Dominican Republic

Endemics of Hispaniola IV

2nd December to 10th December 2023 (9 days)



Palmchat by Adam Riley

Although the Dominican Republic is perhaps best known for its luxurious beaches, outstanding food and vibrant culture, this island has much to offer both the avid birder and general naturalist alike. Because of the amazing biodiversity sustained on the island, Hispaniola ranks highest in the world as a priority for bird protection! Our birding tour provides the perfect opportunity to encounter nearly all of the island's 32 endemic bird species, plus other Greater Antillean specialities. We accomplish this by thoroughly exploring the island's variety of habitats, from the evergreen and Pine forests of the Sierra de Bahoruco to the dry forests of the coast. Furthermore, our accommodation ranges from remote cabins deep in the forest to well-appointed hotels on the beach, each with its own unique local flair. Join us for this delightful tour to the most diverse island in the Caribbean!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Santo Domingo**
Day 2	**Santo Domingo to Sabana del Mar**
Day 3	**Sabana del Mar to Santo Domingo**
Day 4	**Salinas de Bani to Pedernales**
Day 5	**Cabo Rojo & southern Sierra de Bahoruco**
Day 6	**Cachote to Duverge**
Day 7	**Northern Sierra de Bahoruco**
Day 8	**La Placa, Laguna Rincon to Santo Domingo**
Day 9	**International Departures**



Birding sites in detail

Santo Domingo Botanical Gardens. The National Botanical Gardens is a great introduction to the birding bounty of the Dominican Republic. Diligently preserved and full of native plants, the gardens provide a habitat for many of the island's most sought-after species. We can expect to kick off our tour with good views of the scarce West Indian Whistling Duck, retiring Mangrove Cuckoo, ornate Red-legged Thrush and other widespread species such as Zenaida Dove and Greater Antillean Grackle. Near-endemics and endemics are many, including Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Hispaniolan Parakeet, Black-crowned Tanager, Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, Antillean Palm Swift, gorgeous Antillean Mango, minuscule Vervain Hummingbird and one of only monotypic families of the Caribbean – Palmchat.



Broad-billed Tody by Lev Frid

Parque Nacional Los Haitises area. We venture to this section of the country for one particualr species – indeed, one of the most imperilled endemic targets of the tour - Ridgway's Hawk. Critically Endangered, this incredibly rare raptor has had its range reduced to only a small part of northern Dominican Republic, long since extinct in Haiti. On the upside, due to intensive and prolonged efforts by the Peregrine Fund, this species is making a small recovery.

This site is one of the better spots on the tour to get views of the bizarre Antillean Piculet. Too big to be closely related to other neotropic piculets, but too small to be a woodpecker, the species looks and sound much more akin to the pygmy woodpeckers of the Old World. The area also supports Plain or Scaly-naped Pigeons, Hispaniolan Amazon, White-necked Crow and Black-whiskered Vireo. We might also get our first glimpse of a Tody, as Broad-billed Tody is not at all uncommon. There are also several commoner species to be seen such as Grey Kingbird, Black-whiskered Vireo, several species of swallow, Bananaquits, Yellow-faced Grassquit, thousands of Turkey Vultures and Red-tailed Hawks.



Ridgway's Hawk pair by Adam Riley

This evening we will head out to locate the endemic Ashy-faced Owl. The species is quite successful within its habitat preference of humid forest borders and edges.

Sabana del Mar dock. A brief stop here offers a wonderful view of the surrounding mountain ranges that plunge into the Caribbean, as well as

providing some decent shorebird and tern viewing. We've often found Hispaniolan Curlytail Lizards and some interesting anoles here, for those herp lovers on the tour.



Ashy-faced Owl by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Salinas de Bani. We will start our birding along the mangrove edges in search of the Caribbean race of Clapper Rail, Mangrove Warbler, and the stunning American Flamingo which can be seen here in varying numbers. Several endemics live in the scrub and thickets bordering the mangroves, and we might come across our first Stolid Flycatcher or Greater Antillean Bullfinch here.

