



Fernandina's Flicker

Cuban Trogon

Cuban Tody

Western Spindalis

Cuban Pygmy Owl

Bee Hummingbird



## CUBA BIRD SURVEY

*Havana, Cuba's Western Mountains, and The Zapata Peninsula,*  
**July 2 - 10, 2014**

### ***EXCLUSIVE ITINERARY, RICH IN NATURE AND CULTURE***

**The Massachusetts Audubon Society** is promoting an exclusive, U.S. led and managed birding program to Cuba! The program is coordinated under U.S. government authorization by the Caribbean Conservation Trust, Inc. (CCT) which is based in Connecticut. CCT staff have a 17 year history of managing bird conservation programs in Cuba. Along with MAS leader **Bill Gette**, our full time staff will include Cuban biologist **Dr. Luis Diaz** (Curator, National Museum of Natural History, Havana), a bilingual Cuban tour guide, and Cuban driver. In addition, 3 regionally located Cuban naturalists will accompany us in various parts of the country. They will guide you through a variety of natural areas in Cuba, the Caribbean's largest and most ecologically diverse island nation.

Our program begins and ends in Havana, one of the most authentic colonial cities in the Americas. Our first full day in Cuba includes a private visit to the home of Orlando Garrido, Cuba's most prolific living naturalist and co-author of *The Field Guide To the Birds of Cuba*. The following morning (Day 2 of the 7 day program) we will immediately depart for the countryside to visit national parks and reserves, returning later in the week to enjoy a final evening in Havana. CCT designed this itinerary to take you to Cuba's 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 birding, we will learn about the ecology and history of regions we visit. Finally, we can expect some degree of indulgence in the richness of Cuban music, dance, art, architecture, and history.

### **CUBA'S BIRDS**

According to BirdLife International, which has designated 28 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Cuba, "Over 370 bird species have been recorded in Cuba, including 28 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 passing through on their way south (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 spend the winter in Cuba (endemics in italics) : *Bare-legged Owl*, *Bee Hummingbird*, *Blue-headed Quail-Dove*, *Cuban Blackbird*, *Cuban Black-Hawk*,

*Cuban Grassquit, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Meadowlark, Cuban Nightjar, Cuban Oriole, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Pewee, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Cuban Solitaire, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Vireo, Fernandina's Flicker, Gray-fronted Quail-Dove, Giant Kingbird, Gundlach's Hawk, Red-shouldered Blackbird, Yellow-headed Warbler, Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow.*

Other specialties include: Cuban Bullfinch, Cuban Crow, Cuban Emerald, Cuban Parrot, Plain Pigeon, Great Lizard-Cuckoo, Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, Bahama Mockingbird, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Loggerhead Kingbird, Olive-capped Warbler, Key West Quail-Dove, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Ruddy Quail - Dove, Zenaida Dove, Stygian Owl, West-Indian Whistling Duck, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Greater Flamingo, and a great variety of wading birds, and numerous other migratory and resident species.

**WHERE WE TRAVEL:**

**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* and Olive-capped Warbler. Other potential endemic species for western Cuba include *Cuban Oriole, Cuban Blackbird, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Pewee, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Cuban Tody, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Vireo, Gundlach's Hawk, and 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, Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Fernandina's Flicker, Bare-legged Owl, Tawny-shouldered and Red-shouldered Blackbird* are among the many birds we will hope to find.

**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, conservation organizations, institutions, and local citizens to conduct research and initiate programs to help conserve the birds of the Caribbean and their habitats.



Cuban Parrot



Red-legged Thrush



Cuban Parakeet



Cuban Grassquit



Cuban Bare-legged Owl

**The Cuba Bird Survey Program** Your participation in this program will involve a simple bird and habitat survey. Each evening, the group will review and record a checklist of birds seen on that particular birding day. Data is compiled by the group, and submitted by the trip leader to CCT staff. Recorded trip totals are part of CCT's ongoing data bank of information on both migratory and resident species recorded in Cuba over several years. Significant findings are noted and submitted to the journal *North American Birds*. Our Cuban colleagues keep trip totals and notable information to support their ongoing research as well.

