function to mingle – they are outstandingly friendly and communicative at all times! Following cocktails and canapés we slowly meandered to our beachside restaurant and dined listening to the lapping waves and background steel band music. At another time of the year it might have been worth walking along the beaches looking for turtles coming ashore and depositing their eggs in their sandy 'nests'.

Day 6

Wednesday 9th January

Without an early morning start today we all enjoyed a leisurely breakfast in the Treetops restaurant. Yes, the food is lovely, but the birds always put on a 'tree-mendous' performance, even canopy specialists providing fabulous views! In fact it is tempting to stay there all morning!

However we had a boat trip planned and at 9am we met our transport down at the beach and chugged northwards hugging the coastline. Royal Terns and a Belted Kingfisher kept their distance and a variety of pleasure craft passed in both directions. Our venue was the capital Castries and as we steered towards the harbour a couple of Brown Boobies came into view. Two immense cruise liners were docked at Castries with the

passengers spewing out to wander the street markets awaiting their perusal. A sizeable Cattle Egret colony was active in the grounds of a nearby hotel.

We docked nearby and were met by our driver who drove us the 20 minutes or so to our next adventure – an aerial forest-canopy gondola! A little like a ski lift, we caught the slow moving gondola and traversed up the steep slopes and into the canopy of long-lived forest trees. Two guides accompanied us and provided a running commentary on what we were looking at. At the top we glided to a halt and disembarked. Here we admired a couple of well-camouflaged large cricket-like insects which strum all night, and which are probably the cause of the loud noises heard during the night at our resort. Then a short circular walk proved productive with more views of some of the endemics such as St Lucia Pewee, St Lucia Oriole and St Lucia Warbler and we enjoyed good views of Lesser Antillean Flycatcher and Caribbean Elaenia. Old strangler trees were much admired, and their trunks provided the appropriate backdrop for group photos; one particular specimen of St Lucia Anole (an endemic lizard) posed beautifully and was much photographed and seemed to enjoy the attention!

We then descended in our gondola again, checking the foliage for any wildlife as we slowly passed tree after tree. Purple-throated Caribs whizzed about and occasionally perched near a flower, a flock of Lesser Antillean Swifts flew around and other birds included Scaly-naped Pigeon and Antillean Crested Hummingbirds. On the ground once again we espied furtive Grey Tremblers and a Pearly-eyed Thrasher and admired a Green-throated Carib, our first prolonged views.

After a short opportunity for a comfort break, we said good bye to our enthusiastic guides and took the 20-minute drive back to the harbour where we again boarded our boat taxi and consumed our packed lunches. We slowly chugged back to Anse Chastanet looking for any wildlife along the way, which proved to be similar to that encountered on our outgoing journey.

The afternoon was taken up with gentle walks, photography, snorkelling and relaxing on the beach, the immediate area around Anse Chastanet providing plenty of opportunities to explore, watch the wildlife or simply chat with the locals. The Osprey caught a small fish in the bay and took it to the cliffs and out of our view.

Day 7

Thursday 10th January

Following breakfast, the group took a short taxi ride en route to the Sulphur Springs Park, but with Meno on board we first stopped at a small river in Soufriere which was alive with water birds. Immediately obvious was a selection of herons made up of Great, Snowy and Cattle Egrets, Green Heron, Little Blue Heron and our only Black-crowned Night Herons of the trip. A Belted Kingfisher was perched up for most of the time we were there, and other birds included Spotted Sandpiper, Black-faced Grassquit and our first Eurasian Collared Doves.

We wrenched ourselves away and entered the park which depicts the volcanic origins of the island. Here we took a short but very interesting tour where we could see the thermal activity for ourselves, with hot springs, gurgling mud and gushes of steam. And even here there was wildlife – the sulphuric atmosphere is reputed to repel snakes and insects – but there were butterflies and dragonflies on the wing, and high up, we could see two Ospreys lazily riding the thermals. A little tourist retail therapy was possible here and we then took a short drive to Emerald Farm. The farm serves the resort of Anse Chastanet and Jade Mountain and we were taken on an excellent tour by one of the gardeners, Edwin. He was passionate and very knowledgeable about his subject as

we examined the herbs, fruits and vegetables of this large plot of land dedicated to providing a significant part of the food utilised by the resort chefs. And even though we were supposed to be concentrating on what was growing, plenty of butterflies were cruising around and the prepared beds of vegetables and shrubs were attractive to quite a number of Common Ground Doves. Overhead a couple more Broad-winged Hawks soared around and there were hummingbirds too!