An impressive array of shorebirds, including the endangered Piping Plover, is one of the reasons this area has gained international recognition as an area of importance. In spring migration, thousands of shorebirds stage here en route to breeding grounds in the arctic. We will be visiting at the front end of this migration spectacle. While we won't have the astonishing numbers a visit in April would yield, we will encounter large numbers of an array of nice species today. Shorebirds regularly seen here include Black-necked Stilt, Grey (Black-bellied) Plover, Snowy, Wilson's, Semipalmated, and Piping Plovers, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Stilt, Least, Semipalmated, Western, and Spotted Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitcher, Willet, and both species of Yellowlegs. Royal, Cabot's, and Common Terns, as well as the odd Roseate (rare) can be seen here along with the entire compliment of the island's herons and egrets. It will be a pleasant morning at a very scenic location.

Sierra de Bahoruco (southern slopes). There are several well-known birding spots covering the southern Sierra de Bahoruco slopes and coastline. We will likely start our morning by driving up the Alcoa Road. This southern access to the Sierra de Bahoruco was built by the Alcoa bauxite mining company many years ago. These days, the asphalt road allows us easy and quick access to the higher parts of the ridge where native pine forests remain intact. As with any area, certain birds are more likely to be seen in one locale than the other. Here we hope to find Hispaniolan Amazon, Golden Swallow, Hispaniolan Palm Crow, Pine Warbler, Antillean Siskin and Hispaniolan Crossbill, to name just a few.



Antillean Piculet by Lev Frid

Cabo Rojo. This small beach cove is host to a few special birds such as White-tailed Tropicbird, Brown Booby, the Hispaniolan subspecies of Cave Swallow and Antillean Palm Swift. It also makes for a perfect seafood lunch stop!

Barahona area. Several hotels and lodges in the area have, cultivated gardens that can be quite productive.

Specials we'll keep an eye out for include Hispaniolan Oriole, Palmchat, Hispaniolan Woodpecker. We have another chance for Ashy-faced Owl this evening if need be.



Eastern Chat-Tanager by Lev Frid

Cachote. This morning we will head into another part of the Sierra de Bahoruco range for a very special treat. With a certain amount of luck and effort, we should be able to get good views of Eastern Chat-Tanager. Many miles outside of its known distribution, this southern slope population is little known and even less often searched for. These songsters are notorious skulkers, but with patience we usually get everyone on the bird. Besides the Eastern Chat-Tanager, we will enjoy our first exposure to the higher-elevation and humid broadleaf forests that the bulk of the island's endemics inhabit. Notably, Rufous-throated Solitaire song fills the air here, and is one of the most beautiful songs in nature! We may find the rare Bicknell's Thrush, common and adorable Narrow-billed Tody, and Hispaniolan Trogons, too! Though more numerous at our next destination, Hispaniolan Spindalis and Green-tailed Warblers are both seen here, adding to a wonderful host of island endemics. We will be treated to a filling field breakfast prepared by our hosts from the nearby village of Cachote, before birding our way back down the mountain.

Rabo de Gato. This is an incredible site for Quail-Doves, who come to feed in the leaf litter along a particular stretch of the Rabo de Gato Trail. Though few tours see all three species of Quail-Doves that occur on the island, all three have indeed been observed here. The clear focus is the island's endemic White-fronted Quail-Dove, recently split from Grey-headed Quail-Dove. If we're lucky, we'll also see Key West and Ruddy!

