

**Trip report
Dominica and St. Lucia
27 June-2 July 2007**



For a variety of reasons, we decided on a short trip to the Lesser Antilles in 2007. Most of the islands are easily accessed, there is good information on finding birds on most of them, and most of the islands have one or more endemics. Trip participants were Jim and Steve Dinsmore, George and Gordon Brown, and Jay Gilliam. The trip went smoothly with pleasant weather throughout. This was supposed to be the rainy season, but we encountered only a few light showers, the landscape was decidedly brown, and wetlands were dry or nearly dry on both islands. We had no trouble locating all of the endemics, and finished with a trip total of 81 species. The chance to see several species like the Imperial Parrot and White-breasted Thrasher, which have very small world populations, added to the enjoyment of this trip.

27 June



This was our travel day from the U.S. to Dominica. Jim, Jay and I spent 3 days before the trip in Florida and rendezvoused with George and Gordon (and a host of Greater Antillean Grackles) in San Juan, Puerto Rico at lunchtime. All five of us then flew direct to Melville Hall International Airport in Marigot, Dominica, arriving there at 3 p.m. The plane had to weave through the mountains to get to the runway. A look out either side of the plane revealed steep, forested mountains, a rather unsettling view from a plane. We picked up our rental vehicle, a Mitsubishi Pajero (\$171 U.S. for 2 days), and began the trek south and west to the Morning Bird Hotel

(<http://www.morningbirdhotel.dm/index.htm>) in Mero on

the island's west coast. We checked in to the hotel by 5 p.m. and spent the remaining hour of daylight birding the hotel grounds. We saw many of the common lowland forest birds including Caribbean Elaenia, Pearly-eyed Thrasher, Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Plumbeous Warbler, and Lesser Antillean Saltator. We also found an injured Bare-eyed Thrush on the hillside behind the motel. [partly to mostly cloudy, temperature 80-90°F, wind W 5-15 mph, scattered light showers]



28 June



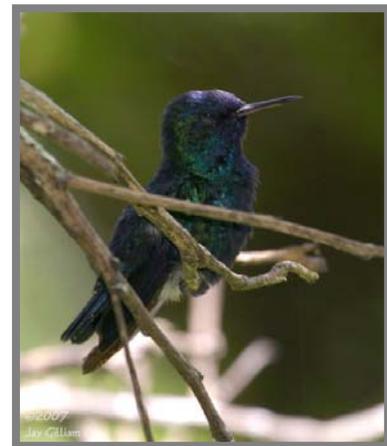
On our first full day on Dominica, we hired a local guide, Bertrand Jean-Baptiste (a.k.a. Dr. Birdy) for the morning to take us into the Syndicate Forest and adjacent Morne Diablotin National Park. We enjoyed a very productive morning of birding and saw most of our target birds – Ruddy Quail-Dove (a nest with 2 eggs), Mangrove Cuckoo, Red-necked Parrot, Black Swift, Purple-throated and Green-throated caribs, Blue-headed Hummingbird, Lesser Antillean Pewee, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Brown Trembler, Rufous-throated Solitaire,

Red-legged and Forest thrushes, and Antillean Euphonia. Birding in the park was excellent and we got really good looks at most of the birds.

After lunch at the national park visitor center (sandwiches, chips, and a cold drink), we headed for the coast to find gasoline and water. We then took a 2-hour scenic drive to the northwest end of the island. We found a Roseate Tern along the beach in Douglas Bay, Eurasian Collared-Doves and Carib Grackles near Ross University in Portsmouth, and Caribbean Martins from the parking lot of the old fort in Cabrits National Park. We were back in the park by 4 p.m. to continue our search for parrots.



We followed the trail to the main overlook and set up watch by 4:45 p.m. For the next hour we saw many pairs and small flocks of Red-necked Parrots working the ridge to the east. Finally, at 5:50 p.m., we spotted a lone Imperial Parrot that cooperated by landing and making several short flights along the far ridge. We were able to get good looks in flight and through a spotting scope. On the hike out



we glimpsed an agouti, but little else of interest. We returned to the hotel by 7 p.m. for dinner and then called it a night. [partly cloudy, temperature 78-89°F, wind light and variable]

29 June

We slept in a bit this morning and left the hotel at 6 a.m. We worked our way north, making a half hour stop at a cliff and overlook north of the small town of Salisbury. Here, we saw many Magnificent Frigatebirds, 2 White-tailed Tropicbirds, and 10+ Sooty Terns. We then continued on to Morne Diablotin National Park and revisited many of the spots we checked yesterday. Our hope was to get better looks at Ruddy Quail-Dove and Forest Thrush, but we were only partly successful. After checking out of the hotel at 10 a.m. (a lengthy process because they had totaled the bill \$200 in their favor – they



charged us for about 20 more beers than we actually drank, but our pride prevented us from arguing...) we slowly made our way back to Melville. We made several quick stops along the Layou River and finally saw and heard a Ringed Kingfisher. At a beach stop in Atkinson we saw a distant Brown Booby. We continued north and stopped on the beach in Marigot where we saw a large feeding flock of Common Terns and Brown Noddies just offshore. We were at the Budget Car Rental office at 1 p.m. to check out and catch a shuttle to the airport.