Following our tour, where we were permitted to smell, feel and taste the fruits of their labour, Edwin then introduced us to two of the resort chefs who had come up to the farm to prepare lunch for us, using the produce to hand. Two dishes were produced in front of us and these guys certainly love using lime juice! A diced kingfish dish and a guacamole evolved before us and of course, we enjoyed the opportunity of tucking in afterwards. Both chefs were entertaining but were also very happy at showing us their tricks of the trade, and with a couple of pretty serious food preparers in our group, there was plenty of intense concentration!

After our farm tour and prepared lunch, it was time to head back, but several of us opted to visit the nearby Botanical Gardens where an hour or so was deemed sufficient to see the best on show. I think the lure of a very English afternoon tea back at Anse Chastanet proved too compelling for the remainder!

The rest of the afternoon was at leisure, with many again taking to the water to enjoy the fascinating life on the coral just offshore. Photographers were in their element trying to capture images of fidgety butterflies and restless hummingbirds, while for others, it could simply be supping a 'Bentley' (local cocktail and highly recommended) under the shade of a beach shack! By this time, we had managed to convert to this very temporary way of life with conviction; it was lovely while it lasted!

Afternoon melted into evening with more fine dining, and each evening there was musical entertainment which tended to phase out just after 10pm. We endeavoured to maintain our diaries and checklists, with Chris steadily compiling the butterfly list and George stoically engaged and leading on unravelling the complexities of island flora. In comparison the bird list was a doddle!

Day 8

Friday 11th January

For many of the group this was our last day on this paradise island, and later in the day we said our goodbyes, as the group splintered and went their separate ways. But before all that there was still plenty of wildlife to see! Many of us opted for another boat trip in an effort to track any cetaceans in the area, others fancied another land-based bird walk from the resort and both took place that morning. Before that, the breakfast birds put on an excellent display and included a Spectacled (also known as Bare-eyed) Thrush, the only one we saw all trip!

We boarded our boat a little after 9am and headed out into the big blue of the Caribbean Sea. Tracking distant birds on the horizon was more difficult than it sounded but surely where there are birds there are fish and other beasts? A good few miles out, the dispersing sea-birds proved to be a party of Brown Boobies which declined to allow a close approach. A 'blow' nearby belonged to a Sperm Whale which didn't linger but then a second animal was found that provided the best views of the trip. We enjoyed an excellent side-on view of this huge animal, in particular with excellent views of the front end with the almost conical blow hole and stretched and glistening grey skin defining the power and strength of huge muscles and the flexible vertebrae. The whale changed its position in the water and we enjoyed an aerial view from behind it, where the girth and bulk could be better

appreciated. All the time the animal was breathing in and out with the blow of water ejecting forwards and to the left. And if that wasn't impressive enough, our Sperm Whale moved position again and then completed a slow-motion deep dive concluding with the massive fluke following the huge body down under the waves.

Follow that! Well we couldn't really – a glimpse of some dolphins was had by the crew but came to nothing, and so after some trawling around and seeing some more Brown Boobies, we chugged into the bay and sea front of Soufriere where we found a flock of just-arrived Laughing Gulls, almost certainly wintering here from the USA. There appeared to be just 15 individuals but, as the winter progresses, apparently the numbers grow into hundreds and they adorn the moored boats in the sheltered bay. We took a look at the Antillean Fruit Bat colony again and counted a couple of Brown Boobies preening on the cliffs, with a couple of distant egrets and herons fishing the beaches.

Arriving back at about 11.30am, we met up with the land bird group and they had thoroughly enjoyed watching a variety of passerines which included the local race of the House Wren, Shiny Cowbirds and plenty of other species previously encountered, but still enjoyed again.

Our last meal together was of course at the beach restaurant and, yes, there was good reason to enjoy another 'Bentley' or two prior to our lovely food. It was another warm, sunny day and we had been blessed with good weather throughout, just the first day being a bit wet and occasional showers on other days. It was never cold! After more photographic opportunities and time to shower and change, late afternoon effectively concluded tour business and six of us left the resort to travel back on overnight flights to the UK. George and Susan were destined to leave the following day and of course we were all jealous of David and Elaine and Chris and Anna who were staying on for a couple of extra days!

Day 9

Saturday 12th January

The overnight flights landed back in a rather chillier UK.

