



THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

"This year's tour to the Dominican Republic was a great success. We managed to encounter 30 endemic species in the Dominican Republic (seeing 28 of them) and most of the distinctive subspecies that may be split in the future. Beyond the endemics though we found a host of birds restricted to islands in the Caribbean, in a surprising variety of habitats, tallying a new trip-record 149 species in the process. The Caribbean may not hold the same diversity of species as a trip to the mainland tropics, but what these islands lack in number of species they more than make up for in quality. And this year we managed fine views of some stunning and unique birds. Palmchats, the sole member of the family Dulidae, were common throughout the Dominican Republic, and Todies were daily companions. From the arid cactus-clad forests of the southwest to the lush broadleaf forests of the high sierra and Los Haitises National Park it seemed as if a journey of a couple of hours was always able to bring us to another world. The island supports a wealth of highly colorful birds, and we were entranced this year by birds such as gaudy Hispaniolan Trogons investigating a nest cavity in a roadside tree, both Yellow-breasted Crake and Spotted Rail in a huge freshwater marsh, two dazzling White-fronted Quail-Dove sedately striding in the leaf litter along a forested creek, a pair of elegant La Selle Thrush foraging in full sunlight near its namesake sign along the Haitian border, a quietly perched Ashy-faced Owl just overhead, and the seemingly omnipresent and snazzy Hispaniolan Woodpeckers. Add to this the wealth of lizard and frog diversity, multiple boat trips through mangroves, marshes and ocean bays and varied cuisine and it turns into quite an enjoyable week in the Caribbean!

Our first evening in the Dominican Republic started with a bang, as just a few blocks from our hotel in colonial Santo Domingo we enjoyed views of several endemic Hispaniolan Parakeets settling into one of their communal roost sites around the ruins of a 16th century hospital building. By standing in the small parking lot adjacent to the ruins we were able to watch about three dozen birds perched on the walls of the ruins or in adjacent palm trees. Hispaniola Parakeets are surprisingly common around the city, and as they are large birds clad in emerald green with red wingpits and bold white eyerings they certainly lend a tropical feel to downtown. While watching the antics of the parakeets we also noticed a group of Palmchats tending a bulky communal nest in one of the palms. The sole member of the family Dulidae, these odd birds somewhat resemble a cross between a starling and a waxwing. They are quite common across the island and occur in all habitat types. Although they fly with a swift and direct flight, sometimes carrying twigs many times larger than themselves the species has never been recorded on adjacent islands. In some large fig trees around the same parking lot we also picked out a dull Cape May Warbler and female American Redstart, and somewhat poor views of a pair of Hispaniola Woodpeckers (a species that we would get to know very well the following morning). Soaring over us in the humid and rapidly darkening skies were several sprightly and attractively marked Antillean Palm Swifts, which rounded out a nice cast of local birds. We followed this brief bout of birding with dinner and our introductory meeting in the courtyard restaurant of our historic hotel.

The next day we ventured to the beautiful botanical gardens on the north side of the city where the gardens' lush plantings, and surprisingly wild streamside vegetation allowed us to quickly become acquainted with some of the more common birds in the country. Palmchats were seemingly everywhere around the gardens, flying among the Royal Palm stands, drinking from dripping faucets and aggregating in fruiting trees. Almost equally common was the incredibly gaudy Hispaniolan Woodpecker, replete in bands of gold, black and red. Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoos played hide and seek with us for a while as they lurked in mistletoe clumps or in the denser foliage of the canopy. With patience though managed repeated views of their buff and gray underparts, red irides and exceedingly long bills.

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A nice pair of Black-crowned Palm-Tanagers (likely soon to be members of a small endemic family on Hispaniola rather than with the actual Tanagers), and unbeatable lengthy views of about a dozen West Indian Whistling-Ducks were also appreciated. Tiny Vervain Hummingbirds were perched high up on open song perches at several locations during our walk, looking positively miniscule as they perched on the exposed spikes of Royal Palm trees. The colorful and much larger Antillean Mangos were also in evidence foraging in some of the ornamental flowers and hawking for insects over the trail. And how can I forget to mention the mixed warbler flocks, containing American Redstarts, Ovenbird, Prairie, Cape May, Black-and-White Warblers, and Northern Parula? Along the creek teetered a few Solitary Sandpipers, a smattering of herons and a couple of Common Gallinule and Least Grebe. Near the end of the walk around the gardens we heard a calling Broad-billed Tody and were soon able to track it down as it perched at close range all around us. Todies are a Caribbean endemic bird family with 5 extant species, although fossil evidence suggests that the family was once much more widespread. The island of Hispaniola is the only island to support two species; the widespread Broad-billed and the more range restricted highland Narrow-billed. Although all five species are quite similar they differ in the shade of green on their upperparts and the extent of pink and yellow in their underparts. I think that the Broad-billed is perhaps the most colourful of the set, with huge flared pink flanks and a pink and yellow wash across their breast. In all honesty though the best Tody is likely whichever one you are lucky enough to be watching, and they are all undeniably cute.

After lunch and some grocery shopping we then made the three-hour drive to Barahona in the Southwest corner of the country, our base for the next five days of the tour. While checking into our rooms we were distracted by birds on the coastal hotel's grounds. Brown Pelicans, Turkey Vultures and Royal Terns flew by along the cliffs, an Antillean Mango was foraging in a room-side cactus and a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was found sitting in the shade of some large trees. The main prize though was a pair of dashing Hispaniolan Orioles, a widespread but not particularly common endemic that is attractively patterned in black and bright yellow.

