

Cuba Bird Survey

Cuba's Western Mountains, Zapata Peninsula, Northern Archipelago, Escambray Valle and Colonial Havana

November 20 – 30, 2020

You are invited on an exclusive, U.S. led and managed authorized birding program to Cuba! The program is managed by the **Caribbean Conservation Trust, Inc. (CCT)**, which is based in **Connecticut**. In early 2020 CCT staff began their **25th year** of managing bird conservation and natural history programs in Cuba. All of our trips are legal for U.S. Citizens. Along with WFO President and Field Trip Committee Chair **Kurt Leuschner**, our team will include the esteemed Cuban biologist **Dr. Luis Diaz**, a bilingual Cuban tour leader and local naturalists in 4 different birding regions. They will guide you through some of the best bird habitat in Cuba, the Caribbean's largest and most ecologically diverse island nation.

CCT designed this itinerary to take you to Cuba's finest bird habitats, most beautiful national parks, diverse biosphere reserves, and unique natural areas. We will interact with local scientists and naturalists who work in research and conservation. In addition to Cuba's incredible birds, we will learn about the ecology and history of regions we visit. Finally, and especially given the ongoing changes in U.S. – Cuban relations, we can expect some degree of inquiry into fascinating aspects of Cuban culture, history, and daily living during our visit.

Cuba's Birds

According to BirdLife International, which has designated 28 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Cuba, "Nearly 400 bird species have been recorded in Cuba, including 26 which are endemic to the island and 29 considered globally threatened. Due to its large land area and geographical position within the Caribbean, Cuba represents one of the most important countries for Neotropical migratory birds – both birds using Cuba as a temporary stopover during fall and spring migration (75 species) and those spending the winter on the island (86 species)."

Our itinerary provides opportunities to see many of Cuba's endemic species and subspecies, as listed below. This trip will also focus on the many neotropical migrant species that migrate south to Cuba in the fall, and are abundant in Cuba during the winter months (endemic species and endemic subspecies in italics):

Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Oriole, Bee Hummingbird, Blue-headed Quail-Dove, Gray-fronted Quail-Dove, Cuban Black Hawk, Cuban Blackbird, Cuban Bullfinch, Cuban Gnatcatcher, Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Parrot, Cuban Pewee, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Cuban Solitaire, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Vireo, Fernandina's Flicker, Giant Kingbird, Gundlach's Hawk, Eastern Meadowlark, Cuban Nighthjar, Red-shouldered Blackbird, Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, Oriente Warbler, Yellow-headed Warbler, Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Cuban Crow, Palm Crow, Cuban Emerald, Bahama Mockingbird, Thick-billed Vireo, & Western Spindalis.



Cuban Oriole

Smooth-billed Ani

Cuban Tody

Red-legged Thrush

Western Spindalis

Other species of interest include:

Great Lizard-Cuckoo, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Loggerhead Kingbird, *Olive-capped Warbler*, Key West Quail-Dove, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Zenaida Dove, *Stygian Owl*, West Indian Whistling Duck, American Flamingo, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, and a great variety of wading birds, and numerous other migratory and resident species.

<https://www.facebook.com/cubabirds/>

WHERE WE TRAVEL

Our **Cuba Bird Survey** begins in the forests surrounding **Las Terrazas Community**, established in 1968 as a re-forestation and community integrated development project. In Cuba's post-revolutionary history, the community has blossomed as a model of sustainability, and is currently a prime destination for ecologically based tourism.

Cuba's Western Mountains include two of the country's most diverse and dramatic ranges: the Sierra de la Rosario, and Sierra de los Organos. We will explore an area common to both ranges in search of western range endemic species such as the *Cuban Solitaire*. A highlight of the trip, we will visit the magical, unusually beautiful karstic landscape of mogotes-- the towering, lushly vegetated, flat-top limestone monoliths that dominate the Organos Mountains. This is the only region in which we will likely see the *Cuban Solitaire*, *Cuban Grassquit*, *Giant Kingbird*, & *Olive-capped Warbler*. Other potential endemic species for western Cuba include *Cuban Oriole*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, *Cuban Pewee*, *Cuban Pygmy-Owl*, *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Vireo*, & *Yellow-headed Warbler*.



