Lesser Antilles

Pearls of the Caribbean



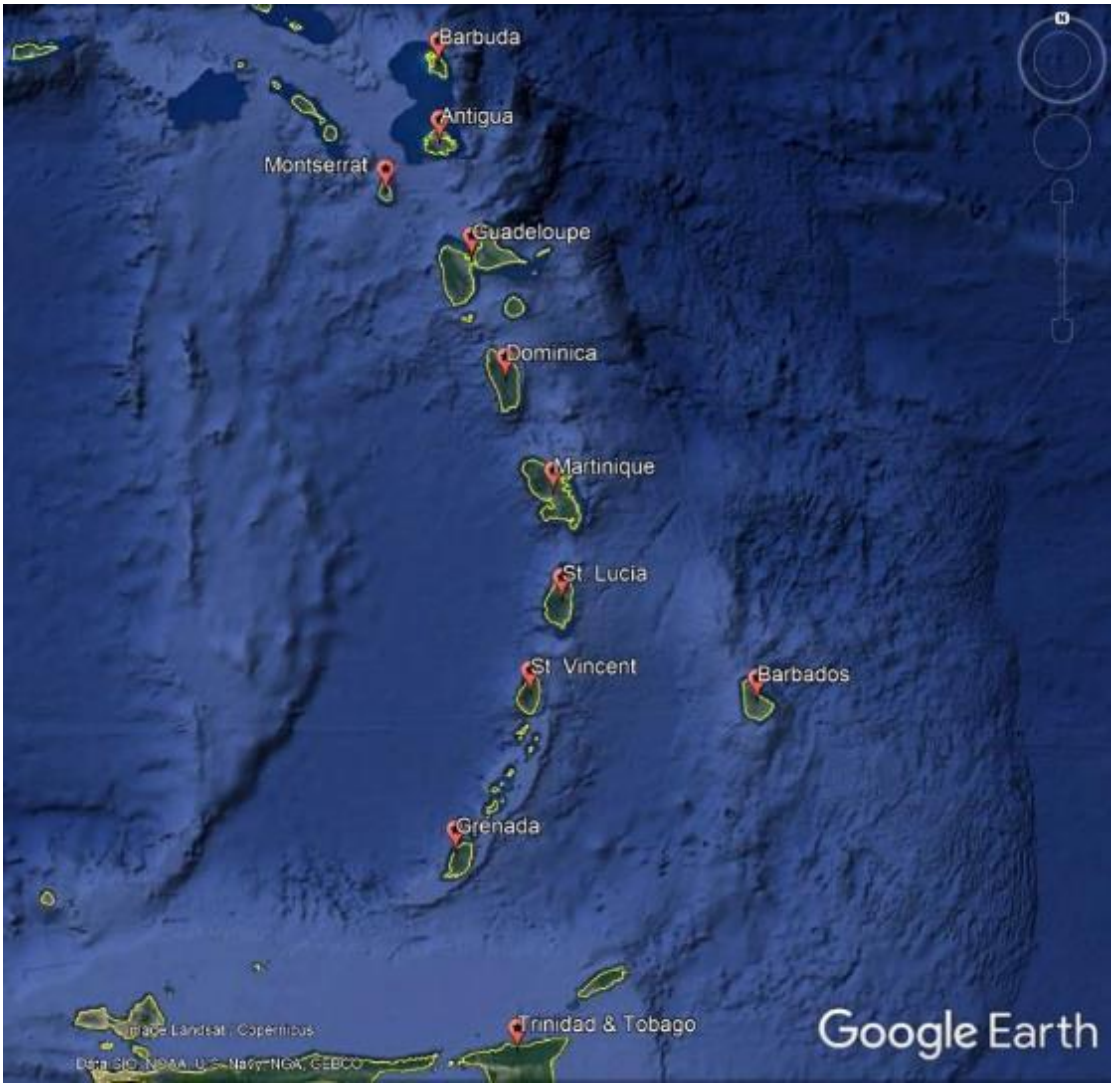
St. Vincent Amazon's by Keith Clarkson

An epic adventure covering 6 countries and 10 islands, taking in all the single island and Lesser Antillean Endemics. Made up of the southerly Windward and northerly Leeward Islands, the Lesser Antilles are the last frontier of Caribbean birding. These volcanic islands on the edge of the Caribbean Plate are the gateway between the harsh Atlantic Ocean and the warm, tranquil Caribbean Sea. Originally settled by the Taino of South America, the islands have played host to multiple colonisers from the Caribs to the more modern European giants of Britain, France and the Netherlands. Through multiple wars, slavery, epidemics, natural and man-made destruction, the island's wildlife has managed to escape mostly intact, but equally lives a precarious existence that can be wiped out in a single event.