On the second full day we drove inland from Barahona along the Enriquillo Valley and uphill to the small farming community of Puerto Escondido. Our picnic breakfast along a rushing creek was interrupted by a calling Stolid Flycatcher that we spotted in a fruiting tree along the creek in the morning sun. A few Black-whiskered Vireos, a pair of Black-crowned Palm-Tanagers and our first Greater Antillean Bullfinches joined the Flycatcher in the fruiting tree, which further interrupted our breakfast, although I suspect that no one minded! Further up the road we stopped to check out an area along an irrigation canal, which provides some water in an otherwise arid scrubland. Here we had excellent views of several more jewel-like Todies and a few migrants such as Northern Parula, and Common Yellowthroat. We then spent the rest of the morning walking along a humid creek, surrounded by large fruiting trees, and dense scrub over a limestone karst understory. Here we were occupied by repeated views of agitated Broad-billed Todies flashing their pink flank patches and quickly becoming like old friends. Likely due to the large amount of fruit present along the creek this year we encountered several Hispaniolan Parrots and a pair of dashing Hispaniolan Orioles. The first pair of parrots flew by in perfect light, really showing off the bright greens and iridescent blues of their plumage, and several other birds were later scoped as they clambered around in the fruiting trees above the trail. This species is persecuted throughout the mountains for the pet trade, but happily seems still to be relatively common (much unlike many of the other Caribbean *Amazona* parrots). Through the course of the morning we also found several perched Hispaniola Parakeets and a few Olive-throated Parakeets (thought to be introduced here by Jamaican workers at the ALCOA Bauxite mine several decades ago). Palmchats and Bananaquits were seemingly everywhere, and the laughing calls of Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoos and White-necked Crows provided a great aural backdrop. Migrant warblers were prevalent throughout the morning, with many Cape May and Black-throated Blue Warblers joined by a few Prairie, American Redstart, Northern Parula, Ovenbird and single Hooded, Magnolia and Louisiana Waterthrush. Along with the diversity of parulids we were surprised to hear the scolding calls of a Yellow-throated Vireo that we subsequently tracked down. The vireo is a scarce migrant for the island, and was the first (of many) write-in species for this year's tour that ran about 2 weeks later than usual.

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Although we did not detect any Quail-Doves stalking the dense leaf litter in the relatively open understory near the creek this time our highlight of the morning more than compensated for any disappointment. As we neared the completion of our loop walk we heard the unmistakable calls of a Bay-breasted Cuckoo coming from the other side of the creek. This large and surprisingly colorful cuckoo is likely the most rare of the endemic bird species in the Dominican Republic. Not much is known about the ecology of the Cuckoo, and recent surveys have indicated that perhaps as few as 300 pairs persist in the country. The birds seem to have large territories and are likely heavily impacted by forest fragmentation and the removal of the larger diameter trees laden with epiphytic growth that is occurring over much of the country. They seem to specialize in the transitional forest bands, where large humid forest broadleaf trees intersect with the drier thornscrub. We crossed the creek with quickened pace and soon found two Cuckoos cavorting around in the canopy. They seemed intent upon whatever their private discussion was about and we were able to follow them as they chased each other and frequently perched out in the open. As this species is devilishly hard to see well, earning the moniker "the wraith of the forest" and is often wary, especially around groups, our repeated views were exceptionally good. Elated, we headed back towards the car, stopping to look at a few of the butterflies that abounded all along the trail, and we made frequent stops to admire bugs like Malachite, Hardwoods Anetia, Zebra Longwing and Tiger Mimic-Queen. All told the morning walk revealed a wonderful 12 of the island's endemics, certainly an excellent introduction to the Sierra de Barahuco!

After a picnic lunch in the shade of some large fig trees and a brief stop in at the park headquarters to purchase our passes for the next day in the high sierra we headed down to Lago Enriquillo, a huge brackish lake that sits below sea level in the Neyba Valley. The contrast between the mesic foothill forest and the xeric scrub around the lake was startling, and really helped to drive home the diversity of habitats that the island of Hispaniola had to offer. Along the shore we found a smattering of wading birds including Tricolored and Little Blue Herons and many more Common Gallinule, as well as our first Lesser Yellowlegs and Black-necked Stilt and a hunting Osprey. We drove down a small dirt road and surrounded by tree cactus, acacia scrub and open grassland and eventually located several vocal and close Palm Crows. This is the "normal" looking and sounding crow on the island, and has in the past been regarded as an endemic species (it was recently lumped with the Cuban Palm Crow without any documented reason by the AOU). One van also enjoyed a very cooperative Mangrove Cuckoo that flushed up with our passing and then perched at eye level just out our window. Also along the road here we found a positive bountiful crop of the cute Khaki Curlytail lizards, a particularly attractive endemic with a bright orange undertail and spotted flanks scuttling through the cactus in the understory. We then returned to Barahona where we ate dinner at a seaside restaurant and turned in early in preparation for our very early start the next day.