After a short detour to Antigua to change planes (where we saw a flyover White-crowned Pigeon), we arrived in St. Lucia at 5:50 p.m. and spent an hour going through customs and getting our rental car (a Range Rover). We departed town at 6:45 p.m. and arrived at Fox Grove Inn (<http://www.foxgroveinn.com/>) near Praslin at 7:45 p.m. After checking in, we ate dinner (kingfish salad for me) at the restaurant and enjoyed several rounds of local beer (Piton) as we made plans for the next day. [clear to partly cloudy, temperature 80-92°F, wind NE 10-20 mph, showers in St. Lucia]



30 June



We rendezvoused at the hotel lobby at 5:30 a.m. and headed south to Micoud. From Micoud, we drove inland nearly 6 miles to hike the Des Cartier Forest Trail. The trail passes through mature rainforest and was treacherous because it was constructed of smooth cobblestones that were slippery with the recent rains. The forest was birdy, but many birds were difficult to see well because it was dark, overcast, and drizzling. The best birding was at the observation area about 1000+ meters up the trail. Here the canopy is open, there is

ample room to sit under a covered veranda, and we were afforded excellent looks at most species. We saw 20+ St. Lucia Parrots, Lesser Antillean Pewee, Gray Trembler, St. Lucia Warbler, St. Lucia Black Finch (excellent close looks at several birds on the trail), and St. Lucia Oriole. What was most impressive was that in only a couple of hours we had managed to see most of the island's endemics!



After leaving the forest, we drove north to Preslin and began our search for the White-breasted Thrasher. We found a cooperative pair 0.7 miles west (up) the first road off the main highway on the north edge of Preslin (the first public road south of the La Paradisio resort). We also saw another Gray Trembler, several St. Lucia Warblers, and a pair of St. Lucia Orioles along this road. Sadly, a large portion of this area is currently under intense development as part of the La Paradisio Resort, the signs for which were everywhere on the island.

We returned to the hotel for lunch and then relaxed for an hour in the midday heat. At 2:30 p.m. we again drove south along the east coast towards the south end of the island. We searched unsuccessfully for Boriel's Pond and continued south to the north edge of Vieux Fort. We stopped twice along highway to scan the Maria Islands. The smaller north island (Maria Minor) had a grassy top with nesting Sooty Terns. We saw a



lone tropicbird of unknown species, plus a few Brown Noddies. But the most impressive sight was the pigeons – we watched thousands of them (90% Scaly-naped Pigeons, 10% Zenaida Doves) fly across the ocean to and from the larger south island (Maria Major), presumably to their nests. We also saw our first Eared Doves along the highway near the



airport. At 4:30 p.m. we continued south into Vieux Fort and wound our way east towards the lighthouse at Cap Moule à Chique. The road finally ended on a high spot just west of the lighthouse with a small parking area and spectacular views of the ocean and town. We stayed here until 6 p.m. and saw a Brown Booby, an American Kestrel, hundreds of Sooty and a few Bridled terns, and Brown Noddies. We were back at the hotel by 6:30 p.m. for

dinner (kingfish salad again for me) and beers. [partly cloudy, temperature 78-90°F, winds NE 10-20 mph]

1 July

This morning we again departed at 6 a.m. and drove south towards Vieux Fort. We first stopped at Boriel's Pond, which we located thanks to good directions from our hotel staff. The directions are: from Vieux Fort, leave town headed north on the main highway, turn right (east) on a dirt land with a sign for "Mankote Mangrove" (this is just south of the large soccer stadium), and continue 1.5 miles on a winding 2-track to the beach. At the beach, turn left (north) and follow the 2-track another 0.3 miles to a mangrove on your left and a beach overwash. Park here and walk north to the top of the first hill for a great view of the pond. Along the beach on the way in we spotted a flock of Ruddy Turnstones. At the



main lagoon we found a nice assortment of summering shorebirds – 1 Black-bellied and 17 Semipalmated plovers, 1 Spotted Sandpiper, and 7 Greater Yellowlegs. We also found a couple of Common Moorhens in the mangrove near where we parked in addition to the expected songbirds in the surrounding scrub. We left the lagoon at 8 a.m. and made a brief stop at the old airport runway on the north side of Vieux Fort to look for Grassland Yellow-Finch. Alas, we were unsuccessful, but did see a lone Willet and

many Eared Doves. After circling the new runway on a gravel levee, we stopped on the beach just west of town. The ocean was alive with birds, mostly Sooty Terns flying east towards the colony on Maria Minor. Mixed in were Brown Noddies, a few Brown Boobies, at least 1 Greater Shearwater, and 2 Royal Terns.

Next, we returned to the overlook at Cap Moule à Chique and ocean watched from 9:30 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. The birding was surprisingly slow, and we saw only a few Sooty and 1 Bridled Tern mixed in with larger numbers of Brown Noddies. The highlight was great views of 10+ Red-billed Tropicbirds, many fairly close to shore and apparently nesting on the cliff below the lighthouse. On our return to the hotel we spotted a Eurasian Collared-Dove on wires near the east end of the main airport runway.