We will also explore the diverse wetland region of the **Zapata Peninsula**, Cuba's richest and most important birding destination located in the historic **Bay of Pigs**. This peninsula is a Ramsar Convention (international conservation treaty) designated site, and is among the most important wetlands in the West Indies. Here, the best local guides will lead us through protected areas in Cienaga de Zapata National Park and other natural sites off the beaten track. The Zapata Peninsula covers more than 2800 square miles and features easily accessible, everglades-like ecology and habitat. Framed by the pristine Caribbean coastal environment of the Bay of Pigs, the peninsula features vast open swamp land, low coastal forests, sparkling white sand beaches, healthy and accessible coral reefs, and refreshing natural limestone pools called cenotes. *Bee Hummingbird*, *Cuban Black Hawk*, *Zapata Wren*, *Zapata Sparrow*, *Fernandina's Flicker*, *Bare-legged Owl*, *Blue-headed and Grey-fronted Quail Doves*, *Tawny-shouldered* and *Red-shouldered Blackbird* are among the many birds we will hope to find (3 nights).



Cayo Coco and Cuba's Atlantic Archipelago provide excellent birding opportunities on Cuba's Atlantic coast.



These previously uninhabited, relatively unexplored islands were connected to the mainland by an 18+ mile causeway completed in 1989. Cuba's academy of sciences (CITMA) maintains a research facility here. **These barrier islands and keys provide unique opportunities for:** *Cuban Gnatcatcher*, *Oriente Warbler*, *Thick-billed Vireo*, *Bahama Mockingbird*, *Mangrove Cuckoo*, *West Indian Whistling*

Duck, as well as numerous shorebirds and aquatic birds. This region also provides additional opportunities to see rare endemics such as *Zapata Sparrow* & *Gundlach's Hawk*. Accommodations are in a beachfront resort (2 nights).

Our program begins in **HAVANA**, among the most authentic colonial cities in the Americas. Havana is one of Latin America's best preserved and most compelling colonial cities. Our time in Havana will include all meals, accommodation, transportation, and a guided tour Habana Vieja, the city's historic center and **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. Visiting **Colonial Cuba** is like walking through a living museum. Currently Havana is undergoing rapid, energetic change.



THE CONSERVATION PROJECT

The U.S. Department of Treasury has provided a license for conducting bird conservation work in Cuba to the **Caribbean Conservation Trust, Inc.** (CCT), a U.S. based organization committed to the conservation of endemic and migratory birds and their habitats in the greater Caribbean region. The primary objective of CCT is to enhance the ability of North American and Caribbean ornithologists, naturalists, resource managers, conservation organizations, institutions, and local citizens to conduct research and initiate programs to help conserve the birds of the Caribbean and their habitats. CCT is dedicated to bird and habitat conservation through education and relationship building and, is in compliance with U.S. Treasury licensure for travel to Cuba.

For a glimpse of our program in action, go to: <http://video.pbs.org/program/counting-birds/> for a link to the film **COUNTING ON BIRDS**, a 2013 Public Broadcasting System (www.pbs.org) production which describes the history of the Christmas Bird Count and features a segment on our program in Cuba as an example how birders can contribute to 'citizen science' based bird conservation efforts.

Program Leadership

Our program is designed and managed in the United States and is professionally staffed and field tested **over 24 years in Cuba**. We are dedicated to providing participants with informative nature oriented experiences with the help of our highly skilled local leaders.

U.S. Field Leader - Kurt Leuschner, a southern California native, resides in Palm Desert, California with his wife Candice and three children, Luke, Drake, and Annabelle. He is a tenured Professor of Natural Resources at College of the Desert, teaching a variety of courses in science and natural history for the past 22+ years. He holds a Master's degree in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Florida; his specialties include field ornithology, entomology, desert natural history and tropical ecology. Kurt has been leading and organizing birding and natural history trips all over the United States and the world since 1980. After a year studying zoology and Kiswahili at the University of Nairobi and two years serving in Tanzania's wildlife division with the U.S. Peace Corps, he began taking groups in 1993 to international destinations including Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Egypt, Costa Rica, Honduras, Ecuador, the Galapagos, Peru, New Zealand, and Tasmania. Africa remains a favorite destination - in 1996 he became a charter member of the African Bird Club and has been the sole U.S. representative for the ABC ever since. Since 2000, Kurt has been an active member of the Western Field Ornithologists and currently serves as President and as the acting chair of the field trip committee. In 2008 Kurt received The Roger Tory Peterson Nature Education Achievement Award and was voted Faculty of the Year at College of the Desert. In his spare time he researches (and bands) California Scrub-Jays (*Aphelocoma californica*) and has recently completed a project involving sound recording of this species and other closely-related corvids.