A very early start to day three enabled us to reach the highlands of the Sierra de Bahoruco before dawn. Along the slow and rough ride up we were treated to several Burrowing Owls along the roadside and singing but frustratingly unresponsive Hispaniolan Nightjar and Least Pauraque. I suspect that the clear and cold night, in the low 50's, contributed to the low insect activity and perhaps the reticence of the nightbirds. Driving up this somewhat tortuous road in the dark is always a memorable part of the tour, but the birding in the high mountains, over 6000ft. is worth it. We arrived at a patch of montane deciduous forest along the Haitian border at dawn. Within minutes of our arrival the dawn chorus of Rufous-throated Solitaires started to tune up, giving their ethereal call notes that sound like fingers circling the top of a crystal wine glass. A brief vigil along the road as the light began to illuminate the forest revealed a pair of the endangered La Selle Thrush foraging along the roadside edge. The La Selle's is boldly coloured with a black head, orange bill and eyering, dark back and bright brick-red chest and flanks offsetting a white vent and lower belly, surely one of the most attractive thrushes in the world. After a quick and very highly anticipated breakfast we turned our attention to the chorus of birdsong. A nearby pair of nearby Greater Antillean Elaenias was flitting around in a fruiting tree near the cars. Although they are admittedly not likely to win any bird beauty contests the subspecies on Hispaniola should likely be regarded as distinct from the race on Jamaica, thus representing a potential armchair lifer.

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A wonderfully bird-rich two hours then followed as we explored the road that passes through patches of dense broadleaf forest, laden with tree ferns, mosses and lichens and flowering bromeliads. In some fruiting trees near to our breakfast sight we located several colorful Hispaniolan Spindalis, trying to snatch fruits from under the watchful eye of the solitaires. Here too were our first Green-tailed Warblers (not a warbler), several feeding Hispaniolan Emeralds and a few vocal Scaly-naped Pigeons. Several pairs of Western Chat-Tanagers were calling along the road and we soon managed to track a responsive individual. These large birds somewhat resemble skinny thrashers as they move around the vine tangles and understory of humid broadleafed forest, and can be virtually invisible if they choose to be. We had repeated views one as it bounced through the dense understory and eventually crossed the road, perching in the open for brief periods. An isolated pine tree kept us entertained for quite some time as a small group of Antillean Siskins fed on cones near the top of the tree. Several bright yellow males, with their customary black head and elongated pinkish bill were among the flock, and gave us excellent views. Like many species of finches these Siskins are highly mobile and can be hard to pin down on demand. In this same tree we located a cooperative Hispaniolan Pewee flycatching from the lower limbs, and another Elaenia for good comparison.

We continued walking slowly up the road from here, with highland specialties popped up for us one by one. In the intermittently cloudy sky we picked out a couple of Golden Swallows flying just above treetop level and were able to see the glossy golden-green sheen on their backs as they repeatedly banked and looped back around our heads, often passing just over the group. Narrow-billed Todies were common, with their machine-gun like rattle and complicated (for a tody) song almost constantly in earshot. Although similar looking to their more widespread Broad-billed relatives this species has a whiter breast, black bill tip, white iris and more yellow-green back. After our walk we decided to drive further uphill, which turned out to be an excellent idea as just a few minutes drive from up our breakfast spot revealed a pair of Hispaniolan Trogons prospecting for a nesting site in a cavity of a large tree along the road. These bulky trogons (one of only 2 Caribbean species) differ in body shape to their mainland cousins, and are quite attractive with strikingly banded black and white wing coverts, carmine-red belly, dark gray chest and head, and orange iris. The trogons require a fairly large nesting cavity, and the population is likely limited by the number of available nest holes. The broadleaf forest here is under constant pressure from the influx of Haitian loggers, who have run out of wood for cooking closer to home. The deforestation caused by this influx has largely been kept in check for the last several years by the local park rangers, and several large blocks of habitat seem to be currently in re-growth, but it will be quite a while before the road accessible forest here returns to its full height and diversity. Just uphill from the Trogons we found a pair of White-winged Tanagers (not a tanager) actively foraging right over the road before zipping off downslope. We drove up as far as the pineywoods, which seem strikingly reminiscent of the southeastern U.S. pine forests, except that the pines here are littered with bromeliads and the ground covered in mosses and ferns, and the sounds of parrots ring in the distance rather than the more customary Chipping Sparrows and Blue Jays. We then began our descent of the mountain, stopping at the ranger station to take advantage of their newly erected picnic tables. Along with lunch we were thrilled to spot a pair of very vocal Loggerhead Kingbirds (another soon to be endemic species if the AOU ever gets around to reviewing the recent suite of papers) perched up in the adjacent pines. On the way back down we briefly walked across the border into Haiti and picked up nice tally of 7 species, including Vervain Hummingbird, a pair of flying Hispaniola Parrots and a perched Hispaniola Lizard Cuckoo. Some very responsive Antillean Euphonias came right in to our calls, perching just overhead in Haitian trees. The local subspecies is more orange than the races found on other islands in the Caribbean, but seems to respond to songs from Puerto Rican birds. We paused to watch an American Kestrel repeatedly diving on a flying Red-tailed Hawk, but the pair stubbornly stayed in Dominican airspace. Once we were back down on the flatter road through dry scrub forest we stopped to take a break near a grove of fruiting trees and spent a happy half-hour picking through the migrant warblers, Black-whiskered vireos and Hispaniola Parrots that were devouring the small red fruits. Here too was a cooperative Flat-billed Vireo. This aberrant vireo was originally described as a warbler due to its bill shape, and is one of the less studied endemics on the island.

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Although not the brightest bird, it is unique, in both shape and voice, and can be difficult to obtain solid views of. Contrary to that reputation though this bird came right in overhead, lingering and inquisitively hopping around us for several minutes and allowing us to see the details that so confounded the original discoverers, such as a bill more reminiscent of a flatbill flycatcher than that of a vireo. In the late afternoon we reached paved roads at last and as we began the drive back towards our base in Barahona we stopped to admire a couple of perched Plain Pigeons in the palm groves just East of Duverge. The Dominican Republic has served as a stronghold for this species, which is globally endangered, but even here their numbers are low. The lighting was good enough that we could discern the pale leading edge to the wing, plum tones in the wings and pale irides that make this pigeon anything but plain. Then it was time to get back to our Barahona Hotel for a well-deserved rest.