For an informative look at CCT in Cuba, check out the documentary film entitled **COUNTING ON BIRDS**. The film in part features CCT in Cuba in the larger context of migration and "citizen science" efforts to document birds in North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The documentary was produced by New Hampshire Public Television, which has an excellent reputation for producing nature related programs, many of which focus on bird conservation topics. It premiered at the end of November, 2013 in the greater Boston area to some very inspiring reviews.

The story recalls the history of Christmas Counts, and includes footage from New England, Ecuador, and Cuba. The CCT agenda in Cuba is clearly explained, and there is good and plentiful sights and sounds footage of a CCT group in action in April, 2013.

<http://video.nhptv.org/video/2365128454/>

The link above is a direct connection to the film. If this fails, go to NHPTV.org and scroll left to PROGRAMS and down to **COUNTING ON BIRDS**.

### **Program Leadership**

Our program is designed and managed in the United States and is professionally staffed and field tested over 16 years in Cuba. We are dedicated to providing participants with informative nature oriented opportunities, good, wholesome food and comfortable accommodations, and highly skilled local leaders.

**Mass Audubon Leader: Bill Gette** is Sanctuary Director at the Joppa Flats Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary in Newburyport. Bill, a skilled teacher and field naturalist, has been leading domestic and international natural history expeditions for Mass Audubon since 1986. He has led very successful programs throughout the United States and to Canada, Kenya, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Panama, Costa Rica, Mexico, Ecuador, and the Galapagos Islands. Bill has taken a leadership role in bird research and public education concerning birds and bird conservation. He directs the Joppa Flats Bird Banding Station, a research and education facility operated in cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. He and his staff have also developed interpretive programs and field trips for audiences with special needs, including the visually impaired. Bill's most recent initiative is Mass Audubon's Birder's Certificate Program, which is designed to enhance the public's knowledge about birds and to stimulate a conservation ethic.

### **Full-time 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. Luis will be with us throughout the program in the field. Additionally, we will work with local naturalists from the national parks and biosphere reserves that we visit throughout the program.

### **Cuban Specialists**

Our primary Cuban naturalist will be with us throughout the program in the field and will assist in providing an overview of Cuban natural history as well as 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**

Our Cuban hotels are staffed by friendly, helpful hosts and represent the best Cuba has to offer in the regions we visit, and may include vintage 4 star hotels, modest 3 star facilities, and simple beach-front bungalows. All hotels are safe, clean, air conditioned tourist facilities. We will travel in a comfortable and spacious vehicle. Most hotels have swimming pools, and one hotel has a lovely beach (Playa Larga - 4 nights).

### **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. A bird checklist will be provided following receipt of your final balance payment. U.S. Government authorization documents and air tickets between Miami and Havana are provided after flights are confirmed and paid for (approximately 30 days prior to departure).

### **Physical Demands and Expectations**

This is a birding program with early departure times on birding days, and occasional evening sessions. Birding days provide for leisure time after lunch and before our afternoon birding sessions. Physical exertion will be light to moderate on most days, with the longest walks approximately 3 miles. Terrain is mostly flat and dry, with some hills present in western Cuba. All participants should be in reasonably good physical condition. Be prepared for strong sun, with humid conditions and temperatures in the mid 80s – 90s. Mosquitoes can be bothersome in the Zapata Region. Rain may occur as well, so bring adequate rain gear. Everyone must check with their physician before taking part in the program and provide us with the physicians contact number.

### **TRIP COSTS, TERMS, AND CONDITIONS**

Land costs for the 9 day itinerary are **\$ 4,500** per person all inclusive, for shared accommodations. Single supplements are \$575.00 per person, singles are limited. A \$ 500.00 deposit is required to hold space. Prices are based on 12 travelers, with a minimum of 10 travelers required. Maximum number of participants is 13, and the trip is filled on a first come, first served basis. **All deposits, reservation and forms must be in by April 3rd, 2014. All applicants must complete a paragraph describing their birding experience and knowledge and complete numerous forms before May 1<sup>st</sup>.**

### **What is Included:**

All accommodations in Cuba, meals as described in the itinerary, guide services, most tips (guides, drivers, naturalists and 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 full-time driver. Program fees include a donation to help support our conservation efforts in Cuba.

**What is Not Included:**

Travel to Havana, Cuba; Flights, Cuban Visa (\$75) and Cuban health insurance (required as of May, 2010 (approximately \$3 per day); items of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, beverages, bar and housekeeping tips, etc., airport departure taxes, passport fees, or other fees not listed in the program.

