CUBA BIRD SURVEY
Cuba’s Wild Western Peninsula, Western Mountains, Zapata Swamp, and Atlantic Archipelago

November 2* – 15/16, 2015

Western Field Ornithologists (WFO), in collaboration with Caribbean Conservation Trust (CCT) is promoting an exclusive, U.S. led and managed birding program to Cuba! The program is coordinated under U.S. government authorization by Connecticut based CCT. CCT staff have a 19 year history of managing bird conservation programs in Cuba. Along with WFO leader Kimball Garrett, and Cuban museum curator and biologist Dr. Giraldo Alayon, our team will include a bilingual Cuban tour guide, and 3 additional regionally located Cuban naturalists. They will guide you through a variety of natural areas in Cuba, the Caribbean’s largest and most ecologically diverse island nation.

The trip includes one night in Miami prior to departure for Cuba*. Our Cuba Bird Survey begins and ends in Havana, one of the most authentic colonial cities in the Americas. An optional 1 day/night extension in Havana at the end of the program is available and will include a visit to the home and private ornithological collection of Orlando Garrido, Cuba’s most prolific living naturalist and senior author of The Field Guide To the Birds of Cuba. We then depart for Cuba’s countryside and magnificent birding areas. The extra day also includes a guided orientation to Havana, and a visit to Habana Vieja (Old Havana), the city’s historic colonial center and home to Cuba’s National Museum of Natural History, as well as dozens of other museums and historic landmarks.

CCT designed this itinerary to take you to Cuba’s best 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 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 culture, 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 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 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 migrate south to Cuba in the fall (endemic 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 Nightjar, Red-shouldered

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, Greater flamingo, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, and a great variety of wading birds, and numerous other migratory and resident species.

WHERE WE TRAVEL

The Guanahacabibes Peninsula, located at the far western tip of the island, is one of the last remaining wild places in the Caribbean. We will visit Guanahacabibes National Park and a UNESCO administered biosphere reserve that covers more than 125,000 acres and provides habitat to 47 percent of all species and 44 percent of endemic species reported in Cuba. These figures include 192 species of birds belonging to 42 families, 11 of which are endemic and 84 migratory.

A major migratory corridor, this peninsula lies parallel to the Yucatan Peninsula in eastern Mexico, and is adjacent to the Palancar Reef, the largest contiguous coral reef in the northern hemisphere, second in size only to the Great Barrier Reef. The territory also has historical value, including some of Cuba’s most important aboriginal archaeological sites. The peninsula was Cuba’s first significant protected area following the triumph of the revolution in 1959, and was declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1987. The Bee Hummingbird and Blue-headed Quail Dove, Cuban Crow, Cuban Parrot, as well as numerous other birds are quite likely here (2 nights).

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, 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, Cuban Black Hawk, 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 (4 nights).

Cayo Coco and Cuba’s Atlantic Archipelago

Cayo Coco and surrounding keys provides excellent birding opportunities on Cuba’s Atlantic coast. These previously uninhabited and relatively unexplored offshore 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, 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 modern beachfront resort (2 nights).

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.

The Cuba Bird Survey Program Your participation in this program will involve a simple bird and habitat survey. Each evening, the group will 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 a glimpse of our program in action, go to http://www.nhptv.org for a link to the film COUNTING ON BIRDS, a 2013 Public Television 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 19 years in Cuba. We are dedicated to providing participants with informative nature oriented experiences with the help of our highly skilled local leaders.

Our Cuban Naturalists
We work with a very competent team of professional biologists, museum curators and general 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.

Full-time Cuban Biologist Dr. Giraldo Alayon  San Antonio de los Banos, Cuba
Biologist Giraldo Alayon is well known in the Caribbean region as the foremost expert on spiders of the West Indies and Central America. He has published more than 100 papers on the systematics and biogeography of spiders and other insects in the region. Giraldo has been birding seriously since 1977, and has also published 15 papers related to avian biology and behavior. He is currently working on a book about the Ivory–billed Woodpecker, which he claims to have seen in eastern Cuba as recently as 1992. Dr. Alayon has traveled to various island nations in the Lesser Antilles, and has made many trips to the United States with grants from the American Museum of Natural History; Smithsonian Institution; Museum of Comparative Zoology (Harvard University); Field Museum; Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences; Peabody Museum (Yale University); Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor); and California Academy of Sciences. From 1995 to 2001, Dr. Alayon was president of the Cuban Zoological Society. He is currently curator of Arachnida at the National Museum of Natural History at Havana, where he has worked since 1988. Dr. Alayon earned a PhD from the University of Havana in 2000 and is fluent in English.