Cuban Field Leader - Dr. Luis Diaz is Curator of Herpetology at Cuba's National Museum of Natural History in Havana. Luis has authored Cuba's most comprehensive book on reptiles, and has several ornithological publications to his credit. He is an excellent general naturalist and is a very talented birder and illustrator. Luis is fluent in English, and has a warm, engaging personality. Luis has been involved with research projects throughout the West Indies, and has traveled on a scientific visa to the U.S. on several occasions. Luis will be with us throughout the program in the field (Days 3 – 12) and will provide an overview of Cuban natural history as well as specific information relative to birds and other fauna, flora, geology and other natural features of the environments we visit.

Our Cuban Naturalists



Cuban Pygmy Owl

We work with a very competent team of biologists, museum curators and naturalists in Cuba. Our full time Cuban biologist and primary Cuban birding guide will be with us throughout the program in the field and will assist in finding and identifying birds, as well as providing a broad overview of Cuban natural history. He may share specific information relative to the flora, fauna, geology and other natural features of the environments we visit. Additionally, we will work with regional naturalists from the national parks and biosphere reserves that we visit around the country.

A Bilingual Cuban Guide will be at our service throughout the program. Along with a professional driver, he or she will be with the group each day to tell us about Cuban history, culture, arts and lifestyle. He/she will also deal with logistics, meals, translation, and other nuts-and-bolts aspects of the travel experience.

Accommodations

Accommodations feature hotels in Havana and 4 additional provinces. Our Cuban accommodations are staffed by friendly hosts and in the countryside represent the best Cuba has to offer in the regions we visit. These may include refurbished vintage hotels, modern resort hotels, and simple beach-front bungalows. All accommodations are safe, clean, air-conditioned tourist facilities. It should be noted that standards in Cuba differ from those in the U.S. and other developed countries.

Additional Details

Following program registration, we will provide all participants with a bird list as well as details with regard to travel to Cuba, including all of the basics you need to know about travel documents, customs, facts about Cuba, currency, health and safety, food, flights, and what to bring. U.S. Government authorization documents and bird checklist will be provided following receipt of your final balance.



Physical Demands and Expectations

This program offers opportunities for several days of ambitious birding, early departure times on birding days, and occasional evening sessions. Birding days may provide leisure time after lunch and before our afternoon birding sessions. Physical exertion will be light to moderate most days, with the longest walks approximately 3 miles. Terrain is mostly flat and dry, with some hills present in western Cuba. Participants should be in reasonably good physical condition and prepared for strong sun, with temperatures in the mid 70s – 90s. Mosquitoes can be bothersome in Cayo Coco and the Zapata Region. Although unlikely, rain may occur as well, so bring adequate rain gear. Those with medical concerns should check with their physician before taking part in the program. Your health and well-being are very important to us!



Fernandina's Flicker

Registration, Trip Costs, Terms, and Conditions

Land costs for this program are \$ **4,850.00*** per person for shared accommodations, with an additional \$ **495.00** for Single supplements. * **Deposits received prior to April 15, 2020 will reduce trip cost by \$ 200.00 to \$ 4,650.00.**

WFO is a non-profit and your support contributes to our mission of educating field ornithologists, including student programs.

To reserve a spot, look for a WFO News message with instructions.

Once you are notified that your spot is reserved you must send a deposit check for \$ **700.00 per person deposit payable to Caribbean Conservation Trust**. Deposits must be received within **1 week of registration**. Enrollment is limited to 12 participants. WFO Cuba programs have historically sold out very quickly. Fewer than 12 participants may result in a small group supplement.

What is included:

CCT Cuba Bird Survey Programs include the following: all accommodations, all meals in Cuba beginning with lunch on day 1, ending with breakfast on the last day of the program, guide services, most tips (local naturalists, restaurant and bell staff), airport/hotel transfers, ground transportation, bottled water, some drinks, admission fees (itinerary only), U.S. Department of Treasury authorization documents, and program management services which include the provision of all pre- and post-program materials, a full-time Cuban bilingual guide, bilingual Cuban naturalists, and a fulltime driver. Program fees help support Caribbean Conservation Trust's bird conservation efforts in Cuba. Also included is accommodation in Fort Lauderdale the night prior to departure to Cuba.

