

Cuban Emerald (*Chlorostilbon ricordi*)

CUBA

MERRITT ISLAND WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION

November 5-16, 2015



Not only is Cuba full of rich history and culture, it is also home to diverse wildlife and natural aspects. This trip provides a wonderful opportunity to observe a wide variety of Cuba's nature, culture, and other undiscovered treasures.

Experience opportunities to observe a wide variety of Cuba's birds, butterflies, plants, and reptiles as you discover conservation issues, projects, and policies during meetings with Cuban experts.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Look for endemic plants, birds, and other species including the Cuban Crocodile.
- Have encounters with local scientists and naturalists to learn about the island's coastal ecosystems and to discuss ecotourism, sustainability, and conservation efforts that are in place.
- Attend a special presentation by the Korimakao Community Project and discuss the program with the artists.
- Meet Cuban families while dining at their homes, known as paladares.

ITINERARY

BLD = BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER

NOVEMBER 5 - MIAMI

Arrival in Miami today. Overnight near the airport. Meals on own. *Overnight at airport hotel (on own).*

NOVEMBER 6 - HAVANA

Check in early this morning for the one hour flight from Miami to Havana. Transfer to the hotel. Meet the our naturalist guide who will accompany our group. Explore Old Havana and visit the National Museum of Natural History if desired. This evening walk to a local paladar or restaurant for our welcome dinner. Paladares are restaurants in private homes. *Overnight at Hotel Ambos Mundos. (LD)*

NOVEMBER 7 - SAN DIEGO DE LOS BAÑOS

After breakfast (6:00 am.), depart for La Guira National Park in San Diego de los Baños. Along the way we will stop at Las Terrazas, a UNESCO designated Biosphere Reserve. This small community and beautiful reserve is home to rich fauna and more than 800 plant species. Lunch in Campestral restaurant "El Campesino." This afternoon arrive at La Guira National Park, 54,000 acres of mountain wilderness, picturesque valleys, and hidden caves. Our walk this afternoon will introduce us to the local flora and fauna, including endemic birds like the Cuban Trogon and Cuban Tody. *Overnight at Hotel Mirador. (BLD)*

NOVEMBER 8 - ZAPATA

An early breakfast will be followed by a morning walk at Cueva de Los Portales, a limestone cave set adjacent to hills covered in lush vegetation. The cave is interesting both geologically and historically, famous for being where Che Guevara headquartered during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The area is also renowned for being an excellent place to spot the Cuban Solitaire. After lunch at the hotel depart for the Zapata Peninsula, arriving in time for a late afternoon bird walk on the hotel grounds. The Zapata area consists of well-preserved scrub, mangrove swamp, and coastline, and is inhabited by many reptiles including the region's most notably species, the endemic Cuban Crocodile. Over 200 bird species have been recorded here including the endemic Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow, and Zapata Rail. Look for species such as the Cuban Blackbird, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Greater Antillean Oriole, and Cuban Emerald. *Overnight at Hotel Playa Larga. (BLD)*

NOVEMBER 9 - ZAPATA

After breakfast, depart for the Bermejas site, a popular nest building area, especially for different species of woodpeckers. Endemic species here include the Blue-headed Quail-dove, Grey-headed Quail-dove, Key West Quail-dove, Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Pygmy-owl, Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Woodpecker, and Fernandina's Flicker. The Zapata Peninsula has more than 900 species of flora. A mosaic of dry forest, swamp, mangrove and mudflats, this is one of the best preserved ecosystems on the island. Lunch is at a local restaurant, where our special guests are Zapata area conservationists who will update us on continuing projects to preserve Cuba's largest wetlands. It may be possible to swim or snorkel this afternoon. In the late afternoon visit the Sopillar region of the reserve. Dinner at a local paladar. *Overnight at Hotel Playa Larga. (BLD)*

NOVEMBER 10 - ZAPATA

Depart after breakfast for the La Turba area, where we hope to find Zapata Wren and Zapata Sparrow. Afternoon birding at Salinas, an area frequented by many different species of waterbirds that live in the mangrove swamps, coastal lagoons and woods. 165 indigenous and migratory birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and invertebrates are found here. Expect to see flamingos, Roseate Spoonbills, Glossy and White Ibis, herons, pelicans, Snail Kite, Peregrine Falcon, Cuban Black Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, and others. Dinner is at the hotel. Tonight a special performance by artists of the Korimakao Project has been arranged. The Korimakao Community Project consists of residents from the surrounding communities who are given the opportunity to develop and improve their performing skills such as singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments. Learn about the growth and development of the program and interact with the talented artists. *Overnight at Hotel Playa Larga. (BLD)*