The next day we elected to explore the extreme southwestern corner of the island and the southern slopes of the Sierra de Bahoruco. We started out with breakfast at our hotel and then drove an hour south to Laguna Oviedo, where, in addition to relatively close views of a nice mix of herons including Tricolored, Little Blue, Snowy and Great Egrets, a few Least Sandpipers and Lesser Yellowlegs, and perched Sandwich and Caspian Terns we made the arrangements for our afternoon boat tour. Then we headed further south through a series of small villages, open ranchland and into the huge cactus forest of the southwestern peninsula. We arrived at the picturesque Cabo Rojo, a nice mix of heady white sand beaches, limestone cliffs and small marshes in the mid-morning. Our normally large marsh along the end of the paved road was disappointingly largely dry this year, with the cattail stands standing in dry mud and no sign of any of the usual Bitterns or rails. The small portion of the wetland that was still holding water though was full of birds. Several pairs of White-cheeked Pintail and Blue-winged Teal were paddling around the pond, and some hunting young Reddish Egrets (strikingly white as is customary through the Antilles) put on quite a show. We continued on to the impossibly azure waters of Bahia de Aquilas where we were thrilled to see several White-tailed Tropicbirds coursing through the skies. Although somewhat distant their elongated tail streamers were clearly evident in binoculars, and several times we saw pairs conducting their tandem courtship flights offshore. Sitting out on a very distant buoy was a pair of young Brown Boobies, and along the bluff over the bay we watched dozens of Cave Swallows entering their nest crevices. On the coralline shelf we admired a variety of sea life, including chitons, snails, lightfoot crabs, and some bright blue corals. We reluctantly pulled ourselves away from the idyllic surroundings to head inland and uphill on a refreshingly well-paved road, originally built by an American mining company seeking bauxite. The park road was as empty as always as it snakes up into the mountains from the coastal highway allowing easy access to higher elevation pine forests. We spent the rest of the morning at elevation, and had good success with Golden Swallows circling below us as they foraged around the abandoned mine site. Our main birding goal here was Hispaniola Crossbill, and happily we coaxed a young bird in for a close study. This relict species looks quite different from the White-winged Crossbills of the boreal forest, with a very long and thick-based bill, even brighter wing bars, bulkier build and square head. Fossil evidence indicates that crossbills used to be found on other islands in the Caribbean, but persist only in Hispaniola. After lunch at the park gazebo near the end of the road we stopped to watch a few White-collared Swifts coursing overhead through increasingly cloudy skies, with one or two closer passes that allowed us to hear their twittering calls as they appeared to conduct tandem courtship flights. Here too we saw a few more Palm Crows, and were somewhat surprised to hear the calls of a distant Northern Bobwhite (introduced here for hunting).

We then headed back to Laguna Oviedo for a one-hour boat ride along the lakeshore. This shallow brackish lake supports a large number of birds, and among the hundreds of American Wigeon and Caribbean Coots we picked out a few Northern Shoveler and Ruddy Duck, and several Roseate Spoonbills and White Ibis. The star of the boat ride though was the flock of 19 American Flamingos. These stately yet awkward birds are intensely pink, and having an opportunity to watch them at close range as they waded in the shallow lake against a backdrop of dark green mangroves was one of the defining images of the tour. Tern diversity was high this year, likely due again to the later date, with Gull-billed and Least Terns joining the more common Royal and Sandwich. Single Common and Caspian Terns and a few Laughing Gulls rounded out the cast of Larids.

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Shorebirds proved also to be well represented with excellent views of Black-bellied, Semipalmated, Snowy and Wilson's Plovers along the shoreline, and a few Stilt Sandpipers and Greater Yellowlegs around the small mangrove islands. We then headed back to Barahona to our coastal hotel, admiring the stunning vistas of the cliff and beach laden coast on the way.

Our last morning in Barahona found us driving up into the eastern side of the Bahoruco Mountains to a new site that Miguel had found recently for Eastern Chat-Tanager. We parked in the early morning light and left the cars surprised by the chill in the air. A short walk downslope revealed a singing Eastern Chat-Tanager that soon came in close to our group and slowly circled around us through the nearly impenetrable tangle of shrubs along the road. We waited for a few minutes for the bird to slip up and land in the open and were soon rewarded with lengthy views of it perched in the open. Its browner back coloration, yellow eyering, and more slender and compact build readily set it apart from the Western Chat-Tanagers that we saw along the Haitian border. The two species of Chat-Tanager are not, in fact, Tanagers at all. It is now likely that through recent discoveries in DNA-based research that they are best regarded as members of their own family. At the same stop as the Chat-Tanager we also heard a tody giving a truly odd call. This was a known bird that Miguel had located years earlier, and given its plumage characters and voice, both seemingly intermediate between Narrow and Broad-billed Todies might represent a hybrid individual. A graduate student from Villa Nova is currently investigating the area, and other potential overlap zones to see to what degree the two species may interbreed. A very active pair of White-winged Warblers also presented themselves to us as we walked back up to enjoy our picnic breakfast. This was a welcome find as two of our group had been so engrossed in Trogon photography that they just missed the pair of "warblers" that we found in the highlands. As we finished breakfast we were distracted by flyover Scaly-naped and White-crowned Pigeons, and then heard an Antillean Piculet call from just up the road. Unlike most of the piculets that we had attempted to see to that point this bird remained vocal and responsive to our playback. It soon came in to an isolated Pine tree and gave us repeated views as it clambered around on the smaller branches in the crown of the tree. Happy with a great first hour and a half of birding we then drove downhill to the tiny town of Cabral, interrupted by a male Indigo Bunting that briefly flew out of the dry scrub along the road and landed just outside our car window.

