

St. Lucia

Naturetrek Tour Report

10 - 18 January 2020



Rufous-throated Solitaire by Richard Jones



Spotted Dolphins by Rose Purdy



St. Lucia Boa by Ed Drewitt



Antillean Crested Hummingbird by Richard Jones

Report by Ed Drewitt
Images courtesy of Richard Jones, Rose Purdy & Ed Drewitt



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Summary

The Caribbean is an excellent winter destination in January and despite some liquid sunshine (aka rain) we had beautiful hot sunshine based at the stunning Anse Chastanet with a backdrop of the famous volcanic plugs, the Pitons and star-studded night skies.

Exploring the dry coastal forest and the rainforests of St Lucia, it didn't take long before we had caught up with the island's endemic birdlife, the St Lucia Warbler, the St Lucia Oriole, the St Lucia Parrot and the St Lucia Pewee. They were complimented by a range of other wildlife including an endemic subspecies of Boa, land crabs and a range of coral reef fishes at the marine reserve within the bay of Anse Chasanet. Sea trips revealed hundreds of Pantropical Spotted Dolphins, several Fraser's Dolphins and four incredibly shy and rarely seen Dwarf Sperm Whales.

Throughout the week, we also caught up with the supporting cast of birdlife including endemics to this area of the Caribbean such as the Lesser Antillean Saltator, the Caribbean Elaenia, the Lesser Antillean Swift and the Antillean Crested Hummingbird. Our visit to the Aerial Ride near Castries was a chance to see Lesser Antillean Flycatchers up close and stunning green St Lucia Anole lizards. At night we were serenaded by tiny Lesser Antillean Whistling Frogs while at dawn Grey Kingbirds and Zenaida Doves were the first to call.

Combined with hot sunshine, beautiful food (including an exquisite cookery experience), stunning scenery and friendly people, we had a St Lucian holiday for everyone to remember.

Day 1

Friday 10th January

London to St Lucia, 28°C

Leaving behind Gatwick experiencing a mild spell of weather, our group of 11 and Ed headed off to St Lucia, first flying across southern England, meeting John and Sarah who were already there.

We arrived at 3pm on a hot bright very breezy day at Hewanorra Airport on the southern tip of St Lucia, ready for our transfer to the hotel. Once through security and customs, and after a refreshing cool peppermint water flannel and drinking water, we boarded our transfer vehicles at 4pm and headed on the one-hour journey up the coast to our luxury hotel, Anse Chastanet.

We were soon heading north along the scenic tour following 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. Leaving Soufrière, we slowly travelled along a bumpy track looking back down at the town with superb views of the Pitons as a backdrop. After ten minutes or so we reached Anse Chastanet, greeted with a refreshing non-alcoholic cocktail known as the Bentley (with a slice of sugar cane) and amazing views looking down to the beach. After checking in we headed to our rooms at 5.30pm, providing a chance to settle in before meeting for dinner at 6.30pm.

We met 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 evening breeze was refreshing (if strong at times!) and the full moon shone across the valley from the night sky full of stars and bright planets. Lesser Antillean Whistling Frogs called in the background - their chime-like regular calls distinctive along with the grating sounds of tree crickets singing.

Day 2

Saturday 11th January

Anse Chastanet and Anse Mamim, 29°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 a la carte cooked menu. Carib Grackles and Lesser Antillean Bullfinches perched nearby in the hope of stealing some breakfast titbits. A nearby fig tree, *Ficus citrifolia*, was full of small fruits and attracting a small number of Scaly-breasted Thrashers, thrush-size birds that were busily hovering and reaching out to grab the rich food.

After an orientation briefing from the duty manager Jonathan at 8.00am, we met with our hotel wildlife guide Mano to explore the forest estate behind the hotel and along to Anse Mamim beach. During the three and a half hours we had an incredible time seeing two of St Lucia's endemics, the St Lucia Warbler and the St Lucia Pewee.