During this very special trip we were lucky to see a diversity of wildlife, felt we had sampled the St Lucia culture and also had time to relax and enjoy the facilities and other excursions associated with the resort.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers and exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



www.facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays



www.twitter.com/naturetrektours



www.instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays

Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	January							
			4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Spatula discors</i>			1					
2	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>			3					
3	Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>			15					
4	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>			10					
5	Red-billed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>			✓					
6	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>							3	
7	Yellow-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax violacea</i>	1	1						
8	Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>		1	2				2	
9	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	4		20		✓	✓	✓	
10	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			4				1	1
11	Tricoloured Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>		1	2					
12	Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>		2	6				2	2
13	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>		1	6				1	
14	Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>		1	1	2		10	3	12
16	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>					1	1	2	1
17	Broad-winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>	✓	✓	4	2	2	3	3	
18	Antillean Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata cerceris</i>			30					
19	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana americana</i>			10					
20	Grey (Black-bellied) Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			20					
21	Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>			10					
22	Hudsonian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus</i>			1					
23	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			2					
24	Wilson's Snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>			3					
25	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>		1	4				2	
26	Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>			1					
27	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>			6					
28	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>			2					
29	Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>								15

	Common name	Scientific name	January							
			4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
30	Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>			1			12		1
31	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>								
32	Pomarine Skua (Jaegar)	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>		4+		1				
33	Rock Dove (Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>						2		
34	Scaly-naped Pigeon	<i>Patagioenus squamosa</i>		4+	4	2	6	6	6	6
35	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>							4	
36	Common Ground Dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>		2	✓			1	8	
37	Eared Dove	<i>Zenaida auriculata</i>			3					
38	Zenaida Dove	<i>Zenaida aurita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Mangrove Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus minor</i>		1	3					
40	Lesser Antillean Swift	<i>Chaetura martinica</i>			3			12	4	
41	Purple-throated Carib	<i>Eulampis jugularis</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Green-throated Carib	<i>Eulampis holosericeus</i>			1			1		1
43	Antillean Crested Hummingbird	<i>Orthorhyncus cristatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>		1	1			1	1	
45	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	✓	3	5		3			2
46	St Lucia Amazon (Parrot)	<i>Amazona versicolor</i>		H	6					
47	Caribbean Elaenia	<i>Elaenia martinica</i>		H	4		1	2	1	
48	L. Antillean Pewee (St Lucia)	<i>Contopus latirostris latirostris</i>		6	4			2		2
49	Grey Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Lesser Antillean Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus oberi</i>		2			1	2		1
51	Black-whiskered Vireo	<i>Vireo altiloquus</i>		1						
52	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓			1.0		
53	House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>								2/3
54	Tropical Mockingbird	<i>Mimus gilvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	White-breasted Thrasher	<i>Ramphocinclus brachyurus</i>			5					
56	Scaly-breasted Thrasher	<i>Allenia fusca</i>		4	3	2	10	4	6	6
57	Pearly-eyed Thrasher	<i>Margarops fuscata</i>			2		4	3		2
58	Grey Trembler	<i>Cinclocerthia gutturalis</i>		1+	1		5	3		2
59	Rufous-throated Solitaire	<i>Myadestes genibarbis</i>			1+					
60	Spectacled Thrush	<i>Turdus nudigenis</i>								1
61	Antillean Euphonia	<i>Euphonia musica</i>			2					

	Common name	Scientific name	January								
			4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
62	St Lucia Oriole	<i>Icterus laudabilis</i>		1				3	2		2
63	Shiny Cowbird	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>						12			3
64	Carib Grackle	<i>Quiscalus lugubris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	St Lucia Warbler	<i>Setophaga delicata</i>		✓	✓	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Lesser Antillean Saltator	<i>Saltator albicollis</i>		6	4			1			2
67	Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Black-faced Grassquit	<i>Tiaris bicolor</i>		2				3		4	
69	Lesser Antillean Bullfinch	<i>Loxigilla noctis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	St Lucia Black Finch	<i>Melanospiza richardsoni</i>		2	2			6	H		

Reptiles (D = Dead)

1	Gecko sp.			✓	✓	✓					
2	St Lucia Anole Lizard	<i>Anolis luciae</i>		1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	L. Antillean (Johnstone's Whistling) Frog	<i>Eleutherodactylus johnstonei</i>	H	H	H	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Boa Constrictor	<i>Boa constrictor</i>					1				
5	Red-snouted Tree Frog	<i>Scinax ruber</i>			H	H	H				
6	Fer-de-lance Snake (St Lucia Viper)	<i>Bothrops asper</i>			1 D						