Western Field Ornithologists Leader
Kimball Garrett, well-known birder, author, and ornithologist from the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, will be WFO’s host and leader. A long-time director and past-president of WFO, Kimball has a passion for that organization and for the study of birds. He led WFO’s 2008 trip to Cuba and is eager to return to this spectacular island and its remarkable avian diversity and endemism.

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 hotels are staffed by friendly, helpful hosts and represent the best Cuba has to offer in the regions we visit, and may include refurbished vintage 4 star hotels, modest 3 star facilities, and simple beach-front bungalows. All hotels 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, with 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 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 temperatures in the mid 70s – 80s. 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!

Registration, Trip Costs, Terms, and Conditions
To register for this program please to go: http://www.westernfieldornithologists.org/tours.php

Land costs for the 14 day program is $4,965.00 per person for shared accommodations. Single supplements are an additional $450.00 per person. The very popular one day/night Havana extension is $275.00 per person sharing, with an additional $45.00 single supplement and includes all meals, guide services, ground transportation, a guided exploration of Old Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the most unique destinations in the Caribbean. Trip costs are based on 14 fully paying participants. A lower number of participants may result in a modest small group supplement.

What is included:
CCT Cuba Bird Survey Programs include the following: all accommodations, all meals in Cuba beginning with dinner on day 1, ending with breakfast on the last day of the program, 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.

Not Included:
Travel to Havana, Cuba (estimated at $400 - $475 from Miami); Cuban Visa ($75) and Cuban health insurance (required by law and approximately $3 per day); items of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, additional beverages, bar and housekeeping tips, etc., airport departure taxes ($30 departing Cuba), U.S. passport fees, meals in Miami, or other fees not listed in the program. Cost estimates are as of March, 2015 and are subject to change.

Flights
We fly from Miami to Havana on flights arranged by an authorized Cuba Travel Service provider (TSP). Flight schedules are approved by the U.S. government several weeks prior to departure, and were not available at the time this description was compiled. We will provide all of the information necessary to make booking these flights simple & secure.

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 un-welcome 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 Travelex
insurance, go to:  http://www.travelex-insurance.com/index.asp?location=07-0067  or call 1 800-228-9792. Be sure to use the agency **location code 07-0067** to access coverage explicit to this program. CCT’s U.S. Department of Treasury issued OFAC license number is **CT 2014-310824-1** and is on file with Travelex.

**Payment**

Regarding payment for the land portion of the tour, a **$1,000.00** deposit is due as soon as possible to reserve space on these programs. This can be paid by wire transfer, check or money order payable to:

![Caribbean Conservation Trust](image)

Please do not write **Cuba** on the check memo.

**Balance Payment and cancellation and refund policy** *

Full payment is due 75 days prior to departure or by August 21, 2015. 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............ $ 500.00 per person (land only)
Fewer than 90 - 75 days prior to the tour… FULL DEPOSIT
Fewer than 75 days prior to the tour ........ NO REFUND (unless we can fill your place)

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.**

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.

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Cuba Bird Survey ♦ November 2* – 15/16, 2015
Cuba’s Wild Western Peninsula, Western Mountains, Zapata Swamp, and Atlantic Archipelago

DAY 1  Monday, November 2*, 2015  Miami, FL
Accommodation in Miami, Florida (included) with a brief meeting relative to next day’s departure to Havana.

DAY 2  Tuesday, November 3, 2015  Miami – Havana
Departure from Miami, Florida for our flight to Havana, Cuba. Accommodation at the 4 star Hotel Occidental Miramar. The hotel is conveniently located in Havana’s Embassy District and has sizeable green space and bird habitat nearby.

DAY 3  November 4, 2015  Havana to Peninsula Guanahacabibes
Breakfast followed by 8am checkout and departure west for Guanahacabibes National Park in western Cuba (5 hours from Havana). En route we will have a morning birding excursion birds in search of the endemic Cuban Grassquit. Other likely species include the endemic Cuban Vireo, as well as Cuban Pewee, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Red-legged Thrush (endemic subspecies). Lunch followed by drive west to our hotel within the national park. The peninsula is at the far western tip of Cuba, and is among the last remaining wild places in the Caribbean. This region includes a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and is home to 44 percent of endemic species and 47 percent of all bird species than in any other accessible region in Cuba. Dinner and accommodation on the coast at Hotel Maria la Gorda (2 nights). This area is known for world class diving & snorkeling.

DAY 4  November 5, 2015  Guanahacabibes
Early breakfast and birding nearby the hotel in restricted conservation areas. We will set sights on endemics such as the Bee Hummingbird, Blue-headed Quail Dove, Cuban Black Hawk, Cuban Tody, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Yellow-headed Warbler, and Cuban Trogon, and Cuban Pygmy-Owl, in addition to numerous neo-tropical migrants and West Indian and Caribbean residents, including Cuban Crow, Cuban Parrot, and Plain Pigeon. Birding areas include coastal scrub and low to moderate growth forest. Terrain is flat and dry, with forest trail and roadside birding. Dinner/accommodation overlooking the beach at Hotel Maria la Gorda.