Generally speaking this last full day around the Southwest is occupied by seeking out whatever endemic species we lack (usually Bay-breasted Cuckoo). Given our excellent luck with that and virtually all the other species though we had a bit of time to play with this year. Acting on Miguel's advice we decided to charter a boat out to Laguna Cabral, a large freshwater marsh that had nearly disappeared a few years ago due to drought but that now stretched across the Neyba Valley, supporting large populations of fish, introduced Apple Snails, native wading and marsh birds and huge stands of cattails. While waiting for the boat captain to arrive at the dock we found a Palm Warbler foraging in the lakeside brush. We then climbed into the small boat and set off on what was the consensus best part of the tour. Crossing the shallow and surprisingly large freshwater lake we passed through several bands of cattails, flushing Glossy Ibis and Black-crowned Night-Herons until arriving at a small mixed stand of sedges, cattails and small acacias. Here the local park ranger had been monitoring a pair of Yellow-breasted Crake, a tiny, very secretive and poorly known species that occurs over a wide area around the Caribbean and adjacent mainland but that is very infrequently seen. We floated near the appropriate area while the local ranger and the boatman waded out in the knee-deep swamp. They were soon able to locate the birds and by slowly walking behind them brought them over to the marsh edge where waited in the boat (or in the water for a few participants). The crake showed well, swimming across a gap in the marsh and then coming out for about a minute as it walked back towards its original area. Close to a Black Rail in size, but with quite long legs, and a colorful yellow, buff, rust, and gray plumage this species is quite a nice rail. A write in for the tour, and a lifer for the leader the species was voted bird of the trip (with Hispaniola Woodpecker and Palmchat close behind). Elated with our views, and even photos, most of the group elected to walk over to another close area in the lake, using the recently purchased rubber boots that we bought in nearby Cabral. The ground was firm and shallow over most of the walk, though around the cattail stands it became decidedly uneven and muckier.

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We had made the walk to look for a recently reported Wilson's Snipe, which we did not find. However we did enjoy multiple views of Least Bitterns at very close range and behind the denser cattails noted a dark bird duck into a dense stand. Surrounding the clump of reeds we were shocked when a Spotted Rail flew up and over our heads, quickly diving back into cover. Previously unrecorded in Laguna Cabral, and possibly colonizing the lake due to the presence of huge number of introduced apple snails. It's not every day when in about a half-hour span you can see Yellow-breasted Crake, Spotted Rail and multiple Least Bitterns! We returned to our hotel for a poolside lunch and bit of a rest (always in short supply on the Dominican Republic tours!)

In the late afternoon we decided to drive back to Rabo de Gato in search of the one remaining diurnal endemic in the Southwest; the gorgeous White-fronted Quail-Dove. By walking through the leaf-litter laden understory along the creek we soon pinned down two different individuals that froze at our approach, but with patience soon started walking around again, showing extremely well. These relatively small and beautifully patterned doves are surprisingly cryptic against the masses of dead leaves that coat the forest floor, but their white forecrowns shone like beacons from the gloom. As they walked through patches of dappled sunlight the bright purples, blues, gray and apricots in their feathers showed to excellent effect. As we returned to the cars we were sidetracked by the rollicking laughter and yelps of several White-necked Crows that were calling in the distance. Just for fun we tried imitating their calls, and whether it was our laughable attempts or just coincidence we were treated to flyover views of a stream of crows (likely heading to some nearby roost) that eventually numbered some forty individuals! Dinner back in Barahona was unfortunately a bit of a protracted affair, and by the time we finished it started to rain. We had initially planned another attempt to look for Least Pauraque, but with the late hour and intermittently heavy rain showers decided to just return to our hotel, after a truly exceptional day in the field.

We met for a solid breakfast at the very civilized hour of seven o'clock. While eating we watched the Antillean Palm-Swifts drinking from the pool, the resident pair of Hispaniolan Orioles foraging in flower aloe beds, and a male Shiny Cowbird (our first for the tour) sitting above the courtyard. Packing up and settling the bills we then

began the long but scenic drive across the country. A lunch stop at a very nice seaside restaurant in Santo Domingo introduced a few participants to mofongo; a local dish of fried mashed plantains. As we continued east we transitioned into a dramatically different and more tropical feeling countryside, with sugar cane fields, meandering streams, riparian hardwood forests and lush roadside vegetation followed, and we arrived at our hotel in the late afternoon. The hotel itself is perched on the eastern edge of the large Parque Nacional de Los Haitises, and resembles a 10 year olds fantasy tree-house, complete with lots of rockwork, leaves cemented into the plaster, tall ceilings with wooden beams, loft beds, indoor balconies and winding stairs, all with a stream and multiple waterfalls running through the bottom floor! The hotel is currently expanding with a large new wing going up on an adjacent hill, but the white noise from the creek drowned out the construction noises quite effectively. After dinner we set out to try to locate our penultimate endemic, the beautiful Ashy-faced Owl which is generally more common around Los Haitises than Barahona. It took a couple of stops along the main road in to the resort, which was a bit of a mess this year due to the construction project but at our third stop, along with the calls of multiple species of frogs and the flashing lights of click beetles we heard a response to our playback. An Ashy-faced Owl flew silently overhead, almost alighting on a palm and then changing its mind and circling back to land just overhead on a limb crossing the trail. The bird's gray face, set off from the almost umber body plumage were noticeable in our torchlight, clearly distinguishing perhaps the loviest owl of the genus from the more widespread Barn Owl. It remained in clear view for several minutes; I wish all owls were so cooperative!

