



Birding in Cuba

February 1-10, 2024

Tentative Trip Itinerary

Day 1, February 1, 2024: Arrival

After clearing immigration and customs in Havana, we'll meet our hosts and Cuban guide, and set our course for Soroa, near the *Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve*, which is nestled in the forest and foothills of the Sierra de la Rosario mountains. We'll orient ourselves to the adventure ahead, then settle into our accommodations for two nights and enjoy our first Cuban meal together.

Accommodation near Soroa

Day 2, February 2, 2024: Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve to San Diego de los Baños

We'll get started early today with morning birding at **La Guira National Park** where we'll seek out an incredible songster, the **Cuban Solitaire**, plus Yellow-headed Warbler, Cuban Vireo, Cuban Oriole, a collection of regional endemics including Giant Kingbird, Olive-capped Warbler, and Red-legged Honeycreeper, and many others. We'll also pay a visit to **Cueva Portales**, the enchanting and historic site where Cuba's Western Army sheltered during the Missile Crisis of 1962. After lunch, we'll bird at area wetlands and fish farms, seeking Snail Kite and various waterbirds.

Accommodation near Soroa

Day 3, February 3, 2024: Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve to Zapata Peninsula

We'll bird again in the forest reserve, seeking a collection of Cuban endemics including Cuban Grassquit, **Cuban Tody**, **Cuba Trogan**, Cuban Bullfinch, Fernandina's Flicker, Cuban Pewee, Great Lizard Cuckoo, and Red-legged Thrush. We'll enjoy lunch at beautiful **Cafetal Buena Vista**, a restored 19th century coffee plantation offering sweeping views of the mountains, plains and coast before setting our course for the Zapata Peninsula, about 4 hours to the east. We stay 3 nights in **Playa Larga** 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.

Accommodation Playa Larga

Day 4, February 4, 2024: Zapata Peninsula

We set out early for a full morning of birding in a nature preserve adjacent to the small village of **Bermejas**. Here is our best opportunity to see the beautiful, endemic **Bee Hummingbird**, the world's smallest bird at barely 2.5" from bill tip to tail! Other endemics we will seek out include Fernandina's Flicker, **Bare-legged Owl**, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Parrot, **Blue-headed and Gray-fronted Quail-Doves**, Key West and Ruddy Quail Doves, among many! We'll lunch together at Punta Perdiz, a peaceful coastal location abundant with fish and excellent snorkeling opportunities, and very near the historic Bay of Pigs museum. We'll bird a bit more in the afternoon in Bermejas, before returning to Playa Larga for dinner and a good night's rest.

Accommodation Playa Larga

Day 5, February 5, 2024: Zapata Peninsula

After another early breakfast, we'll depart for birding within **Zapata National Park** and a morning walk along a dry roadway in the swamp at **La Turba**. This is our best opportunity for **Zapata Wren**, Zapata Sparrow, Red-shouldered Blackbird and Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, along with a large variety of warblers and other migrants. After lunch, we'll travel to **Las Salinas Wildlife Refuge**, where we have a good chance to see numerous shorebirds, plus Reddish Egrets, Wood Storks, Spoonbills, Flamingos and the endemic **Cuban Black-Hawk**. We'll end our stay in Playa Larga with dinner at a private restaurant in the village.

Accommodation Playa Larga

Day 6, February 6, 2023: Zapata to the Atlantic Coast

After a leisurely breakfast and checkout, we'll take a bird walk before heading north and east towards Cuba's Atlantic coast. We'll stay the next two nights in Moron, just south of the Atlantic archipelago, the setting for Hemingway's *Islands in the Stream*. The cays here offer excellent birding and scenery.

Accommodation Moron

Day 7, February 7, 2023: Cayo Coco

We'll spend our first 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, Thick-billed Vireo, possibly a subspecies of **Zapata Sparrow** and the locally endangered Bahama Mockingbird are target birds for the day. After lunch, we'll bird some more! We'll visit beautiful Cayo Guillermo, which hosts mixed habitat including coastal forest, mangrove flats, low coastal scrub, and pristine white sand shoreline. Here shorebirds, aquatic, and wading birds abound.

Accommodation Moron

Day 8, February 8, 2023: Atlantic Coast to Havana

We'll enjoy a relaxed morning departure with nearby birding before heading south and west through the scenic Escambray Valley in search of **Palm Crow**, and if previously missed, **Giant Kingbird**, both future endemics. This is our longest travel day of the trip, and we'll end our journey in the beautiful, dynamic capital city of Havana!

Accommodation Havana

Day 9: February 9, 2023: Havana

This morning, we'll enjoy a visit with Orlando Garrido, Cuba's most prolific living naturalist. Orlando is Cuba's distinguished and accomplished former curator of ornithology and co-founder the National Museum of Natural History. Following this, we'll enjoy touring around the city, including a walking tour of historic Old Havana with lunch, followed by unstructured time to explore the city. We'll enjoy our final group dinner together and share favorite moments!

Accommodation Havana

Day 10, February 10, 2023: Departure

After our final Cuban breakfast, we'll say goodbye to Havana and transfer together to Jose Marti International Airport for our return flight to the U.S.

Pace and Accessibility Notes

Most of our birding will be on foot, with the longest walks approximately 3 miles or less. Terrain is mostly flat and dry, with some hilly terrain in western Cuba. Our days will generally start early to take advantage of the hours of peak birding activity. There may be some leisure time after lunch and before our afternoon birding sessions.

US citizens can legally visit Cuba, albeit with restrictions. Our partners at Caribbean Conservaiton Trust, Inc. (CCT) are licensed by the US Department of Treasury to conduct bird conservation work in Cuba, and it is through this program that our tour is allowed. Each day, we will conduct a bird and habitat survey that will be submitted by your leaders to CCT.

Currently, the U.S. Government restricts U.S. citizens in Cuba from 'supporting the Cuban Government' which owns a majority or minority interest in all hotels on the island. We stay instead in privately-owned, tourist ministry-approved "Casas Particulares." CCT has worked with these accommodations for years; each room has a private bath and air conditioning, and breakfast and dinner are served en casa.

Trip Leaders:

Candace Larson

Mary Coolidge

and local guides