From Barbados, the most easterly of the islands we embark on numerous short hops to Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia, Martinique, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Montserrat, Barbuda, and Antigua. Hosting 20 single island endemics, 14 Lesser Antillean Endemics, 7 Caribbean Endemics and upwards of 35 endemic sub-species (some liable to be full splits), this travel intensive, but birding relaxed tour appeals to the birder, twitcher and photographer alike. Gaudy birds, picture postcard beaches, turquoise seas, rugged landscapes, and friendly locals make this tour one of our birding highlights.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Grenada**
Day 2	**Grenada**
Day 3	**Grenada to St. Vincent**
Day 4	**St. Vincent to St. Lucia**
Day 5	**St. Lucia**
Day 6	**St. Lucia to Martinique**
Day 7	**Martinique to Guadeloupe**
Day 8	**Guadeloupe**
Day 9	**Guadeloupe to Dominica**
Day 10	**Dominica**
Day 11	**Dominica to Antigua via Barbados**
Day 12	**Montserrat**
Day 13	**Barbuda**
Day 14	**Final departure**



Birding sites in detail

Barbados. A visit to the Graeme Hall Wetland offers the perfect introduction to Lesser Antillean birding. A RAMSAR designated Wetland of International Importance, we can expect a hive of birding activity as we stroll along productive edge habitat. Flitting amongst the dark green leaves of the Red Mangroves are a host of indigenous regional species, including Caribbean Elaenia, Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Carib Grackle, Bananaquit, the local race of Mangrove Warbler and of course the endemic **Barbados Bullfinch**. We will take advantage of prime locations looking out across the sedge-lined canals to enjoy unparalleled views of Scaly-naped Pigeon, Masked Duck secretive Sora and both Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons. Three species of egret also inhabit the mangroves.



Antillean Crested Hummingbird by Keith Clarkson

In the evening, we'll head to the popular and bustling nearby fishing village of Oistins for a freshly caught evening meal. With such local delicacies as pickled seacat (octopus), breadfruit coucou and flying fish awaiting our palates, the tone is set for what promises to be as equally delectable a journey for our taste buds as the myriad colourful bird species will be for our eyes. Please note: a wide range of other meats such as chicken, beef, pork, as well as vegetarian options are also available at Oistins.

St. Lucia. We'll journey through the wilds of the island to an area close to Dennery - one of the most popular fishing villages on the island. The dense thickets of semi-arid woodland associated with this part of the island represent ideal habitat for one of the rarest birds we will see on this entire trip - the **St. Lucia Thrasher** (formerly White-breasted). This species was recently split and is now endemic to St. Lucia. Its population is thought to number fewer than 700 pairs in the wild (and is decreasing).



St. Lucia Thrasher by Keith Clarkson

As we travel further inland, semi-arid woodland is gradually replaced by the lush Des Cartiers Rainforest. Here we will bird until late afternoon. Meandering along the network of easily navigable forest trails lined with a staggering array of flora, ranging from giant Tree Ferns to tiny bromeliads, we delight in the sights and sounds of a host of regional forest-dwelling species and threatened endemics, amongst them, and perhaps most coveted of all - St. Lucia's national bird, the magnificent **St. Lucia Amazon**.

After our time in Des Cartiers with such endemic gems as **St. Lucia Oriole**, **St. Lucia Black Finch** and recently elevated **St. Lucia Wren**, as well as regional indigenous stunners like Rufous-throated Solitaire and Green-throated Carib, we make our way towards Vieux Fort to explore the nearby Aupicon Wetland. This

important site is populated by Pied-billed Grebe and such regional specialities as the Caribbean race of American Coot and Black-bellied Whistling Duck as well as a wide variety of overwintering waterfowl and waders from North America.



St Lucia Oriole by Keith Clarkson

We'll spend the evening at a locally run hotel, where we can dine while overlooking the scenic coastal setting of Praslin Bay and the Frigate Islands.