After breakfast at the resort's buffet, accompanied by more White-necked Crows and the constant stream of Palmchats around the pool we wandered down the trail into Los Haitises adjacent to our lodge. Our local guide here, who is connected to the Peregrine Funds conservation efforts for Ridgway's Hawk had told us the night before that the local pair of birds was again nesting just behind the hotel.

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A bit unfortunately though his definition of “just behind” was not quite what we expected and it was a more of an adventure than usual. At a creek crossing the group elected to split up and it was, of course, the smallest section of the group that located a calling bird about a half-kilometer from the trailhead. It took about a half hour for the other parts of the group to link up with us, but the male Ridgway’s cooperatively sat up on the slope above us waiting for more admirers. This is perhaps the rarest species of raptor in the world, and to see one comparatively easily, and in such obviously altered habitat is heartening, and portends a hopeful future for the species in the long term. Los Haitises National Park is the last remaining stronghold for the species in the world, and it is estimated that in the nearly 1000 square kilometer park there are roughly 120 pairs remaining. There has been large scale clearing for agriculture in this area for a decade and the park guards are vigorously trying to educate the farmers and protect the valuable nest trees that remain. After an elated celebration we elected to continue along the trail for a few more minutes and were rewarded with views of huge numbers of Palmchats busily tending to their nests, a few pairs of the delightfully raucous White-necked Crows, bucketfuls of colorful and very interactive Hispaniolan Woodpeckers, and some very cooperative Vervain Hummingbirds and Broad-billed Todies. We then returned to the hotel, on a much more direct path and packed up the cars. A two- hour boat ride through coastal mangrove forests, and out San Lorenzo bay to several small islets that dot the coastline occupied our midday time. The mangroves held several Little Blue Herons and a few passerines, but the tide was high and there was no exposed shoreline this year. We stopped on the way out to the seabird islands to look at a perched Osprey, of the local white-headed Caribbean subspecies, and were happy to see a White-crowned Pigeon flying low enough over the water that those fast enough to see its approach could make out its white crown.

At the farthest out of the small steep-sided limestone islets was acting as a breeding site for hordes of Magnificent Frigatebirds. We circled the island, with hundreds of frigates hanging in the air above us or perched on the bushes and small trees that have colonized the islet. Several males were spotted with their balloon-like bright red throat patches extended. Along with the frigatebird show were good numbers of Brown Pelicans, including lots of still somewhat fuzzy chicks, and a smattering of Great Egrets and Little Blue Herons in full breeding regalia. The small caves just above the waterline around the islands played host to dozens of West Indian Cave Swallows busily flying in and out of the cave entrances to their nesting crevices. This year’s tour was the first that I have undertaken three separate boat tours, which offer a wonderful change of pace, and allowed us to see a different side of this varied island. We made a short foray into the park trails, walking into isolated valleys with huge mangrove trees and mixed hardwoods. Here we tried our hand at a bit of caving, walking into a short matrix of twisted limestone caverns for eye-level views of some Taino cave sculptures and paintings. After a late lunch we headed back towards Santo Domingo, taking our farewell dinner in the courtyard of our hotel.” – *Gavin Bieber*

Bird List:

Column A= Number of years this species seen has been recorded

Column B= Number of days recorded during the last tour

Column C= Maximum daily total recorded during the last tour

H=Heard Only

A		B	C	
8	West Indian Whistling-Duck (C)	2	6	<i>Dendrocygna arborea</i>
7	White-cheeked Pintail	1	7	<i>Anas bahamensis</i>
5	American Wigeon	1	120	<i>Anas americana</i>
9	Blue-winged Teal	2	10	<i>Anas discors</i>
3	Northern Shoveler	1	6	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
2	Lesser Scaup	1	30	<i>Aythya affinis</i>

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1	Masked Duck				<i>Nomonyx dominicus</i>
7	Ruddy Duck	1	5		<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>
1	Northern Bobwhite (I)	1	1	H	<i>Colinus virginianus</i>
11	Least Grebe	1	2		<i>Tachybaptus dominicus</i>
10	Pied-billed Grebe	1	6		<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>
6	American Flamingo	1	19		<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>
4	White-tailed Tropicbird	1	5		<i>Phaethon lepturus</i>
9	Brown Booby	1	2		<i>Sula leucogaster</i>
11	Brown Pelican	5	45		<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>
11	Magnificent Frigatebird	4	200		<i>Fregata magnificens</i>
4	Least Bittern	1	8		<i>Ixobrychus exilis</i>
10	Great Blue Heron	4	10		<i>Ardea herodias</i>
11	Great Egret	6	50		<i>Ardea alba</i>
11	Snowy Egret	5	35		<i>Egretta thula</i>
11	Little Blue Heron	4	20		<i>Egretta caerulea</i>
10	Tricolored Heron	2	25		<i>Egretta tricolor</i>
6	Reddish Egret	1	4		<i>Egretta rufescens</i>
11	Cattle Egret	7	125		<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
11	Green Heron	6	5		<i>Butorides virescens</i>
8	Black-crowned Night-Heron	1	10		<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
7	Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	3	4		<i>Nycticorax violaceus</i>
3	White Ibis	1	6		<i>Eudocimus albus</i>
3	Glossy Ibis	1	4		<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
7	Roseate Spoonbill	1	4		<i>Platalea ajaja</i>
11	Turkey Vulture	3	100		<i>Cathartes aura</i>
11	Osprey	4	3		<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
8	Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	1		<i>Accipiter striatus striatus</i>
8	Ridgway's Hawk (E)	1	2		<i>Buteo ridgwayi</i>
11	Red-tailed Hawk	3	5		<i>Buteo jamaicensis jamaicensis</i>
3	Clapper Rail				<i>Rallus crepitans caribaeus</i>
2	Sora				<i>Porzana carolina</i>
1	Yellow-breasted Crake	1	3		<i>Hapalocrex flaviventer</i>
2	Spotted Rail	1	1		<i>Pardirallus maculatus</i>
2	Purple Gallinule	1	3		<i>Porphyrio martinicus</i>
10	Common Gallinule	4	30		<i>Gallinula galeata</i>
10	American Coot	3	40		<i>Fulica americana caribaea</i>
9	Limpkin	3	1		<i>Aramus guarauna</i>
7	Black-bellied Plover	1	4		<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
4	Snowy Plover	1	2		<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
7	Wilson's Plover	1	3		<i>Charadrius wilsonia</i>