Not Included:

Travel to Cuba (approximately \$ 250.00 round trip between Florida & Cuba); Cuban Visa (\$ 75); items of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, additional beverages, Driver, Cuban Biologist, Bilingual Cuban Tour Guide, bar and housekeeping tips, etc., U.S. passport fees, meals or accommodations outside Cuba, or other fees not listed in the program. Cost estimates are as of February, 2020 and are subject to change.

Cuban Trogon



Flights

We plan to arrive in Cuba on a direct flight from South Florida. The best arrangements we have experienced on Jet Blue Airlines from Fort Lauderdale. No flights are included. Airlines tend to offer flight for booking no more than 6 months prior to departure. Our driver and guide will meet the groups at the airport upon arrival. Arrival is in Havana, departure is from Camaguey, Cuba.

Payment

Regarding payment for the land portion of the tour, an \$ **700.00** deposit must be received within 1 week following online registration to reserve space on this trip. Please send checks payable to:

Caribbean Conservation Trust
353 West Todd Street
Hamden, CT 06518

(do not write Cuba on the check memo)

Cuban Parrots (Rose-throated Amazon)



Balance Payment and cancellation and refund policy *

Full payment is due 90 days prior to departure or by August 19, 2020. You will receive a detailed receipt/invoice following receipt of your deposit and reservation form. All cancellations must be done in writing and are effective upon receipt in the CCT office. Should it become necessary for you to cancel, all payments will be refunded after a deduction of our cancellation fee outlined below:

More than 90 days prior to the tour.....\$ 100.00 per person (land only)
Fewer than 90 days prior to the tour... FULL DEPOSIT (unless we can fill your place)
75 days prior to departure No refunds (unless we can fill your place)

***Please be aware that the refund policies apply only to the land portion of the trip, and that airlines may have different policies that exist beyond our ability to control. Additional registration fees may apply. As with all international travel programs, we highly encourage trip cancellation and travel insurance policies.**

Caribbean Conservation Trust and its agents and constituents reserve the right to make changes to the itineraries. Land and air arrangements may be subject to price increases beyond our control.



Habana Vieja (Old Havana), Cuba



<https://www.facebook.com/cubabirds/>

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Cuba's Western Mountains,
Zapata Swamp, Atlantic Archipelago, Escambray Valley and Colonial Havana

Day 1 ~ November 20, 2020 (Friday)

arrive in *Fort Lauderdale, Florida*

Accommodation and airport shuttle near Fort Lauderdale (1 night).

Day 2 ~ November 21, 2020

Arrive Havana and depart to San Diego de los Banos

Morning departure from Florida to Havana. Lunch followed by afternoon birding in Las Terrazas Ecological Community (1 hour west of Havana). Some charismatic Cuban endemics (Cuban Trogon, Cuban Oriole, *Cuban Bullfinch*, Cuban Tody, Cuban Green Woodpecker as well as Cuban Grassquit and Fernandina's Flicker are possible here. *Lunch at Cafetal Buena Vista, a restored 19th century coffee plantation. Late day birding near Hacienda Cortina* (1+ hour west), *an interesting former lavish estate with excellent birding options. Cuban Vireo, Cuban Oriole, Yellow-headed Warbler, Giant Kingbird, and Red-legged Honeycreeper* are likely. Short drive to San Diego for accommodation & dinner (1 night).

Day 3 ~ November 22, 2020

San Diego - La Guira National Park – Zapata Peninsula

Early breakfast and birding in **La Guira National Park**, with a visit to **Cueva de Portales** (40 minute drive), a classic 'through cave' carved by the San Diego River. This was Che Guevara's military headquarters during the missile crisis of 1962. *Endemic Cuban Solitaire, Giant Kingbird, Olive-capped Warbler, Scaly-naped Pigeon* are pursued here. Lunch is at our hotel in San Diego, followed by departure east to the Zapata Peninsula (4 + hours). Birding stops along the way as opportunity permits. Accommodation / dinner in private home stay in **Playa Larga** (3 nights) on the picturesque **Bay of Pigs**. This region contains the largest wetland complex in the West Indies, and is Cuba's most prolific birding region. Here we have access to excellent local guides, as well as to protected areas and birding locations off the beaten track.