In between occasional light showers and mainly bright sunshine, we saw a huge variety of birds, many endemics to the island. We started off watching a Grey Kingbird preening by the Treehouse Restaurant and a perched Green-throated Carib as we headed down the road. Two St Lucia Warblers sang and showed briefly while a Spectacled Thrush called like a cat in the background. As Meno was pointing out the spiny bark of a young Silk-cotton Tree, a Broad-winged Hawk flew overhead and a female Antillean Crested Hummingbird showed briefly above us. A little further along we looked up to a Gommier Tree in fruit with red berries; it was attracting a Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, a Lesser Antillean Saltator and a Caribbean Elaenia. By the track two House Wrens foraged along tree branches like treecreepers close to a Black-whiskered Vireo.

At the pond an Osprey suddenly took off and flew by. The water's surface was adorned with lilies with stunning large white or pink blooms. Aside from hearing a few Common Gallinules and a calling Zenaida Dove, it was very quiet. A female Antillean Crested Hummingbird fed and rested around a patch of young Caster Oil trees.

The best was yet to come – as we headed up a steep slope we came to a viewpoint looking out across to Soufrière and the Pitons. Beautiful flowering Glory Cedar trees, *Gliricidia sepium*, were full of Bananaquits and Antillean Crested Hummingbirds feeding on their delicate pink pea-like flowers. We saw all sorts of colourful flower shrubs nearby including Morning Glory and Bougainvillea. Meno touched the leaves of the *Mimosa* showing how their leaves quickly fold up when touched as protection from being eaten. Meno pointed out Calabash, Guava and Tamarind trees. Along the walk, Meno picked different citrus leaves for us to smell and identify, as well as Ginger and West Indian Bay Leaf.

After a brief yet heavier shower, a St Lucia Pewee showed well perching in front of us and occasionally flying out to catch insects. Through the binoculars and cameras we could see its long 'whiskers' either side of the broad-based bill.

Further down the track we stopped by a reservoir that was used in the 1700s to deliver water to sugar kilns using in the days of sugar plantations and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As we headed down towards it two Broad-winged Hawks called overhead. A juvenile Little Blue Heron obligingly perched in front of us; unlike the Snowy Egret's black legs with yellow running up the back of them, it has yellow-green legs. By the water we spotted an adult blue-coloured Little Blue Heron which flew into tree close by. Above, in a leaf-less tree a Merlin, a regular winter visitor to St Lucia, was perched.

As we neared the end of our walk, we entered what is now an area of secondary woodland growth with some managed open areas. Some cocoa trees have recently been pollarded to encourage new growth. Artifacts and remnants of buildings, draped in vanilla vines, are left in situ and leave reminders of the once lucrative sugar trade and associated slavery that once took place here. A few of the original huge metal cauldrons are still used at the beach restaurants at Anse Mamim and Anse Chastanet today. The mortar in one of the semi-ruined buildings still contains fragments of conch shell, originally heated, crushed and mixed with water. 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. As Meno was showing us a Ginger plant, a St Lucio Oriole called above and we managed to spot a male feeding high up in the canopy of a tree above. Before we headed to the beach a Purple-throated Carib was feeding high up on the flowers of the African Tulip tree.

Other birdlife during the walk included an American Kestrel whizzing overhead and another zipping low through the trees to the disgust of an Antillean Crested Hummingbird, further elanias, saltators and pewees, Grey Kingbirds, two Tropical Mockingbirds, brief views and calls of two separate Grey Tremblers and the call of a Mangrove Cuckoo.

We caught a water taxi back to Anse Chastanet - just a short journey away - and arrived back around 12.00pm, in good time for a rest at lunch and a chance to indulge on the sandy beach or snooze in our beautiful rooms. By the beach restaurant and bar areas, the red tubular flowers of *Russelia equisetiformis* were popular with one or two Antillean Crested Hummingbirds. Ed, Richard and Patrick went for a snorkel in the marine reserve just off the beach enjoying views of a huge range of different tropical fishes, corals and sea urchins including parrot fishes, filefishes and trumpETFishes.

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.

Day 3

Sunday 12th January

Des Cartier, 27°C

There was heavy rain around midnight although by morning everywhere was still and calm. Most of us met together at 5.30am and headed 90 minutes south with our drivers Clyde and Mitchell back past the airport and then up the east coast to Dennery. Here at the Mandeie Lookout we met our brilliant guide for the day, Vision. After our packed breakfasts looking out across to Dennery Island and the white waves coming in from the Atlantic we headed down to the road to some dry woodland to spot a very special bird, 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. Walking in just metres away from the road Vision played some sounds of the thrasher and while nothing responded several Antillean Euphonias called like Goldfinches in the trees ahead and one showed briefly. With a little more time a White-breasted Thrasher responded and despite the undergrowth we managed to watch this individual - dipper-like in plumage - resting and preening on a branch. When it moved across the path, Sarah watched it close to her in a tree while the rest of the group were watching a female St Lucia Black Finch that had just moved into the woodland floor from the track to feed.

