

## MAIN BIRDING SITES IN CUBA

### ZAPATA PENINSULA

Located in southern Matanzas Province, just over 150 km from Havana, the peninsula occupies an area of 4,700 km<sup>2</sup> and supports several different natural habitats, including semideciduous forest, swampy forest, mangrove swamp, cactus communities, dry forest, mudflats, and extensive wetlands, including salt pans and fresh- and brackish water marshes. Almost 70% of the region is covered by a dense layer of organic mud; the drier sections of Zapata have abundant limestone.

The journey to Playa Larga from Havana takes c.2.5 hours. At km 142 on the freeway between Havana and the east of the island, turn right (south) towards Playa Larga (the turn is clearly signposted to Zapata), and the resort is located 29 km along this road.

Most birders will prefer to stay in one of the two comfortable tourist hotels in the region, Playa Larga, or the more distant Playa Girón, which is 32 km further east along the coast. Both possess similar facilities, including a swimming pool and easy access to the beach, and all of the sites listed in this chapter can be comfortably visited within a day from either. Indeed, at most times of year it is sufficiently hot (and bird activity insufficiently high) to make returning to hotel for lunch and a short siesta an attractive and feasible option. If you prefer to remain all day in the field, stock up with provisions at the buffet breakfasts or purchase some snacks at one of the resort's on-site shops. Accommodation at both resorts is in small, but comfortable, en suite private chalets. Playa Larga is better positioned for easy access to most of the main birding sites in the Zapata region, and is especially convenient for visiting either Santo Tomás, or the two sites in the northern part of the swamp—Peralta and Hato de Jicarita—as a pre-dawn start is essential for visiting all of these localities. Nonetheless, Playa Girón still makes an excellent base, and has the advantage of being positioned close to the endemic-rich sites of Bermejas and Punta Perdiz. Both Playa Larga and Playa Girón offer reasonable birding on site, and both resorts possess an easily seen pair of Stygian Owls within their grounds. Another, less convenient, but scenically very attractive, option is to stay at Guamá, within Treasure Lake, which offers many excellent birding opportunities, but is distinctly less ideal in several other respects, especially if you intend to do much night birding, as all transportation to and from the hotel is by boat. In addition, the on-site facilities and restaurant are not of the same standard as those at the other two resorts mentioned above. Finally, there is the option to stay in private accommodation, in government licensed guesthouses (private homes), in Playa Girón, Playa Larga or even Jagüey Grande, although we would not recommend the latter, except for its close proximity to Peralta and Hato de Jicarita. Such accommodation usually costs \$15–25 per person per night, while meals can usually be obtained for a few dollars extra. Most such accommodation is clearly indicated, but some of those in Playa Larga are best found by asking for directions from local people. Staying with a Cuban family in this manner provides some insight into local life, but is not necessarily a lot cheaper than staying in one of the hotels. Nonetheless, it probably offers greater flexibility and most travelers to Cuba who try to break the habit of staying in hotels enjoy the experience.

We recommend that visitors will wish to spend a minimum of four or five days in the Zapata region. In the following pages we present a near-exhaustive list of localities liable to be of interest to birders, but those with limited time we suggest should concentrate on the following, most important areas: at least one of Santo Tomás, Peralta or Hato de Jicarita, as well as Los Sabálos, Bermejas, Pálpite, Mera, El Cenote and Los Canales. These areas should offer the keen birder the opportunity to find most of the endemics and specialities of the region.

### **ZAPATA'S OTHER WILDLIFE**

In addition to the birdlife, among other endemic fauna perhaps the most impressive is the Cuban Crocodile *Crocodylus rhombifer*. The likelihood of finding this species in the wild is very low, with the best locality being the river Hatiguanico, located near Hato de Jicarita (site 1.19), although the only sure place to see one is at the Boca crocodile farm, not in the wild. The American Crocodile *C. acutus* also occurs. The endemic Cuban ground lizard *Leiocephalus cubensis*, two unique subspecies of the Cuban giant anole *Anolis luteogularis*, as well as a subspecies of another endemic lizard *Leiocephalus stictigaster* all occur in Zapata. The peninsula harbors yet another four endemic species of anoles, three endemic snakes, including the Cuban racer *Alsophis cantherigerus* and Cuba's giant boa *Epicrates angulifer*.