**Flights**

We help facilitate arrangement of a group charter flight directly to Cuba (from Miami or Cancun) through our partner travel agency, Marazul Charters. Everyone in the group must arrive and depart from Cuba on the charter flight we arrange. *Departure times for flights will be provided as much in advance as possible. Often an overnight is required in either Miami or Cancun.*

**Travel Insurance Protection**

Any U.S. citizen traveling internationally these days should consider insurance protection. Reasonably priced coverage is available to provide protection against financial loss due to trip cancellation or delay, as well as lost baggage. Although uncommon, cancellations due to illness, accidents, work related schedule changes, and other un-planned or unwelcome events have happened. Unforeseen travel related events which you have little or no control over can also effect travel plans. All of these factors make trip cancellation insurance a very important consideration. For information about Travel Insured International, call 1 800-243-3174 or go to:

<http://www.travelinsured.com/Travel-Insurance/Default.aspx>

When online you can compare and select policies, and get a quick quote. Be sure to use the agency location code 48774 to access coverage explicit to this program.

**REGISTRATION: \$ 500.00** deposit per person is due as soon as possible to reserve space. Tour List will be closed on **April 3, 2014**.

Deposit payments can be by check, money order or credit card (Visa/Mastercard only) payable to:

Caribbean Conservation Trust  
192 Willard Street  
New Haven, CT 06515

The full balance payment is due 75 days prior to the departure date, or by April 22, 2014. Balance payments must be made by check or money order only. Caribbean Conservation Trust will provide individual invoices and balance payment information following receipt of your deposit and registration. Please contact MAS Travel Director Karen O’Neill at 800-289-9504 or direct line 781-259-2166 [www.massaudubon.org/travel](http://www.massaudubon.org/travel) if you have any questions.

**Cancellation and refund policy \***

All cancellations must be done in writing and are effective upon receipt in the MAS travel office.

Should it become necessary for you to cancel, our cancellation fees are outlined below:

For cancellation more than 90 days prior to the tour..... \$400.00 per person (land only)

For cancellation less than 90 days prior to the tour.....NO REFUND IS GRANTED

In the unlikely event that we must cancel the tour, a full refund less a \$100.00 processing fee for your license application will be forwarded to you, should cancellation occur after your license has been processed. *\*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.*

**JOPPA FLATS VOLUNTEER TRIP TO CUBA**

Blue-headed Quail Dove



Cuban Black Hawk



Cuban Green Woodpecker



Zapata Wren



Giant Kingbird



Yellow-headed Warbler

**Day 1 ~ Wednesday, July 2, 2014**

We will arrive in Havana by late afternoon. We will have a brief introduction to our Cuba adventure and then dinner and accommodations at Hotel Occidental Miramar in Havana's Embassy District. If time permits, we will bird on the grounds of the hotel.

**Day 2 ~ July 3, 2014****Havana – Vinales**

Following early morning birding on the hotel grounds and breakfast, we will visit the home and private ornithological collection of Orlando Garrido, Cuba's greatest living naturalist. Sr. Garrido is the retired and venerable former curator of birds at the National Museum of Natural History in Havana. He is also the co-author of the *Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba*, as well as hundreds of scientific publications. Following our visit, we will travel west (1.5 hours) to the Sierra del la Rosario Biosphere Reserve and Las Terrazas ecological community. Birding venues nearby include Cafetal Buena Vista, a restored 19<sup>th</sup> century coffee plantation within the biosphere reserve (hilly, easy forest and paved trails, 2+ miles). Here, we will look for many of Cuba's endemic birds, including *Cuban Grassquit*, *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, and *Yellow-headed Warbler*. We will have lunch at a superb organic vegetarian restaurant. After lunch, we will do more area birding and then drive west to the small town of Vinales nestled among the Sierra de los Organos Mountains. Our accommodations and dinner will be at La Ermita with its splendid views of the dramatic Vinales Valley.