After our delight of seeing these birds we headed up into the mountains 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. 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), fruiting Breadfruit trees and ripe grapefruits hanging off the branches of veteran trees. We arrived around 9.15am and spent the next few hours walking a few kilometres and back exploring the tropical rainforest (c. 1800 feet or 550m 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 early lingering cloud gave way to sunshine and while windy on the other side of the valley we had excellent views across from the viewpoint.

It was generally quiet for birdlife along the way with just the odd Black-watch Moth flying in a scatty fashion and the ringing tone of forest crickets (which sounds like a text coming through on a mobile). Occasional parrots called and a Mangrove Cuckoo gave its distinctive grating call. A pair of St Lucia Black Finches were feeding on the forest floor and the male came and sat on a branch in a nearby bush. 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 a 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. Typical of this species he regularly flicked his tail.

We passed huge magnolia trees, introduced Blue Maho trees, bromeliads, club mosses, vines (including Vanilla Vine), an array of ferns, lichens and *Selaginella* or spikemosses. Vision stopped at particular trees to tell us more about them including the Gommier tree, *Dacryodes excelsa*, which was used by local people to make canoes. It was also an important tree for cavity-nesting St Lucia Parrots although most people on St Lucia didn't know. Today the link is much better known at the Gommier trees are left to grow for the parrots. Vision also showed us the hard seed pods of a magnolia tree, *Taluma dodecapetala*, devoured by parrots when nature breaks open the pods when they fall and hit rocks below. Various other seeds pods we were shown are also enjoyed by the parrots although the seeds are toxic if eaten by us. The parrots deal with the toxins by regularly visiting areas of clay to neutralize the chemicals.

We stopped at a viewpoint, an opening in the forest looking down towards a river. Two Pearly-eyed Thrashers with striking white-tipped tails flew past. This was the place to see parrots and over the next hour we had over half a dozen sightings of pairs flying in front of the trees across the valley before disappearing into their canopies. One stopped on an exposed branch allowing just enough time for most of the group to see it through the 'scopes. And just before we left at 11am, a parrot circled round right overhead.

Not long after we arrived at the viewpoint a male Rufous-throated Solitaire sang. This slender, Starling-size bird gave the most incredible repertoire comprising just a few single prolonged notes that pierce through the forest air.

Singing close to the viewpoint, he moved around in front of us feeding on ripe berries of the *Miconia luciana* tree. It was a great chance to see its yellow legs, blue-purple plumage, white facial markings and rufous throat. When he sang another male replied further down the hillside. A little later he was joined by another bird and bill-snapping and chasing ensued – Vision assured us this was courtship behaviour!

While we looked out across the valley, a St Lucia Pewee foraged in the nearby trees and we had splendid views of a blue-capped Antillean Euphonia. A Purple-throated Carib was keeping watch from a perch and chasing off any intruders that dared come near 'his' tree.

We headed back along the 30-minute walk down to the vehicles and enjoyed our packed lunches on some benches under shelter while a heavy shower passed over. As we left at 12.15pm a parrot flew over the group just before we got back into the buses.

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. The water levels were high and there was a warm, strong breeze. Out on the open water at least 30 Common Gallinules were feeding. On the edge of the lake over 200 wintering Blue-winged Teal were feeding alongside American (white-shielded) Coots were foraging close to the edge of the lake. Everytime a single Magnificent Frigatebird flew low overhead the whole flock of birds suddenly panicked and hugged the water's edge hiding under overhanging trees and vegetation. Vision managed to pick out three American Wigeon and two female Ring-necked Ducks resting amongst them. Like the teal, these ducks are wintering here from parts of North America that are probably under snow and ice, or certainly very cold! Other birds included three or four Great Egrets, half a dozen Snowy Egrets and a Little Blue Heron.

After a fantastic morning we thanked Vision and headed on our hour's journey back to Anse Chastanet, arriving at 2.30pm. We chose our dinner choices for the evening and then had plenty of time to relax.