There are also a few native mammals. Several species of bats spend the day resting in hollow trees and caves. Hutias are comparatively large, largely tree-dwelling rodents. Three species inhabit Zapata, the two largest are fairly common but the smallest, the Dwarf Hutia *Capromys garridoi*, is extremely rare and on the verge of extinction.

During March and April, the road between Playa Larga and Playa Girón can be virtually covered with crabs *Geocarcinus ruricola* migrating from inland forests to the sea, where they lay their eggs. They are variously coloured red, black and pale cream. So abundant are these creatures that nine out of ten rustlings that you hear on the forest floor can be traced to a crab.

### **ZAPATA'S BIRDS**

Zapata Peninsula is, undoubtedly, the best birdwatching area in Cuba, and possibly the entire Caribbean region. It supports all but four of Cuba's 23 avian endemics, as well as many other native species, both winter residents and transients, along with several summer and spring visitors (which breed in Cuba but return south in fall). Over 205 species have been reported in the area. We have selected a number of different locations for inclusion here, based on several criteria, including relatively high diversities of birds, easy access, and greatest variety of habitats.

Several species that reside in Zapata also occur on other West Indian islands, and keen life listers may be tempted to almost ignore those species they have already seen elsewhere in the West Indies, or even North America. In some cases it is as well to note that future taxonomic revisions, based on differences in vocalizations, behavior, genetic make-up, or morphological features, may result in what is currently considered a race or subspecies being regarded as a separate species. A good example of this, which has already been

resolved, is the Greater Antillean Pewee, found in Cuba, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Hispaniola. The Cuban and Bahamian populations have been reclassified as one species, consisting of two races, here called Crescent-eyed Pewee, while those populations in Jamaica and Hispaniola are now considered separate species. Incipient 'splits' include the Greater Antillean Oriole (formerly known as the Black-cowled Oriole), Gray-headed Quail-dove and Eastern Meadowlark. Even the apparently familiar should not be ignored!

## Site 1.1: Playa Larga

### Access/Birding Sites

This resort is that most commonly used by birdwatchers staying in Zapata. The complex consists of four streets with chalets on each side, a restaurant, bar, nightclub, and several small souvenir shops. The restaurant is just a few meters from the beach. The closest town is Jagüey Grande, c. 30 km to the north. Access is straightforward from the main freeway between Havana and the east of the island. Turn south at the crossroads at km 142 on this road, just beyond a Rumbos bar with a boat beside it, which is on the same side of the road as the exit. After approximately 1 km take a right-hand turn (the first one along this road) just ahead of a large citrus processing factory. Continue south along the road, passing the Boca resort and through Pálpite village, to Playa Larga village where the road bends to the left. The entrance to the hotel is on the right, a couple of hundred metres further along the road.

There are several tall trees in Playa Larga resort, and the forest is very close on the opposite of the main road. Within and just outside the resort look for Yellow-crowned Night-heron, Common Black-hawk, Zenaida Dove, Rose-throated Parrot, Antillean Palm-swift, Cuban Emerald, **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, West Indian Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, **Cuban Martin** (summer), Cave Swallow, Black-whiskered Vireo (from mid-March), Cape May Warbler (winter and spring), Cuban Crow, Greater Antillean Grackle, **Cuban** and Tawny-shouldered Blackbirds, Greater Antillean Oriole, and others. Coconut trees may harbor Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Yellow-throated Warbler in winter and spring. The most important feature of the Playa Larga avifauna is the pair of Stygian Owls that can be reliably found in the area. They are best searched for on dark nights, when the moon is either new or in its first quarter, at which times the male may be heard calling from several areas within the compound, although the isolated large tree behind the swimming pool and those tall trees close to the restaurant are consistently favored. Later in the lunar cycle, when the nights are not so dark, the birds may be very elusive or even impossible to find; the same holds true for the pair at Playa Girón.