DAY 5  November 6, 2015  Guanahacabibes to San Diego de los Banos
Morning birding options on the peninsula, followed by lunch and departure east to San Diego de los Banos (3 + hours). Dinner and accommodation at Hotel Mirador, nestled in the quiet town of San Diego de los Banos in the foothills surrounding nearby La Guira National Park.

DAY 6  November 7, 2015  Peninsula Zapata
Breakfast and departure for La Guira National Park (25 minutes) for excellent birding along the trails (easy forest trails, 1 + miles). Endemic Cuban Solitaire, Cuban Oriole, Giant Kingbird, and resident Olive-capped Warblers are likely to be seen here. Visit to Cueva de Portales, a classic ‘through cave’ carved by the San Diego River, which currently meanders through. This was Che Guevara’s military headquarters during the missile crisis of 1962. Lunch and departure east for the Zapata Peninsula and the Bay of Pigs (4 hours). This region contains the largest wetland complex in the West Indies, 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. Dinner, accommodations at Playa Larga (4 nights). Constructed in the 1950s, the private bungalows offer modest yet comfortable and convenient accommodation situated on a peaceful stretch of beach.

DAY 7  November 8, 2015  Peninsula Zapata
A morning of birding in a nature preserve adjacent to the small village of Bermejas. Here is our best opportunity to see the endemic Fernandina’s Flicker, Bare-legged Owl Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Parrots, Cuban Emeralds, and Great Lizard Cuckoos (endemic subspecies) are also an excellent bet. The forest is home to the Bee Hummingbird, as well both
endemic Blue-headed and Gray-fronted Quail-Doves, and 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 the area. Dinner at Playa Larga.

**DAY 8 November 9, 2015**
Zapata
An early breakfast and a morning walk along a dry roadway in the swamp at La Turba and good opportunity for Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, Red-shouldered Blackbird and Tawny-shouldered Blackbird and a variety of warblers and other migrants. Part of this area is reminiscent of the Everglades. Afternoon birding in Soplillar within a semi-deciduous forest and open meadow provides excellent opportunities for additional attempts at several local endemics including Barelegged Owl, Fernandina’s Flicker, Bee Hummingbird, and others. Lunch and dinner at local paladares (private restaurants) nearby. Accommodation at Playa Larga.

**DAY 9 November 10, 2015**
Zapata
Morning departure for 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). Afternoon birding at leader’s discretion. Lunch and dinner at local paladares. Accommodation at Playa Larga. Stygian Owl & Cuban Nightjar are possible evening birding priorities.

**DAY 10 November 11, 2015**
Zapata to Cayo Coco
Breakfast, check out, and birding options within the protected areas of the park, based on leader discretion. Late morning drive northeast to Cayo Coco (6+ hours) in Cuba’s northern archipelago, the setting for Hemingway’s Islands in the Stream. The ‘keys’ offer excellent birding, scenery, and accommodation. All inclusive beachfront accommodation and meals at Sol Cayo Coco hotel.

**DAY 11 November 12, 2015**
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, Thick-billed Vireo and possibly a subspecies of Zapata Sparrow are target birds for the day. Lunch at the hotel followed by afternoon birding on Cayo Guillermo amidst mangrove flats, low coastal scrub, and pristine white sand shoreline (roadside, flat walking). Dinner, accommodation in Cayo Coco.

**DAY 12 November 13, 2015**
Cayo Coco to Santa Clara
AM birding on the Las Dolinas trail (flat but rocky and narrow trails, 2+ miles) for quail doves and other forest birds; Bahama Mockingbird is another target en route. Numerous aquatic and wading birds gather at freshwater lagoons nearby. Late check out followed by lunch drive to Santa Clara (3+ hours). Accommodation and dinner at the tranquil and birdy La Granjita on the outskirts of town (1 night).

**DAY 13 November 14, 2015**
Santa Clara – Havana
Breakfast, birding on the expansive hotel grounds, check out, and drive to Havana (4+ hours) with incidental birding stops along the way. Accommodation in Havana. Farewell dinner overlooking the city and sea.

**DAY 14 * November 15, 2015**
Havana – Miami
Breakfast, checkout and transfer to the airport for one hour flight to Miami. OR EXTENSION

**DAY 14 – * HAVANA EXTENSION** - After breakfast we will 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 co-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. Also included is a guided ½ day orientation to Havana, including a walking tour of Old Havana, one of the jewels of colonial America. Lunch & dinner at a paladare (private Cuban restaurant) are included.

**DAY 15 November 16, 2014**
Havana - Miami
Breakfast and airport transfer are included - program ends.

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