After lunch at the hotel, we relaxed for an hour and then drove north towards Dennery. After failed attempts to find forest access north and then west of Riche Pond (including access to Piton Flore), we returned to Dennery and drove west on a paved road at the south edge of town. This road passes through secondary forest mixed with banana plantations and along a creek with several waterfalls (the only one we found was operating at a trickle). The birding here was good for mid-afternoon and

we saw a Lesser Antillean Pewee, two singing Forest Thrushes, and several endemics including the warbler, black finch, and oriole. We were back at the hotel by 6:30 p.m. for dinner. [partly cloudy, temperature 81-87°F, wind ENE 10-25 mph]

2 July

After a quick breakfast at the hotel, we were on the road by 6:15 a.m. and drove south towards Vieux Fort. Our first stop was Cap Moule à Chique where we ocean watched from 6:45-9 a.m. Conditions were excellent with a light onshore breeze and overcast skies. In addition to a steady stream of terns (Sooty Terns and Brown Noddies) headed towards Maria I., we saw 1-2 Bridled Terns, 5+ Common Terns, many Brown Boobies, an adult light morph Red-footed Booby, and 30+ Red-billed Tropicbirds. However, the real highlight was the shearwater show. There was a light but steady stream of birds (mostly singles) headed NNE, many associating with feeding flocks of Brown Noddies. We counted 1 Audubon's, 1 Greater, and 8 Cory's in addition to 11 that were unidentified (most were large and probably also Cory's).



After leaving the cape, we drove to the west edge of town to check out the marshes there, but found them mostly dry. We then made another quick drive through the old airport runway in another vain attempt to locate a Grassland Yellow-Finch. From the airport, we returned to Boriel's Pond for another chance at wetland birds. Shorebird numbers were down to a Black-bellied Plover and a Willet,

but the real surprise was a Great Blue Heron. After leaving the pond at 10 a.m., we made a quick stop in Vieux Fort to look for souvenirs and were back at the hotel by 11:15 a.m. We ate lunch, packed, paid our bill, and headed to the airport at 1:30 p.m. for our 3:30 p.m. flight. [partly cloudy, temperature 81-86°F, wind NNE 10-20 mph]

General notes

Overall, this was an outstanding trip! The birds and scenery were great, although perhaps slightly better on Dominica because it is less developed. Roads on Dominica were rough, but were substantially better on St. Lucia. We tried to make prior arrangements for most aspects of our trip, but were frustrated at several turns. Despite two emails to Ministers of Forestry on St. Lucia, we never received a response and were unable to obtain official permission to enter local Forest Reserves. Likewise, calls to two local guides were fruitless because the phone numbers we had were disconnected. Despite these hurdles, all the local people we met were extremely nice and helpful. Motel proprietors on both islands were especially helpful in providing directions to local birding locales. Miss James at Morning Bird Hotel on Dominica and Franz and Esther at Fox Grove Inn on St. Lucia were friendly and accommodating and we can recommend both places for birders. One thing we can definitely advise against is booking any arrangements through Nature Island. Colin, the company owner, never contacted the hotel in Dominica advising them of our reservation, we were double charged for the motel (but later received a refund), and our arrangements to have a local guide were not communicated.



Bird list (81 species)

White-tailed Tropicbird
Red-billed Tropicbird
Brown Booby
Red-footed Booby
Brown Pelican
Magnificent Frigatebird
Greater Shearwater
Cory's Shearwater
Audubon's Shearwater
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Blue Heron
Cattle Egret
Green Heron
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
Broad-winged Hawk
American Kestrel
Common Moorhen
Black-bellied Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Spotted Sandpiper
Willet
Greater Yellowlegs
Ruddy Turnstone
Laughing Gull
Royal Tern
Common Tern
Roseate Tern
Sooty Tern
Bridled Tern
Brown Noddy
Rock Pigeon
Scaly-naped Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Zenaida Dove
Eared Dove
Common Ground-Dove
Ruddy Quail-Dove
Red-necked Parrot
St. Lucia Parrot
Imperial Parrot
Mangrove Cuckoo

Smooth-billed Ani
Black Swift
Lesser Antillean Swift
Purple-throated Carib
Green-throated Carib
Antillean Crested Hummingbird
Blue-headed Hummingbird
Ringed Kingfisher
Caribbean Elaenia
Lesser Antillean Pewee
St. Lucia Pewee
Lesser Antillean Flycatcher
Gray Kingbird
Black-whiskered Vireo
Caribbean Martin
House Wren
Rufous-throated Solitaire
Bare-eyed Robin
Red-legged Thrush
Forest Thrush
Tropical Mockingbird
White-breasted Thrasher
Scaly-breasted Thrasher
Pearly-eyed Thrasher
Brown Trembler
Gray Trembler
Yellow Warbler
St. Lucia Warbler
Plumbeous Warbler
Bananaquit
Black-faced Grassquit
Lesser Antillean Bullfinch
St. Lucia Black Finch
Lesser Antillean Saltator
Carib Grackle
Shiny Cowbird
St. Lucia Oriole
Antillean Euphonia