It also pays to stroll along the shore among the sea grape trees, where you may find **Cuban Trogon**, **Cuban Green Woodpecker**, Northern Flicker, and several species of shorebirds, including Ruddy Turnstone and Spotted Sandpiper. Situated at the head of the Bay of Pigs, Playa Larga does very occasionally attract seabirds, such as terns and gulls, including, in 1999, Cuba's second Franklin's Gull. Less than a 0.5 miles from the cabins, along the coast towards Playa Girón, is a huge *Ficus* tree. Its blossoms may attract several species, including Red-legged Honeycreeper, which, in Cuba, is most easily seen at La

Güira, in Pinar del Río Province, but is usually very rare elsewhere. Also, Bee Hummingbird has been observed at these flowers.

Traveling east along the road towards Playa Girón, you will notice American Kestrels, every 2–3 km, perched on the wires or atop telephone poles; most are winter visitors from North America. Cuban resident birds are often found near habitations and are much tamer, often permitting close approach. Also on these roadside wires, watch for widespread species such as Belted Kingfisher, Mourning and White-winged Doves, Gray and Loggerhead Kingbirds, and Northern Mockingbird.

### **Playa Larga Bird List**

112 sp., including 14 target species (endemic species in bold).

**Gundlach's Hawk**

**Cuban Black Hawk**

**Cuban Parakeet**

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

Stygian Owl

**Cuban Nightjar**

Antillean Nighthawk

**Bee Hummingbird**

**Cuban Trogon**

**Cuban Tody**

**Cuban Green Woodpecker**

**Cuban Vireo**

Cuban Crow

**Yellow-headed Warbler**

**Cuban Blackbird**

**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.2: Mera**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

Approximately 100 m southeast of Soplillar (see above for directions to this village), take a narrow road on the left (just before a cattle grid), and drive about 150 m until you reach a fork. Walk the trail on the right, which initially passes through a gate and then semideciduous forest holding **Blue-headed** and **Gray-fronted Quail-doves**, Yellow-throated and White-eyed Vireos, **Cuban Vireo**, Blue-winged, Worm-eating and Palm Warblers, American Redstart, and Yellow-faced Grassquit. Once you reach an open area with scattered palm trees, where the ground can be very wet, you also have a chance of **Cuban Parakeet**, Rose-throated Parrot, **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, **Bare-legged Owl**, and **Bee Hummingbird**. Also, this is one of the best areas to find **Gundlach's Hawk** and **Fernandina's Flicker** during the breeding season. The latter is best searched for among the trees surrounding the final section of trail before the open area. You should also find

West Indian Woodpecker and **Cuban Blackbird**. When returning, look for Crested Caracara among the high and scattered *Ceiba* trees.

### **Mera Bird List**

102 sp., including 22 target species.

#### **Gundlach's Hawk**

Key West Quail-dove

#### **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

Ruddy Quail-dove

#### **Blue-headed Quail-dove**

#### **Cuban Parakeet**

Rose-throated Parrot

Great Lizard-cuckoo

#### **Bare-legged Owl**

#### **Cuban Pygmy-owl**

Stygian Owl

Antillean Nighthawk

#### **Cuban Nightjar**

#### **Bee Hummingbird**

#### **Cuban Trogon**

#### **Cuban Tody**

#### **Cuban Green Woodpecker**

#### **Fernandina's Flicker**

#### **Cuban Vireo**

#### **Yellow-headed Warbler**

#### **Cuban Blackbird**

#### **Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.3: La Majagua**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This spot is located about 5 km southeast of Soplillar on the left-hand side of the road. You will have to walk into forest that is flooded during the rainy season. This is a difficult trail, and it is recommended that you visit it with an experienced guide. Follow the trail for c.100 m to an open area. Most of the herons can be found here, as well as Blue-winged Teal, Northern Jacana, Limpkin, Common Moorhen, and American Coot. Among the scattered trees and shrubs, look for **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**, **Cuban Parakeet**, and several species of warblers and vireos.

### **Site 1.4: Molina**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This is an area of semideciduous forest c.2 km southeast of Soplillar. Look for a narrow dirt road on the right-hand side just before you reach an area of open country that has

been fenced. Drive the dirt track for about 500 m and then walk. This is an excellent area for **Blue-headed Quail-dove**.