**Day 3 ~ July 4, 2014****Vinales – San Diego de los Banos**

Following breakfast, we will explore Vinales National Park. *Cuban Solitaire*, *Cuban Blackbird*, *Tawny-shouldered Blackbird*, *Cuban Bullfinch*, *Cuban Emerald*, *Loggerhead Kingbird*, and *Great Lizard Cuckoo* will be target species. We will have lunch near the park followed by a drive east to La Guira National Park (hilly, easy forest trails, 2+ miles). We will visit Cueva de Portales, a classic "through cave" carved by the San Diego River. This cave was Che Guevara's military headquarters during the missile crisis of 1962. Here, we have a good chance of seeing the endemic *Cuban Vireo*, *Cuban Oriole*, and *Giant Kingbird*, as well as Cuban Pewee, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Red-legged Thrush (endemic subspecies), and resident Olive-capped Warblers. We'll have dinner and accommodations at Hotel Mirador in San Diego de los Banos.

**Day 4 ~ July 5, 2014****San Diego de los Banos – Zapata Peninsula**

We'll have morning birding nearby in Hacienda Cortina, a former lavish estate surrounded by mixed forest. The endemic *Fernandina's Flicker* has been recorded here along with *Giant Kingbird* and *Cuban Grassquit*. Following lunch, we will drive east and then turn south to the Zapata Peninsula (4 hours). We will have stops along the way as opportunity permits. Our accommodation and dinner will be at Hotel Playa Larga (4 nights) on the picturesque Bay of Pigs. Constructed in the 1950s, the private bungalows offer comfortable and convenient accommodations situated on a peaceful stretch of beach and near excellent birding venues.

**Day 5 ~ July 6, 2014**

**Zapata Peninsula**

We will have optional, early morning birding around the hotel, followed by breakfast and then depart for wonderful venues in and around Zapata National Park. This region contains the largest wetland complex in the West Indies, and it is Cuba's most prolific birding region. Here, we will have excellent local guides and be able to explore protected areas off the beaten track. A trip highlight will be morning birding in a nature preserve adjacent to the small village of Bermejas. The Bermejas area will be our best opportunity to see the endemic *Bee Hummingbird* (world's smallest bird), *Fernandina's Flicker*, *Bare-legged Owl*, *Cuban Parakeet*, *Blue-headed* and *Gray-fronted quail-doves*, as well as Cuban Parrot, Key West and Ruddy quail-doves. We'll have lunch at Culeta Buena, a beautiful limestone-rimmed ocean inlet with abundant fish and excellent snorkeling opportunities. Time permitting, we'll plan a visit to the nearby Bay of Pigs Museum. We'll return to Bermejas for afternoon birding and then return to Hotel Playa Larga.

**Day 6 ~ July 7, 2014**

**Zapata Peninsula**

We will have optional, early morning birding, breakfast, and a morning walk along a dry roadway in the swamp at La Turba. Our target birds will be the elusive *Zapata Wren*, *Zapata Sparrow*, *Red-shouldered Blackbird* and Tawny-shouldered Blackbird. The Zapata Swamp at La Turba is reminiscent of the Florida Everglades. We will have lunch followed by a mid-day break. In the late afternoon and early evening, we will conduct another field trip, possibly including an opportunity to see *Cuban Nightjar* and Stygian Owl. Dinner and accommodations will again be at Hotel Playa Larga.

**Day 7 ~ July 8, 2014**

**Zapata Peninsula**

We will again have optional, early morning birding and breakfast followed by a field trip to locate any of the Cuban endemics that we may have missed. Our birding day will include lunch and a trip to nearby Las Salinas Wildlife Refuge. This coastal wetland is an excellent place to see shorebirds, Reddish Egrets, Wood Storks, Roseate Spoonbills, Greater Flamingos, and the endemic *Cuban Black-Hawk*. All walking will be on dry, flat terrain (less than 2 miles total). Dinner will be at a private restaurant, and accommodations will be at Hotel Playa Larga.

**Day 8 ~ July 9, 2014**

**Zapata to Havana**

Following breakfast and check out, we will bird within the Zapata Swamp area. By late morning, we will drive west to Havana (2+ hours), with lunch and a guided walking tour in Old Havana—one of the jewels of colonial Latin America. Our accommodations will be in Old Havana. Our farewell dinner will be in a restaurant overlooking the city and sea.

**Day 9 ~ Thursday, July 10, 2014**

**Havana – Miami**

Breakfast and hotel/airport transfer included to Jose Marti Airport for your flight to Miami.