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7	Semipalmated Plover	1	2	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>
11	Killdeer	5	4	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>
4	Black-necked Stilt	2	8	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>
1	Northern Jacana			<i>Jacana spinosa</i>
10	Spotted Sandpiper	4	2	<i>Actitis macularia</i>
10	Solitary Sandpiper	1	2	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>
8	Greater Yellowlegs	2	5	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>
7	Lesser Yellowlegs	3	30	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>
5	Willet	1	5	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>
4	Ruddy Turnstone			<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
2	Sanderling			<i>Calidris alba</i>
3	Semipalmated Sandpiper			<i>Calidris pusilla</i>
1	Western Sandpiper			<i>Calidris mauri</i>
10	Least Sandpiper	1	5	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>
2	Stilt Sandpiper	1	2	<i>Calidris himantopus</i>
1	Short-billed Dowitcher			<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>
1	Wilson's Snipe			<i>Gallinago delicata</i>
7	Laughing Gull	2	4	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>
2	Ring-billed Gull			<i>Larus delawarensis</i>
1	Lesser Black-backed Gull			<i>Larus fuscus</i>
2	Gull-billed Tern	1	3	<i>Geochelidon nilotica</i>
3	Caspian Tern	2	1	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
1	Least Tern	1	6	<i>Sternula antillarum</i>
2	Common Tern	1	1	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
10	Royal Tern	5	25	<i>Thalasseus maxima</i>
4	Sandwich Tern	1	8	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>
11	Rock Pigeon (I)	8	100	<i>Columba livia</i>
11	Scaly-naped Pigeon (C)	2	12	<i>Patagioenas squamosa</i>
7	White-crowned Pigeon (C)	2	3	<i>Patagioenas leucocephala</i>
10	Plain Pigeon (C)	2	3	<i>Patagioenas inornata inornata</i>
11	White-winged Dove	5	10	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>
7	Zenaida Dove (C)	3	3	<i>Zenaida aurita</i>
11	Mourning Dove	8	25	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>
11	Common Ground-Dove	7	15	<i>Columbina passerina</i>
7	Key West Quail-Dove			<i>Geotrygon chrysia</i>
9	White-fronted Quail Dove (E)	1	2	<i>Geotrygon leucometopia</i>
7	Ruddy Quail-Dove			<i>Geotrygon montana</i>
10	Mangrove Cuckoo	2	1	<i>Coccyzus minor</i>
11	Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo (E)	4	4	<i>Coccyzus longirostris</i>
9	Bay-breasted Cuckoo (E)	1	2	<i>Coccyzus ruficularis</i>

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11	Smooth-billed Ani	7	12		<i>Crotophaga ani</i>
2	Barn Owl				<i>Tyto alba</i>
8	Ashy-faced Owl (E)	1	1		<i>Tyto glaucops</i>
11	Burrowing Owl	2	5		<i>Athene cunicularia troglodytes</i>
1	Short-eared Owl				<i>Asio flammeus domingensis</i>
4	Northern "Hispaniolan" Potoo				<i>Nyctibius jamaicensis abbotti</i>
9	Least Pauraque (E)	1	1	H	<i>Siphonorhis brewsteri</i>
9	Hispaniolan Nightjar (E)	1	1	H	<i>Antrostomus ekmani</i>
2	Chuck-will's-widow				<i>Antrostomus carolinensis</i>
11	White-collared Swift	1	4		<i>Streptoprocne zonaris</i>
11	Antillean Palm-Swift (C)	8	40		<i>Tachornis phoenicobia</i>
11	Antillean Mango (C)	7	10		<i>Anthracothorax dominicus</i>
11	Hispaniolan Emerald (E)	3	5		<i>Chlorostilbon swainsonii</i>
11	Vervain Hummingbird (C)	4	4		<i>Mellisuga minima vieilloti</i>
11	Hispaniolan Trogon (E)	1	2		<i>Priotelus roseigaster</i>
11	Broad-billed Tody (E)	6	8		<i>Todus subulatus</i>
11	Narrow-billed Tody (E)	2	6		<i>Todus angustirostris</i>
7	Belted Kingfisher	3	1		<i>Ceryle alcyon</i>
11	Antillean Piculet (E)	3	2		<i>Nesocittes micromegas</i>
11	Hispaniolan Woodpecker (E)	8	40		<i>Melanerpes striatus</i>
2	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker				<i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>
11	American Kestrel	7	25		<i>Falco sparverius dominicensis</i>
10	Merlin	1	1		<i>Falco columbarius</i>
5	Peregrine Falcon				<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
11	Hispaniolan Parakeet (E)	3	36		<i>Psittacara chloroptera</i>
8	Olive-throated Parakeet (C)	1	10		<i>Eupsittula nana</i>
11	Hispaniolan Parrot (E)	5	8		<i>Amazona ventralis</i>
10	Greater Antillean Elaenia (C)	2	5		<i>Elaenia fallax cherriei</i>
11	Hispaniolan Pewee (E)	1	6		<i>Contopus hispaniolensis</i>
11	Stolid Flycatcher (C)	4	6		<i>Myiarchus stolidus dominicensis</i>
11	Gray Kingbird (C)	7	12		<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>
6	Loggerhead Kingbird (E)	2	2		<i>Tyrannus caudifasciatus gabbii</i>
11	Flat-billed Vireo (E)	1	1		<i>Vireo nanus</i>
1	Yellow-throated Vireo	1	1		<i>Vireo flavifrons</i>
11	Black-whiskered Vireo (C)	5	6		<i>Vireo altiloquus</i>
11	Hispaniolan Palm Crow (E)	2	7		<i>Corvus palmarum</i>
11	White-necked Crow (E)	4	40		<i>Corvus leucognaphalus</i>
10	Caribbean Martin (C)	2	6		<i>Progne dominicensis</i>
11	Golden Swallow (E)	2	12		<i>Tachycineta euchrysea</i>
8	Cave Swallow	3	40		<i>Pterochelidon fulva fulva</i>