We'll have time to bird a generous swathe of St. Lucia's Northern Range. Although we are in a mountainous region of the island, it will be the van's engine, not our own power doing most of the work. We drive up a long, steady incline to the quaint hilltop village of Bouton, from where we set out on a slow-paced walk along a well-worn path, lined on one side with an extensive orchard and on the other with dense rainforest. In this idyllic setting we target such treasures as **St. Lucia Warbler**, Scaly-breasted Thrasher, St. Lucia Pewee, and Lesser Antillean Swift.

As midday approaches, we make for one of St. Lucia's loftiest vantage points. Here we can gauge the relatively short distances between the Lesser Antillean islands, as both Martinique to the north, and St. Vincent to the south are both clearly visible. With stunning scenery all around, we await the arrival of the species that nests on the cliff face that rises far below us; and are soon treated to a spectacular aerial display of Red-billed Tropicbirds battling the buffeting, swirling winds to return to their colony.

Martinique. This small French Territory is home to several avian gems such as the near endemic Blue-headed Hummingbird and Lesser Antillean Flycatcher as well as the entertaining Grey Trembler (another near endemic), but our primary target are the island's two endemics, **Martinique Oriole** and **Martinique Thrasher**.

In addition to the birding, if time permits, we visit the lively capital of Fort de France where we will enjoy local creole cooking set to a backdrop of live music and the swaying of ship masts in the harbour.



St. Lucia Warbler by Ryan Chenery

Guadeloupe. Guadeloupe is a remarkable island, for its forests not only provide glimpses of some of the more secretive species rarely seen on other islands (as often evidenced by the Forest Thrushes hopping amongst the tables in popular riverside parks and Bridled Quail-Doves walking at your feet!), but where one can get close (very close) to a most curious endemic indeed.

The movements of the **Guadeloupe Woodpecker** are somewhat

unconventional, with birds often seen dangling upside down directly overhead while clinging to slender swinging branches and plucking ants from clusters of berries! Odd? Yes. But it certainly offers fabulous looks!



Plumbeous Warbler by Forrest Rowland

Having spent the morning taking part in some relaxed forest birding beside crystal clear streams punctuated with crayfish and shoals of mountain mullet, we make for a reliable site for the delightful Lesser Antillean Pewee and the near endemic Plumbeous Warbler. As is in keeping with the sedate nature of the birding on this, the larger of the two French Territories in the Lesser Antilles, we access this site via a clearly demarcated footpath lining the forest edge - and here revel in the sights of two of the smallest near endemics in the region.

Time permitting, the afternoon is ours to relax and enjoy some cocktails on our verandas before taking a relaxing dip in the pool. Antillean Crested Hummingbirds flit amongst the tubular red flowers of Antigua Heath, while in the palms overhead, Tropical Mockingbirds and Grey Kingbirds play out an almost continuous melody of song.

Dominica. Dominica - an island regarded by many as the "Nature Lover's Caribbean Island". Such is the nature of touring the Caribbean that though a mere six hours earlier we awoke at dawn to bird the woodlands of Guadeloupe, the afternoon of the same day sees us setting foot in the rainforests of Dominica in search of completely new species for the trip.

The island's lush forests absolutely teem with life! The latter half of the day sees us embark on a quest for such residents as Purple-throated Carib, Lesser Antillean Saltator, Pearly-eyed Thrasher, Brown Trembler, the near endemic Kalinago Wren and one of Dominica's two species of endemic Amazona parrot - the charismatic "Jaco" or **Red-necked Amazon**.



Bridled Quail-Dove by Forrest Rowland

Anticipation will be ripe as the following morning brings with it a phenomenal opportunity to enjoy stunning views of the largest and rarest of the Amazona parrots: the undisputed monarch of these forests - **Imperial Amazon**. We drive to a secluded site deep within montane forest where the Sisserou (as it is known by locals) is known to roost. Before setting out on a quest for fruiting trees the birds occasionally pause to preen and stretch their impressive wings, and in so doing allow one to truly

appreciate the large size and unique feathering of this bird.