### **La Majagua and Molina Bird List**

94 sp., including 21 target species

#### **Gundlach's Hawk**

Key West Quail-dove

#### **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

Ruddy Quail-dove

#### **Blue-headed Quail-dove**

#### **Cuban Parakeet**

Rose-throated Parrot

Great Lizard-cuckoo

Barn Owl

#### **Bare-legged Owl**

#### **Cuban Pygmy-owl**

Stygian Owl

Antillean Nighthawk

#### **Cuban Nightjar**

#### **Bee Hummingbird**

#### **Cuban Trogon**

#### **Cuban Tody**

#### **Cuban Green Woodpecker**

#### **Fernandina's Flicker**

#### **Cuban Vireo**

#### **Yellow-headed Warbler**

### **Site 1.5: Los Sábalos**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

An area of semideciduous forest c.15 km southeast of Playa Larga. To reach the area from Playa Larga, drive along the coast road towards Playa Girón and take the second paved road on the left. Drive due north for 5 km, passing through a small village, known as Los Hondones, and subsequently past a fenced-off, small military post. Follow the road to the right until you reach an intersection, marked by three houses. Turn right, and after 800 m take the first trail on the left that enters the forest (there are palm trees marking the entrance). Proceed along this trail, turn right and continue straight ahead until you reach the first left-hand turn.

The tall trees here are probably the best place in Cuba to find **Bee Hummingbird**, though this entire area is excellent for the species. At this point, you may either continue further or return via the same route. A few meters beyond the left-hand turn, there is a track off to the right. Taking this will bring you back to the main, driveable, road, and by turning right

you will reach your starting point. You may also find that it pays to walk even further along the principal track inside the forest, returning via either of the routes mentioned. In addition to **Bee Hummingbird**, the area holds many other sought-after species and we recommend that visiting birders make this one of their principal destinations within Zapata. The rare **Gundlach's Hawk** may also be encountered, as well as Broad-winged Hawk, **Cuban Parakeet**, all four quail-doves (the two rarer species are frequently seen), Great Lizard-cuckoo, Cuban Emerald, **Cuban Tody**, **Cuban Trogon**, three species of woodpeckers, Red-legged Thrush, **Cuban Vireo**, Blue-winged, Worm-eating and **Yellow-headed Warblers**, Cuban Bullfinch, **Cuban Grassquit**, and Indigo Bunting. Another means of reaching the area is to take the road that passes through Soplillar, Molina, and La Majagua. Thereafter you cross a bridge over a canal, then turn right and subsequently left, before you eventually reach the previously mentioned house at the intersection of the two roads.

### **Los Sábalos Bird List**

88 sp., including 12 target species.

#### **Gundlach's Hawk**

#### **Gray-fronted Quail-dove \**

Ruddy Quail-dove

#### **Blue-headed Quail-dove**

#### **Cuban Parakeet**

#### **Cuban Pygmy-owl**

#### **Cuban Nightjar**

#### **Bee Hummingbird**

#### **Cuban Trogon**

#### **Cuban Tody**

#### **Cuban Green Woodpecker**

#### **Cuban Vireo**

### **Site 1.6: Los Canales**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This is a complex of canals, created to irrigate rice plantations in the district of Aguada de Pasajeros, and lagoons. Many aquatic species can be observed in the area, as well as along the edges of the road that runs parallel to it. On the opposite side of the road are extensive stands of palm trees, bushes, and sawgrass, offering a good opportunity to see many different bird species.

To reach the first canal, follow the previous directions to Los Sábalos from Playa Larga, taking the only unpaved road on the left, or follow the road that passes through Soplillar, Molina, La Majagua, etc. The canal is reached at the end of this road; go over the bridge, turn left, and follow the road until you reach open pastures, where some cattle and the first rice fields are found. These pastures are approximately 30 minutes from the canal bridge. Proceed to explore as much of the wetland complex as time permits. It is worth

checking as many areas as you can, especially during passage periods and when water levels are lower, when there may be many shorebirds using the lagoons and fields.