NOVEMBER 11 - SANCTI SPIRITUS

After breakfast, head east toward the colonial jewel of Trinidad for lunch at a local restaurant and then a city tour. Discover the true beauty of this romantic city

atmosphere mixed with the ghosts of past slavery. Visit the historic center of the city and have an opportunity to walk around the town and see the handicrafts, especially the embroidery and textiles. Later in the afternoon, depart for the town of Sancti Spiritus. Upon arrival, visit the Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Humanity (FANJ), a non governmental institution dedicated to research and promotion of programs for the protection of the environment as it relates to culture and society. Engage with members of FANJ and learn about their permaculture organic farm training and research projects in the community. After the visit, have dinner at a local restaurant with members of FANJ. *Overnight at Hotel Los Laureles. (BLD)*

NOVEMBER 12 - CAMAGUEY

Following an early breakfast, depart for Hacienda La Belen. This protected nature reserve features fossilized tree stumps of a three-million-year-old forest, and is inhabited by exotic species including deer and zebra. It is also a renowned bird reserve and an excellent place to spot the rare Cuban Parakeet. There will be a late afternoon opportunity for birdwatching in the area. *Overnight at La Belen. (BLD)*

NOVEMBER 13 - CAMAGUEY

Early breakfast and birding in Najasa Protected Area, a semi-deciduous forest near La Belén National Park. Walking on the edge of the National Park, we may see Palm Crow and Cuban Grassquit. In the more wooded areas, Gundlach's Hawk is regularly seen, a bird which, until 1980, was thought to be extinct. It's possible we may observe a variety of species: Blue-winged Teal, Cuban Tody, Cuban Parakeets, Merlin, American Purple Gallinule, Common Moorhen, Plain Pigeon, White-winged Dove, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Magnolia Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Palm Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, and Tawny-shouldered Blackbird. Species endemic to Cuba here, in addition to Cuban Palm Crow and Cuba Grassquit, include Cuban Woodpecker, Giant Kingbird, and Cuban Blackbird. Butterflies are also abundant and varied. Lunch in the field. *Overnight at La Belen. (BLD)*

NOVEMBER 14 - CAYO COCO

Depart for the northern coast this morning and Cayo Coco. Hotel Melia Cayo Coco is located on a beach of fine, white sand, bordered by palm trees. With 13 miles of these crystalline white sand beaches and as yet undeveloped lush wooded interior, Cayo Coco is an ideal spot for observing Cuban wildlife. *Overnight at Hotel Melia Cayo Coco. (BLD)*

NOVEMBER 15 - CAYO COCO

Following an early breakfast, travel to Cayo Paredon to see Bahama Mockingbird and Thick-billed Vireo. Hike the interpretive nature trails in hopes of finding one of the many flamingo colonies and abundant bird life. Return to the hotel for lunch and spend the rest of the day doing activities on own or just relaxing. *Overnight at Hotel Melia Cayo Coco. (BLD)*

NOVEMBER 16 - MIAMI

Early breakfast and birding in Cayo Coco. Depart for Santa Clara, where we will say farewell to our guide at the airport and board the flight back to Miami this evening. Note that flights are subject to change until confirmed. *(BL)*

PROGRAM PRICING

\$3,275 (13 participants)

Cost includes \$200 donation to the Merritt Island Wildlife Association. Cost does not include gratuities or international airfare estimated at \$600 from Miami.

THE FINE PRINT

Price is based on double occupancy. A \$200 per person deposit and enrollment form is required to secure your space on the trip. This deposit is refundable until July 8, 2015 excluding a \$100 cancellation fee. Final payments are due no later than August 2, 2015. Cancellations received after this date are not refundable. Travel/trip cancellation insurance is strongly recommended. For more information call Travel Insured at 800-243-3174. Holbrook Travel's agency number is 15849.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO ENROLL:

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