Day 4 ~ November 23, 2020

Zapata Peninsula

Early breakfast and a morning of birding in a nature preserve adjacent to the small village of **Bermejas**. Here is our best opportunity to see the endemic *Bee Hummingbird* (world's smallest bird), *Fernandina's Flicker, Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Parrot, Blue-headed and Gray-fronted Quail-Doves, Key West and Ruddy Quail Doves*. Lunch at Caleta Buena, a beautiful limestone rimmed inlet abundant with fish and excellent snorkeling opportunities. The historic Bay of Pigs museum is nearby. Afternoon birding in Bermejas, dinner/accommodation in Playa Larga.

Day 5 ~ November 24, 2020

Zapata Peninsula

Early breakfast and departure for birding within **Zapata National Park** and a morning walk along a dry roadway in the swamp near Santo Tomas. This is our best opportunity for *Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Red-shouldered Blackbird* and Tawny-shouldered Blackbird and a variety of warblers and other migrants. Lunch and a trip to **Las Salinas Wildlife Refuge**, with numerous shorebirds, Reddish Egrets, Wood Storks, Spoonbills, Flamingos and endemic *Cuban Black-Hawk*. All walking is on dry, flat terrain (less than 2 miles total). Dinner at a private restaurant in the village, accommodation in Playa Larga.

Great Lizard Cuckoo



Day 6 ~ November 25, 2020**Zapata to Cienfuegos coast**

Breakfast, check out, and birding options within the protected areas of the park, based on leader discretion. Late morning departure northeast to Yaguanabo (2 + hours) with stops for birds and lunch via Cienfuegos and the coastal route. Target birds include Oriente Warbler and Gundlach's Hawk. Dinner, accommodation in Yaguanabo (1 night).

Day 7 ~ November 26, 2020**Yaguanabo – Cayo Coco**

Early breakfast and departure to Morning departure west through the scenic Escambray Valley in search of *Palm Crow* and *Giant Kingbird*, both 'future' endemics recorded here recently by our groups. Other birding stops en-route. The first part of the drive occurs along the striking Caribbean coastline and Escambray Valley. Picnic lunch followed by a 4 + hour drive northwest to Cayo Coco on Cuba's Atlantic coast for dinner and accommodation (2 nights).

Cuban Gnatcatcher

**Day 8 ~ November 27, 2020****Cayo Coco**

Morning birding on Cayo Paredon Grande, the northeastern-most key in the Cayo Coco archipelago, which is one of Cuba's most important migratory landfalls. *Cuban Gnatcatcher*, *Oriente Warbler*, Scaly-naped Pigeon, a subspecies of *Zapata Sparrow* and the locally endangered Bahama Mockingbird and Thick-billed Vireo are target birds for the day. Lunch at the hotel followed by afternoon birding on Cayo Guillermo in mixed habitat including coastal forest, mangrove flats, low coastal scrub, and pristine white sand shoreline (roadside, flat walking). Dinner, accommodation in Cayo Coco. Evening foray for Cuban Nightjar.

Day 9 ~ November 28, 2020**Cayo Coco - Havana**

AM birding at a nearby lagoon for aquatic birds, including West Indian Whistling Duck. Mid-morning departure southwest for drive to Havana (7+ hours) with lunch and birding stops along the way. Dinner and accommodation in Havana (2 nights).

Day 10 ~ November 29, 2020**Havana**

Your stay in Havana will include accommodation, breakfast, lunch, and a guided tour of Havana, including historic **Old Havana**, one of the most authentic colonial cities in the Americas. The walking tour will include a guided interpretive exploration of some of colonial Havana's most significant historical sites. This **UNESCO World Heritage site** is loaded with a variety of museums, a thriving arts scene, and a full range of architectural examples of both renovated and neglected structures, many opulent or otherwise unique, representing 5 centuries of human habitation. The extension also includes visit the home and private ornithological collection of **Orlando Garrido**, Cuba's greatest living naturalist. Sr. Garrido is a retired and venerable former Curator of Birds at the National Museum of Natural History in Havana, and senior author of the Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba as well as hundreds of scientific publications. This visit is always mentioned as a trip highlight. Lunch is in Old Havana. Late afternoon is open for independent exploration of this fascinating and historic small city. Accommodation in Havana. Dinner at one of Havana's best 'paladares' (private restaurants).

Day 11 ~ November 30, 2020**Havana- U.S.**

Breakfast and transfer to Jose Marti International Airport for your return flight to the U.S. Flight times currently including morning departures from Havana, with arrival mid to late morning in Florida.