We finished the day with a lovely à la carte meal in the Treehouse Restaurant at 6.30pm before retiring for the night ready and a leisurely morning the next day.

Day 4

Monday 13th January

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

We took the option of doing the dolphin watching in the afternoon as the sea state in the morning was still settling down from the recent strong winds. Instead everyone was able to slowly get ready for the day, including watching the fruiting trees by the Treehouse Restaurant where over a dozen Scaly-breasted Thrashers were feeding alongside one or two Spectacled Thrushes, bullfinches, grackles and a Grey Tumbler. Most of us lunched down by the beach just after midday and then met together at 1.30pm down by the beach. Stevie, Travis, Thomas and Loic greeted us on the catamaran which we boarded wet-style and set off out to sea looking for dolphins. Although the sea was a bit choppy the further out went it was still ideal for spotting cetaceans and

along the way we enjoyed lots of flying fishes gliding (a long way!) over the water and memorable views of the Pitons and mountains of St Lucia. A single Pomarine Skua flew past close to the boat; this chunky skua was showing its tail 'spoons'. Despite cetacean sightings being less reliable this season we were in luck as only 20 minutes into the journey Stevie spotted some dolphins. At least three Fraser's Dolphins came towards the boat showing several times before disappearing off to feed. However, it wasn't long before we were joined by at least eight Pantropical Spotted Dolphins surfing towards us, all with white-tipped beaks. Again, they showed briefly and not long after at least 30, probably including the ones we had just seen, were swimming towards us. They spent a short amount of time just beneath the water, surfacing occasionally before disappearing off to feed!

We then headed towards Soufrière and a special sea cave. A vertical split in the cliffs forms a home for over 5,000 Antillean Fruit Bats. Some of us could hear multitude of squeaks. There were hundreds at the entrance to the cave, a hive of activity as they stretched their long wings, fluttered to a new perch, or tussled for a new space to hang.

We slowly made our way back to Anse Chastanet, passing along the cliffs, a distinctive rock conglomeration of large and small volcanic boulders gave home to many different trees and cacti, providing a wide pallet of green hues against the bright blue sea beneath. Travis, our skipper, brought us in closer to huge white splodges on the cliffs; these were the distinctive cone-shaped perches of Brown Boobies and many years' worth of guano! At least half a dozen immature boobies were at home, some fluttering their gular pouch to keep cool. Thomas suddenly shouted out an Osprey which glided overhead before disappearing round the cliff's corner. Before we headed off one more booby flew in and landed with ease on the narrow ledges. We continued on round the cliff into Anse Chastanet passing a few more perched boobies. A heavy shower came down as we slowly came to rest at the beach and disembarked into the Beach Restaurant to make our choice of dinner for the evening. We had several hours to relax, enjoy a drink and rest before meeting again at 6.30pm in the same restaurant for dinner.

Day 5

Tuesday 14th January

Millet Trail, 28°C

After a night of rain we met in the dry at 6.00am and headed north with drivers Clyde and Lloyd to the Millet Trail, a rainforest reserve, passing lots of tree ferns and lush forest along the way. We passed through the villages of Canaries and Anse la Raye and onwards 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 picked up our guide Pamela – who works for the forestry department - along the way and arrived at the reserves' main building just before 7.30am. After a packed breakfast and tea or coffee we headed out at 8.15am. Damas had put out some fresh coconuts at first light and Lesser Antillean Bullfinches were coming down to feed. As we edged along the trail a male St Lucia Black Finch was also devouring some coconut. 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.

As we looked out across the views of the mountains, forest and a reservoir two St Lucia Parrots flew right overhead and out across the valley. They had been feeding nearby on an early fruiting Mango tree. Although mostly shrouded in low cloud, across the hill from our viewpoint was the mountain slopes of Mount Gimie (950m or 3000ft), the largest mountain in St Lucia. Its peak was more easily visible as we headed back to Anse Chastanet through the Roseau Valley. As we headed back along the trail a Mangrove Cuckoo called above and

was perched up high with a huge insect, perhaps a cicada, in its beak. The cicada had its wing open and before long the cuckoo swallowed the insect whole. It stayed around in the tree, no doubt full! Meanwhile, Damas spotted a St Lucia Boa, an endemic subspecies, a suddenly appeared with it safely secured in his hand. We admired the young moulting animal before he put it down on the ground. It stayed for a while before heading off into the leaf litter and vegetation.