Mammals

1	Pantropical Spotted Dolphin	<i>Stenella attenuata</i>				50					
2	Small Asian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>		2			2				
3	Antillean Fruit Bat	<i>Brachyphylla cavernarum cavernarum</i>				100's					100's
4	Common Opossum	<i>Didelphis marsupialis</i>		2							
5	Sperm Whale	<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>				2					2
6	Small bat sp.		✓				✓				

Others

1	Four-winged Flying Fish	<i>Hirundichthys affinis</i>		✓		✓					✓
2	Ghost Crab	<i>Ocypode quadrata</i>									3
3	Mottled Shore Crab	<i>Pachygrapsus transversus</i>		1							

	Common name	Scientific name	January							
			4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11

Lepidoptera

1	Long-tailed Skipper	<i>Urbanus proteus</i>			✓				✓	
2	Great Southern White	<i>Ascia monuste</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
3	Gulf Fritillary	<i>Agraulis vanillae</i>							✓	
4	Little Yellow	<i>Eurema lisa</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
5	Julia Heliconian	<i>Dryas iulia</i>			✓					
6	White Peacock	<i>Anartia atrophae</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
7	Mangrove Buckeye	<i>Junonia genoveva</i>		2	2					
8	Orion Cecropia	<i>Historis odius</i>			✓		✓		✓	
9	Hanno Blue	<i>Hemiargus hanno</i>			✓		✓		✓	
10	Florida White	<i>Appius drusilla</i>					✓		✓	
11	Yponomeuta Moth	<i>Yponomeuta tbd</i>						1		
12	Cloudless Sulphur	<i>Phoebis sennae</i>							1	
13	Fiery Skipper	<i>Hylephila phyleus</i>						4	1	
14	Dominican Leafwing	<i>Memphis dominicana luciana (e)</i>			1					
15	Skipper sp.						✓		✓	

Dragonflies

1	Antillean Skimmer	<i>Orthemis macrostigma</i>							1	
---	-------------------	-----------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	---	--

Other Insects

1	Termite sp			✓	✓		✓			
2	"Cricket" sp.						✓	✓		
3	Golden Orb Spider	<i>Nephila sp.</i>			✓					

Plants

	Family	Common name	Scientific name	January			
				5	6	8	9
1	Bignoniaceae	Tulip Tree	<i>Spathodea campanulata</i>	✓			
2	Fabaceae	Touch and Close Plant	<i>Mimosa pudica</i>	✓			

	Family	Common name	Scientific name	January			
				5	6	8	9
3	Combretaceae	Beach Almond	<i>Terminalia catappa</i>	✓			
4	Aracaceaea	Coconut tree	<i>Cocos nucifera</i>	✓			
5	Moraceae	Breadfruit Tree	<i>Artocarpus altilis</i>	✓			
6	Moraceae	Breadfruit Tree	<i>Artocarpus netiles</i>			✓	
7	Moraceae	Breadnut Tree	<i>Brosimum alicastrum</i>			✓	
8	Moraceae	Ficus pumila-like climbers	<i>Murograia umbellata</i>				✓
9	Moraceae	Strangling Fig	<i>Ficus americana</i>				✓
10	Burseraceae	Peeling Tree	<i>Bursera simaruba</i>	✓		✓	
11	Burseraceae	Tall hardwood, used to make canoes	<i>Dacryodes excelsa</i>		✓		
12	Burseraceae	Incense Tree	<i>Protium attenuatum</i>		✓		
13	Burseraceae	Incense Tree	<i>Protium copal</i>			✓	
14	Zingiberaceae	Ginger plant	<i>Alpinia purpurata</i>	✓			
15	Orchidaceae	Vanilla	<i>Vanilla pomeronia</i>	✓			✓
16	Lauraceae	Avocado	<i>Persea americana</i>	✓		✓	
17	Lauraceae	Cinnamon Tree	<i>Cinnamon zeylaneum?</i>			✓	
18	Heliconiaceae	Lobster Claw plant	<i>Heliconia sp</i>	✓			
19	Araceae	Elephants ears	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	✓			
20	Araceae	Philodendron climbers			✓	✓	
21	Arcaceae	Anthurium climbers				✓	✓
22	Rutaceae	Wild orange and grapefruit	<i>Citrus x aurantiifolia</i>	✓			
23	Bignoniaceae	Calabash	<i>Crescentia cujete (or olata?)</i>	✓			
24	Malvaceae	Cacao	<i>Theobroma cacao</i>	✓			
25	Malvaceae	Blue Mahoe tree	<i>Hibiscus elatus</i>		✓	✓	✓
26	Malvaceae	Mahogany	<i>Sterculia mahoiania</i>		✓		
27	Malvaceae	Tropical Chestnut	<i>Sterculia foetida</i>			✓	
28	Musaceae	Banana	<i>Musa acuminata</i>	✓			
29	Asparagaceae	Tongue ferns	<i>Sansevieria sp.</i>	✓			
30	Fabaceae	Flamboyant	<i>Delonix regia</i>	✓			
31	Fabaceae	Quick stick'	<i>Gliricidia sepium</i>		✓		
32	Fabaceae	White lead tree	<i>Leucaena leucocephala</i>		✓		
33	Fabaceae	Logwood	<i>Haematoxylum campechianum</i>		✓		
34	Fabaceae	Inga Vera - shade tree	<i>Katcote?</i>			✓	
35	Fabaceae	Hummingbird Tree	<i>Sesbania grandiflora</i>			✓	
36	Myrtaceae?	Coriander' shrub	<i>Urgium sp.</i>	✓			