Although the Sisserou is undoubtedly the showpiece, this largely unspoiled region of the island is also home to a staggering array of other beautiful species. One sighting of the dazzling colours of the recently described Lesser Antillean Euphonia can leave you in little doubt that you are in the tropics, while encounters with the resplendent Eastern Red-legged Thrush will no doubt prove equally memorable. With such treasures all around us, we spend the remainder of the morning exploring forest trails in search of other species local to the area, such as Lesser Antillean Flycatcher and Ruddy Quail-Dove, all the while being treated to the cacophony of calls for which such forests alone are reserved.



Purple-throated Carib by Steve Kornfeld

St. Vincent. After arrival at our elegant family-run hotel, the afternoon is ours to take part in some light "hotel-ground birding" where targets will include the fascinating all-black colour phase of Bananaquit, Spectacled Thrush, Eared Dove, Tropical Mockingbird and Grenada Flycatcher.

This can be followed by a swim in the pool, a cocktail at the beach bar, or if you're feeling adventurous why not descend the flight of steps onto the black volcanic sand beaches and go for a dip in the Caribbean Sea (don't forget to pack your snorkel!) Dinner tonight is at the hotel's luxurious open-air restaurant where we will delve into some delicious "Vincy" food.

An early start to our full day on the island is warranted, as it allows us the perfect opportunity for an audience with the island's national bird, and one of the rarest birds on the planet – the **St. Vincent Amazon**. There is something very sobering in the knowledge that you are watching some of the last remaining individuals of a species, in the only country where they can be found, in one of their last expanses of natural habitat. However, what a spectacle they provide as they leave their roosts and commute from one fruiting tree to another, every flit of their wings a mesmeric golden flash against the unbroken dark green backdrop of the island's dense forests. A magnificent sight!



Grenada Flycatcher by Beatrice Henricot

According to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, we follow up our time with St. Vincent's large and vulnerable endemic with an audience with her minute and endangered endemic - the comically attired **Whistling Warbler**. As though he were a curious monocled 19th century gentleman, the male Whistling Warbler often will flit out to fleetingly peer down upon you with a cocked head and quizzical stare, as though he were contemplating the motives behind your entry into his forest abode, before rapidly darting away again. We'll also track down the recently elevated endemic, **St. Vincent Wren.**

As well as being home to some of the rarest of the rare, St. Vincent will also provide us with the opportunity to see several species hitherto unseen on other islands, with the Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Cocoa Thrush, and impressive local race of Common Black Hawk being but a few. On our return journey from another rewarding day of birding, we gaze out the window at the changing topography of this varied and rugged land. Densely forested mountain peaks give way to sparsely vegetated plateaus and eventually grasslands and coastal flora, at which point we arrive back at our hotel, where we enjoy a candlelit dinner on the shores of the Caribbean Sea.



Red-necked Amazon by Steve Kornfeld

Grenada. From the air, this small and densely populated island might seem an odd destination on a birding trip, however, by virtue of our making for one of the last remaining vestiges of suitable habitat in the south of the island, we are soon provided with the opportunity to see the rarest species of the entire trip - the **Grenada Dove**. Latest counts estimate the surviving number of Grenada Doves to be as low as 50 individual birds. However, with the help of a trusted local guide, we will be treated to a sight few people have had or will ever have a chance to see in their lifetime. After visiting the last stronghold of this delicate, unassuming dove, we explore the dry woodland that represents its natural habitat and here enjoy sightings of some more of this tiny island's other inhabitants, including the recently elevated endemic **Granada Wren**, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Lesser Antillean Tanager and Grenada Flycatcher. We even climb a well-located observation tower to scan the skies for the local race of Hook-billed Kite.

Antigua. We spend a few days based on the island of Antigua. With a shoreline pocketed by inlets and bays, Antiguans boast that they can visit a different beach every day of the year and still not see them all. This large number of beaches ensures that Antigua is an island more popular with sun-seekers than birdwatchers.



Grenada Dove by Forrest Rowland

However, although not home to any endemics, this island does offer the opportunity to see a couple of species unlikely to be seen on any other of the Lesser Antilles - the impressively coiffured, White-crowned Pigeon (at home in the swaying palms that surround our hotel), and the White-winged Dove, also regularly sighted in the hotel's expansive grounds. If time permits, we will also explore a vast wetland for up-close views of several overwintering herons, waders, and waterfowl including White-cheeked Pintail, Black-necked Stilt and Wilson's Plover.