We retraced our steps and trekked down another trail 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 *Anthuriums* with beautiful tongue-like flowers. Local women cut a selection on a Wednesday and sell them at market on a Saturday.

Along this trail birds were more elusive although we had good views of one or two St Lucia Warblers. A calling St Lucia Oriole remained elusive high up in the lianas although most of the group had better luck with one further down the trail which stopped to preen. A Pearly-eyed Thrasher and a Grey Trembler kept flying across though both were too shy to show well. Meanwhile, other wildlife put on a show including a medium-size Marine Toad and two Land Crabs, an adult and a young animal, by or in the stream.

We retraced our steps back to the centre where a huge Tarantula Hawk (spider wasp) was found exploring the ground and crevices amongst the nursery saplings looking for spiders. We headed back to Soufrière arriving back at Anse Chastanet just after 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 the Tuesday Manager's Cocktail party where we got to meet some of the staff and enjoy canopès, an incredible range of buffet choices and classic rum punches.

Day 6

Wednesday 15th January

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

After a 7am breakfast, where we saw more Scaly-breasted Thrashers, a Grey Trembler and a single saltator, we met down by the beach at 8am and headed out on a catamaran from the jetty with our captain Aniel and his team Gio and Jay. We were against the swell heading north to Castries and 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 where three huge cruise ships were in port. During the boat journey we saw small numbers of Magnificent Frigatebirds, Brown Boobies, Royal Terns and a single Red-billed Tropicbird.

In Castries, we were greeted by Alvin and then our taxi driver, Junior, who drove us up into the mountains to the Rainforest Adventures Aerial Tram in Chassin where we arrived at 10.30am. This is a forest reserve and was the first to be set up in 1916 as the Castries Waterworks Reserve. We met with our wildlife guides Jesse and Kadeen and were soon on our carriages which took us on a on a gentle tour through and over the rainforest. Although it takes 70 minutes in total, we got off at the top to wander through the trees. Jesse and Kadeen both gave a

fascinating running commentary throughout. We were already 600ft (180m) above sea level and we travelled up to 1400ft (425m), passing from the forest floor with openings covered in spikemosses, through the understorey 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.

Purple-throated Caribs were common and males were often sat on their favourite perches near where the carriage passed. A single Antillean Euphonia was feeding on its favourite food, mistletoe, and glimpsed by just a few. St Lucia Warblers, a Green-throated Carib and a Pearly-eyed Thrasher were also seen in the tree canopies.

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 plants. 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 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 30-minute walk through the forest, finding a St Lucia Pewee and an obliging pair of Lesser Antillean Flycatchers. Alwyn and Ed watched two Purple-throated Caribs locked in combat on the forest floor and disappear under a rotting log before flying off in chase. Turning over a rock, Jessie found a tiny whistling frog for some of us to see (the ones that we hear bleeping at night). We saw several bright green St Lucia Anole lizards sporting blue skin around their eyes. And Jesse pointed out a very cryptic tree cricket; it was almost invisible and is the same one that makes a loud grating call around Anse Chastanet each night. We also saw a resting Black-witch Moth, blending in with the bark of the buttress roots of a tree.

Back on the carriage we headed above the emergence level and back down through the canopy. 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. 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 *Marcgravia* 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.

When we got off the carriages we spent a little time around the beautiful hummingbird-friendly flowers, getting close views of a territorial Purple-throated Carib, a male Black-faced Grassquit and the caterpillars of the Frangipani Moth. A Pearly-eyed Thrasher was feeding in the tree full of Love Apples and a Grey Trembler could be heard calling.

At 1.45pm we headed back down the mountains to Castries and our boat. We ate our packed lunches on the journey back, which was a more comfortable journey as we went with the flow of the waves and the swell. We arrived back to Anse Chastanet at 4pm and transferred to the hotel's boat as we were unable to dock at the jetty due to the swell. The second boat dropped us off on the beach where we stopped at the bar restaurant to choose our meals for the evening before heading back to our rooms to refresh.

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

Day 7

Thursday 16th January

Emeralds Farm and Sulphur Springs, 28°C

After breakfast we met at 8.45am 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.