	Family	Common name	Scientific name	January			
				5	6	8	9
37	Myrtaceaea	Bay tree	<i>Pimenta racemosa</i>	✓			
38	Myrtaceaea	Guava Tree	<i>Psidium guajava</i>			✓	
39	Annonaceae	Soursop,	<i>Annona muricata</i>	✓			
40	Anacardiaceae	Cashew nut tree	<i>Anacardium occidentale</i>	✓		✓	
41	Bignoniaceaea	Common shrub with yellow flower	<i>Tecoma stans</i>	✓			
42	Rubiaceae	Cheese fruit tree	<i>Morinda citrifolia</i>		✓		
43	Rubiaceae	Quinine Tree	<i>Cinchona stlucinaus?</i>				✓
44	Rubiaceae	Ground cover plant	<i>Piper doucei</i>				✓
45	Rubiaceae	Ground cover plant	<i>Cycotria rugmosa</i>				✓
46	Cyatheaceae	Scaly Tree Ferns	<i>Cyatheaceae sp.</i>		✓		✓
47	Selaginellaceaea	Sweat Plant	<i>Selaginellaceae pallesceas</i>		✓	✓	
48	Selaginellaceaea	Ground cover plant	<i>Selaginellaceae sp.</i>				✓
49	Poaceae	Bamboo	<i>Bambusa vulgaris</i>		✓		
50	Magnoliaceae	Magnolia	<i>Magnolia virginiana</i>		✓		
51	Melastomataceae		<i>Miconia telume?</i>		✓		
52	Cecropiaceae	Trumpet Tree	<i>Cecropia sp.</i>		✓		
53	Arecaceae	Spiny Palm	<i>Aiphanes minima</i>		✓	✓	✓
54	Polygonaceaea	Sea Grape	<i>Coccoloba uvifera</i>		✓		
55	Convolvulaceae	Morning Glory	<i>Ipomoea pes-caprae</i>		✓	✓	
56	Myristicaceae	Nutmeg	<i>Myristica fragrans</i>			✓	
57	Meliaceae	Mahogany	<i>Swietenia mahagoni</i>			✓	
58	Clusiaceae	Autograph Tree	<i>Clusia rosea</i>			✓	
59	Commelinaceae	Purple Heart groundcover	<i>Tradescantia zebrina</i>			✓	
60	Solanaceae		<i>Solanum caribe</i>			✓	
61	Orchidaceae	Common Ground Orchid	<i>Spathoglottis sp.</i>			✓	
62	Heliconiaceae	Heliconias					✓
63	Bromilaceae	Bromeliads	<i>Aechmea sp.</i>			✓	✓
64	Polypodiaceae	Various ferns					✓
65	Magnoliaceae	Magnolia	<i>Magnolia telume</i>				✓
66	Pinaceae	Caribbean Pine	<i>Pinus caribe</i>				✓
67	Araucariaceae	Norfolk Island Pine	<i>Araucaria heterophylla</i>				✓