Barbuda. From Antigua we embark on a day trip to the smaller sister of this twin-island state. Our main target here is the diminutive **Barbuda Warbler**. This charming warbler is perfectly at home in the dry scrublands of

one of the Lesser Antilles driest islands, and shares the habitat with Common Ground Dove, Caribbean Elaenia, iguanas, and bizarrely, herds of feral donkeys!



Barbuda Warbler by Forrest Rowland

Barbuda is also home to the largest Magnificent Frigatebird colony in the entire Caribbean. These giants are most commonly seen soaring high above the waves, carefully scanning the waters for food floating on or close to the surface, so it is a wonderful treat to board a dinghy that takes us across a shallow lagoon absolutely teeming with marine life (as evidenced by the hundreds of jellyfish of every shape and size floating beneath us and clearly visible from our bough) and moors us literally within touching distance of nests, chicks and adults. We spend half an hour in the presence of these incredible birds, observing their behaviour and watching as squadrons of adults manipulate their impressive 6-foot wingspan to return with food to perch beside their young.

Driving around the island, one cannot help but be struck by the spectacular and unspoiled natural beauty of Barbuda. This is "postcard perfect", a land which offers a window into how many other islands in the chain now dominated by popular beachside condos and villas (such as Antigua) would have once looked. The water is a glistening turquoise blue, and the colours of the sands effortlessly blend between brilliant whites and varying shades of pink. With some of the most untouched beaches in the Caribbean literally on either side of us, what better way to spend the rest of the day than to enjoy a 'Robinson Crusoe-esque' picnic of mahi mahi, grilled lobster and curry chicken and follow it up with a relaxing swim in sparkling turquoise waters and a stroll along an idyllic white sand beach. We are in full tropical holiday mode. This is truly a case of birding in Paradise!

Montserrat. Fondly known as The Other Emerald Isle. With its historic ties to Ireland, the beautiful and peaceful island of Montserrat is a botanist's dream. With plant life fuelled by incredibly rich volcanic soil, Montserrat's vast swathes of forest reveal flowering plants and towering emergent not seen on many other islands.



Montserrat Oriole by Forrest Rowland

The mighty volcano on Montserrat is still classed as active, and there is therefore no human habitation on the entire south of the island, a view from the Volcano Observatory confirming this as - huge lava flows are visible lining the coast.

In pre-arranged transport we head to the lush, forested foothills of the island, where deep in primary forest and amongst brilliant flowering heliconias we find Montserrat's endemic – the appropriately fiery-chested **Montserrat Oriole**. We spend the rest of the day exploring this truly magical forest and getting to know more of its inhabitants - from Montserrat Racers and Montserrat Anoles to Pearly-eyed Thrashers and the local race of Forest Thrush.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate. Many early mornings and several short flights and transfers from one island to another. Suitable for all birding and wildlife interest levels.
Birding Ease		Undemanding. Most species provide good visuals, forest interior birding is limited.
Accommodation		Very comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Moderate amount of walking, mostly on flat ground, wide trails and around lodge gardens.
Vehicles / Roads		Limited driving, mostly on sealed roads.
Photography		Good to excellent. No dedicated hides.
Annoyances		None of note.

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 14;
- All lodgings;
- All ground & boat 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.**

- We spend some of our time traversing the many islands by small to medium-sized aeroplanes. Baggage restrictions are strictly enforced even for these small hops. Please do not arrive for the tour with more than 19kg (41 lbs) of check in luggage and 7kg (+-15 lbs) of hand luggage.
- This tour requires a moderate level of fitness. There will be many early mornings, several flights, and a fair amount of walking. However, although we cover a diverse range of terrain, there are no steep ascents and trails are primarily well maintained and relatively level. Any light to moderate ascent is conducted at a slow, steady pace with plenty of opportunities to rest along the way.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour departs from Maurice Bishop International Airport (IATA: GND), Grenada on day 1, and conclude in the afternoon of day 14 at V. C. Bird International Airport (IATA: ANU), on the island of Antigua.

The arrival and departure points, tour length and precise internal logistics will vary from year to year based on local airline routes and availability.

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.

Maurice Bishop International Airport (IATA: GND), Grenada and V. C. Bird International Airport (IATA: ANU), Antigua are the primary point of arrival and departure for this tour.

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.

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