We met with our guide Mariana who introduced us to the area and all sorts of fascinating facts about the caldera. We stood by a running stream of warm (30°) surface water and another pipe sending out water at 45°C which we got to touch. We then 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 390,000 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. It was bubbling up at 100 degrees Celsius 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 sticky lava rose up and solidified to form the Pitons but never collapsed, unlike the caldera at Sulphur Springs.

We walked up to the interpretation centre where we watched a short film about Sulphur Springs and read more information about the site. At 10.20am 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.

We were met by Edwin who gave us a tour, showing us the different fruits and vegetables being grown here for Anse Chastanet and Jade Mountain hotels.

Their most recent crops are loofah which looks like a large courgetti hanging from vines. Edwin skinned the fruit revealing the network of strands that forms the loofah. He washed out the seeds and it was ready to dry and be used in the hotels' spa!

We get to smell a whole variety of herbs and spices, including the bark of the cinnamon tree and its roots which smell like menthol. Other plants included lemon grass, pineapple, Stevia (a sweet-tasting plant replacing sugar), Tannia (a ground root) and Papalo (similar taste to coriander). We saw the tropical American Soursop, the fruits of which are like an egg-shaped green melon with soft spines, 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.

Chef Salvatore and Chef Hermanus, who work at the sister hotel Jade Mountain, then did a cooking demonstration showing us how to make a variety of exquisite dishes including ceviche, vegetable stir fry, salad, and surf and turf (with prawns and beef). The table in front of us was adorned with banana leaves and covered in delicious looking greens and fruits. While we enjoyed some natural juices mixed with ginger, the chefs showed us how to cook the delicious dishes while entertaining us. The dishes were flavoursome and provided a really impressive culinary experience.

We got back to Anse Chastanet at just before 2pm where we chose our food for the evening. Seven of the group headed up for a tour around Jade Mountain while others relaxed or went for a snorkel. We met together for our last meal together in the Aspara restaurant at 6.30pm.

Day 8

Friday 17th January

Dolphin Watching, 29°C

After a leisurely breakfast, we met at 9am down by the jetty and headed out for our second dolphin watching trip with boatmen Andel, Travis and Loic. We hadn't been on the water long, just ten minutes, before we had splashing from dolphins! We spent 20 minutes or so with a school of over 100 Pantropical Spotted Dolphins of a mix of ages. Many were riding the bow wave of the catamaran giving beautiful views through the crystal-clear water. Some young animals were playing with a floating coconut with others occasionally jumped out of the water, landing with a splash.

We continued on, making a circuit across the sea in front of Anse Chastanet and Soufrière. Things were quiet, apart from the odd flying fish, a Caribbean Martin migrating towards St Lucia (from Columbia or Venezuela) and a Royal Tern. In the distance some frigatebirds were dipping down to the water so we headed over and found more spotted dolphins, perhaps the same ones, feeding. We could smell the fish in the air. Again, we had incredible views of the dolphins swimming in front of us, several turning over on their backs revealing their spotted bellies.

We headed towards Petit Piton and Gros Piton and at 11:05am Ed suddenly spotted some sharp-shaped fins of something. They turned out to be the fins of Dwarf Sperm Whales, a rarely seen whale. Four to six were logging very low on the surface before subtly disappearing under water. A superb sighting indeed!

We arrived back at Anse Chastanet at 11.45am giving people time to relax, have lunch and final showers before we met together at 4pm to say our goodbyes and do the checklist for the final time. Peter and Alwyn were staying on for a few extra days. We headed back with Clyde and Lloyd at 4.30pm to the airport, arriving at 5.30pm in good time for our BA flight back to the UK.

Day 9

Saturday 18th January

Despite a minor delay and after a shorter flight (7.5 hours) back to Gatwick Airport, we arrived at just after 9am and made our way home safely after a relaxing, hot, sunny holiday seeing St Lucia's endemic birdlife and many other plants and animals.