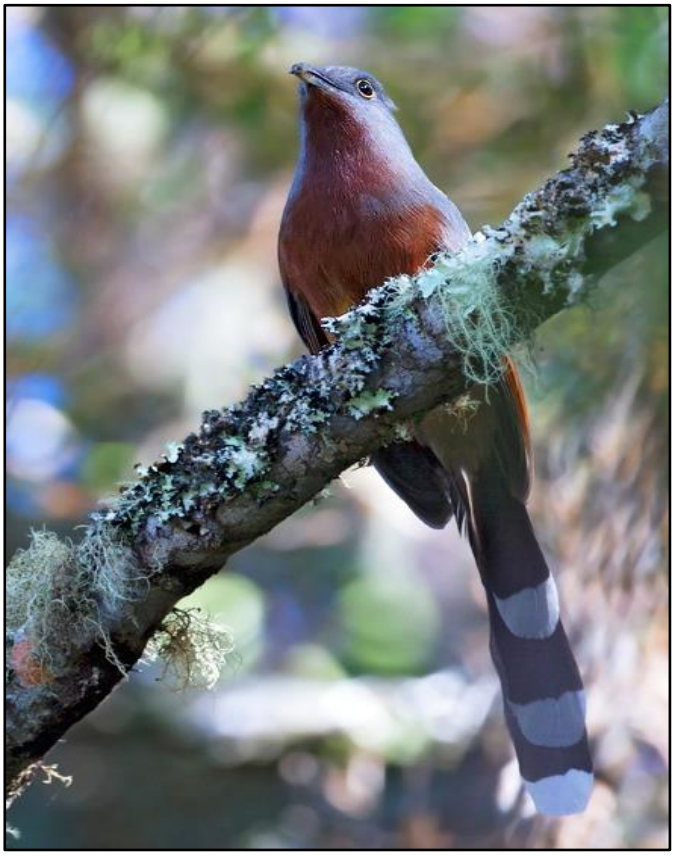


La Selle Thrush by Bobby Wilcox

We should have time to sample the lower-elevation birds here, such as Plain Pigeon, Broad-billed Tody, Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, White-necked Crow, and Hispaniolan Amazon. Night birding here is a must, and we will search for the endemic Least Poorwill and the more widespread Northern Potoo.

Sierra de Bahoruco (northern slopes). This important mountain range supports populations of nearly all of Hispaniola's island endemics and target birds. An early rise this morning will allow us to reach the high elevation cloud forest before activity dwindles. After many exciting

new species, we will then bird our way downhill at our leisure. The long list of birds from today's efforts might include Hispaniolan Nightjar, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Antillean Piculet, Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, Hispaniolan Trogon, Antillean Siskin, Green-tailed Warbler, White-winged Warbler, Western Chat-Tanager, Hispaniolan Crossbill, Hispaniolan Emerald, Hispaniolan Amazon, Broad-billed and Narrow-billed Todies, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Hispaniolan Pewee, Greater Antillean Elaenia, Stolid Flycatcher, Golden Swallow, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Antillean Euphonia, Hispaniolan Spindalis, Greater Antillean Bullfinch, Hispaniolan Oriole and the extremely rare La Selle Thrush. The lush greenery of the mountains is also the wintering ground of many important North American migrant species. Cape May, Prairie and Black-throated Blue Warblers are among the commoner Neotropical migrants, but the range-restricted, boreal-breeding Bicknell's Thrush is also present in small numbers.



Bay-breasted Cuckoo by Dušan Brinkhuizen

La Placa. This site allows us to focus on one of the most spectacular birds of the island – Bay-breasted Cuckoo. Though we might've already encountered this species by now, birding this area offers the tour's best chance for a close encounter with his important, striking species, as well as Flat-billed Vireo, yet another endemic

Laguna de Rincon. Time permitting, we hope to have some time for a boat ride and exploration of a seldom visited, but productive, freshwater site called Laguna de Rincon. As the only large freshwater lake on the island, it attracts a host of waterfowl, rails, herons, and several island endemics. White-cheeked Pintail, American Wigeon, Lesser Scaup and Ruddy Duck frequent the lake, though the marshy areas will be our focus. The elusive Spotted Rail is known to breed here and the enigmatic Yellow-breasted Crake has also been reported. Both are widespread, but certainly one of the most seldom-seen species in their range. We have a decent shot to see at least one of them here at Laguna Rincon!



Hispaniolan Crossbill by Bobby Wilcox

Optional extension to Haiti

Guests wishing to search for Grey-crowned Tanager, the only Hispaniolan endemic not present in the Dominican Republic, can contact our Tailor-made team to arrange a short extension to Haiti. This extension can be arranged before or after our scheduled tour to the Dominican Republic, or as a stand-alone tour. Below is a sample itinerary of a typical trip.

Les Cayes Botanical Gardens. Time permitting, we shall visit the local botanical gardens for an afternoon stroll amongst the scattered trees, scrub, manicured gardens and even a river. We can expect to find a number of common species here, including regional specialities such as Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, Antillean Mango, Vervain Hummingbird, Broad-billed Tody, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Black-whiskered Vireo, White-necked Crow, Palmchat and a number of migratory North American warblers.