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5	Barn Swallow	2	4	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
11	Rufous-throated Solitaire (C)	1	5	<i>Myadestes genibarbis montanus</i>
4	Bicknell's Thrush			<i>Catharus bicknelli</i>
11	La Selle Thrush (E)	1	2 E	<i>Turdus swalesi</i>
11	Red-legged Thrush	5	4	<i>Turdus plumbeus ardosiaceus</i>
1	Gray Catbird	1	1	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>
11	Northern Mockingbird	7	37	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>
1	Cedar Waxwing			<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>
11	Palmchat (E)	7	80	<i>Dulus dominicus</i>
10	Ovenbird	5	3	<i>Seiurus aurocapillus</i>
1	Worm-eating Warbler			<i>Helmitheros vermivorum</i>
10	Northern Waterthrush	2	3	<i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>
8	Louisiana Waterthrush	1	1	<i>Parkesia motacilla</i>
9	Black-and-white Warbler	4	4	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>
9	Common Yellowthroat	3	4	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>
2	Hooded Warbler	1	2	<i>Setophaga citrina</i>
11	American Redstart	5	4	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>
11	Cape May Warbler	3	2	<i>Setophaga tigrina</i>
11	Northern Parula	3	4	<i>Setophaga americana</i>
4	Magnolia Warbler	1	1	<i>Setophaga magnolia</i>
10	"Golden" Yellow Warbler (C)	2	6	<i>Setophaga petechia albicollis</i>
11	Black-throated Blue Warbler	3	8	<i>Setophaga caerulescens</i>
10	Palm Warbler	1	2	<i>Setophaga palmarum</i>
11	Pine Warbler	2	4	<i>Setophaga pinus chrysolueca</i>
3	Yellow-rumped Warbler			<i>Setophaga coronata</i>
1	Yellow-throated Warbler			<i>Setophaga dominica</i>
9	Prairie Warbler	2	2	<i>Setophaga discolor</i>
1	Black-throated Green Warbler			<i>Setophaga virens</i>
11	Green-tailed Warbler (E)	1	10	<i>Microligea palustris</i>
11	White-winged Warbler (E)	2	4	<i>Xenoligea montana</i>
11	Hispaniolan Spindalis (E)	2	12	<i>Spindalis dominicensis</i>
11	Black-crowned Palm-Tanager (E)	7	6	<i>Phaenicophilus palmarum</i>
5	Eastern Chat-Tanager (E)	1	2	<i>Calyptophilus frugivorus</i>
9	Western Chat Tanager (E)	1	3	<i>Calyptophilus tertius</i>
11	Bananaquit	8	12	<i>Coereba flaveola bananivora</i>
10	Yellow-faced Grassquit	4	5	<i>Tiaris olivacea</i>
6	Black-faced Grassquit (C)	2	1	<i>Tiaris bicolor</i>
11	Greater Antillean Bullfinch (C)	4	5	<i>Loxigilla violacea affinis</i>
1	Rose-breasted Grosbeak			<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>
1	Indigo Bunting	1	1	<i>Passerina cyanea</i>

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11	Greater Antillean Grackle (C)	7	24	<i>Quiscalus niger</i>
7	Shiny Cowbird	2	1	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>
11	Hispaniolan Oriole (E)	6	2	<i>Icterus dominicensis</i>
2	Baltimore Oriole			<i>Icterus galbula</i>
10	"Hispaniolan" Antillean Euphonia (E)	1	6	<i>Euphonia musica musica</i>
10	Hispaniolan Crossbill (E)	2	1	<i>Loxia megaplaga</i>
9	Antillean Siskin (E)	1	4	<i>Carduelis dominicensis</i>
11	House Sparrow (I)	8	24	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
8	Village Weaver (I)	3	20	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>
4	Scaly-breasted Munia (I)	1	6	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
1	Tricolored Munia (I)			<i>Lonchura malacca</i>