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Vision talking about seed pods at Des Cartiers by Ed Drewitt

Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	January								
			10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
1	Red-billed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>							1		
2	Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>		✓	✓	10+			4+		4+
3	Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
4	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			1		1	1			
5	Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>		2	1	1	1				
6	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	1		6	1	2+				
7	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>			6+		6+	6+			12+
8	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Spatula discors</i>			200+						
9	American Wigeon	<i>Anas americana</i>			3						
10	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>			2						
11	Osprey	<i>Pandion hallaetus</i>	1	1		1					
12	Broad-winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>	1	3+	1						1
13	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>		2							
14	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		1							
15	American Coot (White-shielded)	<i>Fulica americana americana</i>			20+						
16	Antillean Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata cerceris</i>			30+		4+				
17	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>				1	1			1	1
18	Pomarine Skua	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>				1		1			
19	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓		✓						✓
20	Scaly-naped Pigeon	<i>Patagioenus squamosa</i>						2			
21	Zenaida Dove	<i>Zenaida aurita</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Eared Dove	<i>Zenaida auriculata</i>	2								
23	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>									1
24	Common Ground Dove	<i>Collumbina passerina</i>		1	2	3	6	4	2		
25	St Lucia Parrot	<i>Amazona versicolor</i>			8		4+				
26	Mangrove Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus minor</i>		H	H		1		H		
27	Lesser Antillean Swift	<i>Chaetura martinica</i>					20+				
28	Purple-throated Carib	<i>Eulampis jugularis</i>		1	2			8+			
29	Green-throated Carib	<i>Eulampis holosericeus</i>		1				1			
30	Antillean Crested Hummingbird	<i>Orthorhyncus cristatus</i>		8+	1		2+	2+	3+	2	
31	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle alcyon</i>				1				1	1
32	Lesser Antillean Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus oberi</i>		1				2	H		
33	Caribbean Elaenia	<i>Elaenia martinica</i>		4+	1	1	H				
34	St Lucia Pewee	<i>Contopus oberi</i>		2+	2		1	1			
35	Caribbean Martin	<i>Progne dominicensis</i>									1
36	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	1								
37	Tropical Mockingbird	<i>Mimus gilvus</i>		2+							
38	Grey Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>		6+	✓	✓	✓	✓	2		
39	House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>		2			H				
40	Grey Trembler	<i>Cinlocerthia gutturalis</i>		2	1	1+	2	1	2	1	
41	Scaly-breasted Thrasher	<i>Allenia fusca</i>		6+	1	12+		12+	6+	✓	
42	Pearly-eyed Thrasher	<i>Margarops fuscata</i>			2		1	2			
43	Rufous-throated Solitaire	<i>Myadestes genibarbis</i>			2						
44	Spectacled Thrush	<i>Turdus nudigenis</i>		H		2					
45	Black-whiskered Vireo	<i>Vireo altoquus</i>		1							
46	Antillean Euphonia	<i>Euphonia musica</i>			2			1			
47	St Lucia Warbler	<i>Dendroica delicata</i>		6+	H		2	2+	H		

	Common name	Scientific name	January							
			10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
48	Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Black-faced Grassquit	<i>Tiaris bicolor</i>		H	2+	2	1	1	3	
50	St Lucia Black Finch	<i>Melanospiza richardsoni</i>			3		1			
51	Lesser Antillean Bullfinch	<i>Loxigilla noctis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Lesser Antillean Saltator	<i>Saltator albicollis</i>		2				1	1	
53	Carib Grackle	<i>Quiscalus lugubris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	St Lucia Oriole	<i>Icterus laudabills</i>		1			2			
55	Shiny Cowbird	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>					1			

Reptiles and Amphibians

1	Hawksbill Turtle	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>							1	
2	St Lucia Boa	<i>Boa constrictor orophias</i>					1			
3	Watts' Anole Lizard	<i>Anolis watsi watsi</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	St Lucia Anole Lizard	<i>Anolis luciae</i>			1			5		
5	Lesser Antillean or Johnstone's Whistling Frog	<i>Eleutherodactylus johnstonei</i>	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
6	Cane toad	<i>Bufo marinus</i>					1			

Mammals

1	Dwarf Sperm Whale	<i>Kogia sima</i>								6
2	Pantropical Spotted Dolphins	<i>Stenella attenuata</i>				30+				100+
3	Fraser's Dolphins	<i>Lagenodelphis hosei</i>				3+				
4	Small Asian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>			1		1			
5	Common Free-tailed Bat	<i>Molossus molossus molossus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	Antillean Fruit Bat	<i>Brachyphylla cavernarum cavernarum</i>				✓				