Hispaniolan Trogon by Lev Frid

Pic Macaya National Park and surrounds. We have dedicated two full days to visit Pic Macaya National Park, one of only two national parks in Haiti.

Encompassing a little over 8 000 hectares, the park is home to Haiti's last virgin cloud forest. However, the park is rugged and difficult to access, so we will spend the majority of the day birding accessible forest patches and riverine gorges in the immediate vicinity.

Our first location is likely to be the secondary riverine forests of Saut Mathurine, Haiti's largest waterfall. This is an excellent site for the endemic Grey-crowned Palm Tanager, and early success may provide us with some relaxing down time enjoying the cold turquoise waters and indeed the waterfall (if there is sufficient river volume for it to flow). Aside from the Palm Tanager, we should also fine Greater Antillean Bullfinch, Black-whiskered Vireo, Loggerhead and Grey Kingbirds, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Antillean Mango and Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo.

We shall also bird a nearby wetland if conditions are suitable. Of primary interest are the large numbers of West Indian Whistling Duck, but a host of other waterfowl and waders are typically encountered such as Blue-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Ruddy Duck, White-cheeked Pintail, Tricolored and Little Blue Herons and Spotted Sandpiper. The associated scrub habitat holds White-necked Crow, the by now ubiquitous Palmchat, Palm and Prairie Warblers, Greater Antillean Grackle and Yellow-faced Grassquit.



White-winged Warbler by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Our second days activities will depend on our success the previous day. Should we already have seen Grey-crowned Palm Tanager, we may investigate patches of mangroves and marshes nearby, adding a host of new species to or Haiti list. Possibilities include the likes of Yellow-

crowned Night Heron, Willet, Spotted Sandpiper, Laughing Gull, Royal and Cabot's Tern, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Mourning, White-winged and Common Ground Doves, Antillean Palm Swift, Antillean Mango, Vervain Hummingbird, Broad-billed Tody, Stolid Flycatcher, Black-whiskered Vireo, White-necked Crow and Greater Antillean Bullfinch.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Can be quite a tiring tour but is suitable for all birding interest levels and most mobility capabilities.
Birding Ease		Mostly undemanding. Quite a few skulking species, mostly searched for from the road edge.
Accommodation		Mostly comfortable, hot water availability can be variable at some lodges (there are no basic lodges on this tour anymore).
Walking / Trails		Fairly limited, mostly roadside birding with a few short walks on the beach/mangroves and lodge gardens.
Vehicles / Roads		Comfortable midi-bus on flat sealed roads for most of tour. High clearance vehicle up a very rocky, bumpy track on at least 1 day.
Photography		Good, quite a few skulking species. No dedicated hides or feeders.
Annoyances		Some long days, biting insects on occasion, can be very bright on the coast.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 9;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Much of our time is spent in vehicles, as we do have to cover long distances in order to get to the best birding areas. The more luggage you pack the less room there is in the vehicle, so it is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- This tour does not require a high level of fitness; however, much of the forest birding will be on foot and may require a fair amount of walking (always at a slow pace).
- Crime is problematic in certain areas of the Dominican Republic. Exercise caution as you would for any big city where crime exists. Do not unnecessarily flaunt cash and valuables and do not leave valuables exposed in the vehicle.
- Prostitution is a legal enterprise in the Dominican Republic and tourists are regularly propositioned even during the day, especially around Santo Domingo.
- There are a number of illegal Haitian immigrants living in the Dominican Republic. You may be approached by young children eager to shine your shoes or beg for money. While the children do not seem to present any theft risks, please exercise caution and consult your Tour Leader if you wish to hand over any food/donations/gifts etc.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour starts with a welcome dinner on the evening of day 1. As this is an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude after breakfast of day 9.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Las Americas International Airport, Santo Domingo (IATA: SDQ) is the main port of entry for international flights into the Dominican Republic and is best serviced by Air France, Copa, Delta Airlines and Jet Blue Airways.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements. The following website provides detailed information about visa eligibility and assistance with online applications options where viable: Visa HQ for Travel

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.