Invertebrates

1	Land Crab	<i>Gecarcinus ruficola</i>					4			
2	Orb-web spider	<i>Nephila clavipes</i>		1						
3	Tarantula hawk (spider wasp)	<i>Pepsis</i> sp.					1		1	
4	Tree cricket	"Clack clack"	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H

Butterflies and Moths

1	Great Southern White	<i>Ascia monuste</i>		✓						
2	Little Yellow	<i>Eurema lisa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Julia	<i>Dryas iulia</i>			2					
4	Frangipani Moth caterpillars	<i>Pseudosphinx tetrio</i>						3		
5	Black-witch Moth	<i>Ascalapha odorata</i>			3		1	1		

Dragonflies

1	Great Pondhawk	<i>Erythemis vesiculosa</i>		1						
2	Antillean Skimmer	<i>Orthemis macrostigma</i>		2						
3	Band-winged Dragonlet	<i>Erythrodiplax umbrata</i>		1						

Marine

Fish

Four-winged Flying Fish, *Hirundichthys affinis*
 Sharp-tailed Eel, *Myrichthys breviceps*
 Blacktip Reef Shark, *Carcharhinus limbatus*
 Houndfish, *Tylosurus crocodilus*
 Redband Parrotfish, *Sparisoma aurofrenatum*
 Princess Parrotfish, *Searus taeniopterus*
 Queen Parrotfish, *Searus vetula*
 Brown Chromis, *Chromis multilineata*
 Yellowtail Damsel, *Microspathodon chrysurus*
 Palameta, *Trachinotus goodei*
 Blue Chromis, *Chromis cyanea*
 Slippery Dick, *Halichoeres bivittatus*
 Spotted Goatfish, *Pseudupeneus maculatus*
 Smallmouth Grunt, *Haemulon chrysargyreum*

Goldspotted Eel, *Myrichthys ocellatus*
 Great Barracuda, *Sphyrnaea barracuda*
 Trumpetfish, *Aulostomus maculatus*
 Yellowhead Wrasse, *Halichoerus garroti*
 Stoplight Parrotfish, *Sparisoma viridae*
 Yellowtail Parrotfish, *Sparisoma rubripinne*
 Puddingwife, *Halichoeres radiatus*
 Sergeant Major, *Abudefduf saratilis*
 Dusky Damsel, *Steastes fuscus*
 Blue Tang, *Acanthurus coeruleus*
 Bluehead Wrasse, *Thalassoma bifasciatum*
 Yellow Goatfish, *Mulloidichthys martinicus*
 Fairy Basslet, *Gramma loreta*
 French Grunt, *Haemulon flavolineatum*

Coral/sponge/associated inverts,

Finger Coral, *Porites porites*
 Symmetrical Brain Coral, *Diplora strigosa*
 Swollen-knob Candelabrum, *Eunicea mammosa*
 Massive Starlet Coral, *Siderastrea siderea*
 Porous Sea Rods, *Pseudoplexaura* sp.
 Sea Plumes, *Pseudopterogorgia* sp.
 Yellow Tube Sponge, *Aplysina fistularis*
 Red Boring Sponge, *Cliona delitrix*
 Green Finger Sponge, *Iotrochota birotulata*
 Christmas Tree Worm, *Spirobranchus giganteus*
 Bearded Fireworm, *Hermodice carunculata*
 Mat Zoanthid, *Zoanthus pulchellus*

Brain Coral, *Diploria labyrinthiformis*
 Common Sea Fan, *Gorgonia ventalina*
 Mustard Hill Coral, *Porites astreoides*
 Elkhorn Coral, *Acropora palmata*
 Split-pore Sea Rods, *Plexaurella* sp.
 Giant Barrel Sponge, *Xestospongia muta*
 Stinker Sponge, *Ircinia felix*
 Lumpy Overgrowing Sponge, *Holopsamma helwigi*
 Long-spined Urchin, *Diadema antillarum*
 Social Feather Duster, *Bispira brunnea*
 Algae Hydroid, *Thyrosocyphus ramosus*
 Spaghetti Worm, *Eupolymnia crassicornis*



St Lucia Pewee by Richard Jones



Scaly-breasted Thrasher by Ed Drewitt