Species to watch for during the drive include Masked and Ruddy Ducks, herons, Least Bittern, both cormorants, Snail Kite, **Gundlach's Hawk**, Northern Harrier, Osprey, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, coots and gallinules, Sora, Northern Jacana, Common Snipe, Caspian, Royal and Forster's Terns, Mourning Dove, Barn and Short-eared Owls, Antillean Nighthawk, Belted Kingfisher, Tree Swallow, **Red-shouldered Blackbird**, Eastern Meadowlark, Indigo and Painted Buntings, Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrows. The open pastures are the best spots for finding migrant sparrows. During the rainy season both King Rail and Least Bittern are frequently observed.

### **Los Canales Bird List**

124 sp., including 6 target species.

Northern Harrier

**Gundlach's Hawk**

Red-tailed Hawk

Northern Caracara

**Red-shouldered Blackbird**

**Cuban Blackbird**

### **Site 1.7: El Cenote**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This limestone-based semideciduous forest area is c.18 km southeast of Playa Larga and on the left-hand-side of the road. It is well signposted, 'Cueva de los Peces' (Cave of the Fishes) and can be popular with tourists, particularly in the hottest part of the day, as there is a restaurant on site. Most visitors congregate around the large natural pool, which is primarily fresh water but with an underground channel connecting it to the sea that has led to its use by many coral fishes. In the surrounding woodland, a variety of forest species can be found including **Blue-headed Quail-dove**, which regularly visits the restaurant in mid-afternoons (at the time of writing this may be considered the most regular location for the species in Cuba). The staff at the restaurant know the species by the Cuban name Paloma Perdiz, and should be able to give you up-to-date news on when, or if, it is being seen. Also search this area for Swainson's Warbler, Cuban Bullfinch, and Western Spindalis. Migrant warblers and other Nearctic visitors can be common in season, and other endemics and near-endemics that are regularly found in this area include **Bare-legged Owl** (a pair has occupied a tree directly between the pool and open-air eating area for several years), Cuban Emerald (which has even nested inside the restaurant), **Cuban Green Woodpecker**, Crescent-eyed Pewee and **Cuban Blackbird**. Ask directions to the refuse tip, which is situated in a small, very degraded area of woodland near a tiny compound directly behind the main restaurant building, and reached by a short, narrow trail; this area has often held **Blue-headed** and Key West Quail-doves, and on occasion Ruddy Quail-dove, in recent years, but is increasingly disturbed.

#### **El Cenote Bird List**



86 sp., including 18 target species

Key West Quail-dove

**Blue-headed Quail-dove**

Rose-throated Parrot

Great Lizard-cuckoo

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

**Bare-legged Owl**

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

**Cuban Trogon**

**Cuban Tody**

**Cuban Green Woodpecker**

**Cuban Vireo**

**Yellow-headed Warbler**

Western Spindalis

Summer Tanager

Cuban Bullfinch

Tawny-shouldered Blackbird

**Cuban Blackbird**

**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.8: Bermejas**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

An open area with royal and cabbage palms, bushes and shrubbery, 12 km north of Playa Girón. This is *the* place to look for **Fernandina's Flicker**, as well as all of the other woodpecker species known from Cuba (with the exception of the Ivory-billed). Cuba's two endemic owls, **Cuban Nightjar**, **Cuban Parakeet**, White-winged Dove, and all four quail-dove species (the two rarer species are frequently encountered) can also be seen here, as well as many Nearctic warblers, **Cuban Trogon**, **Cuban Tody**, Great Lizard-cuckoo, **Cuban Grassquit**, and most species of flycatcher found in Cuba.

Bermejas is situated north of Playa Girón on the paved road towards Cienfuegos. After approximately 8 km bear right within the village of Helechal and after another 4.1 km you reach the settlement of Bermejas. The best way to find this place is to ask local people, because the entrance is a left turn by the road, practically in front of the first house in the village on the left, if driving north. On entering the woods, and before reaching the area with cabbage palms, look for **Bee Hummingbird** among the roadside bushes and flowers. Just a few metres from the road the track reaches a clearing. **Cuban Parakeet** is often seen around here and over the adjacent village in the evening. Go left at the clearing and upon re-entering forest, take the first track on the left. This area, including the semi-cleared area to the right of the trail is excellent for many hole-nesting species including Rose-throated Parrot (especially in early morning and late afternoon), **Bare-legged Owl**, **Cuban Trogon**, and Northern and **Fernandina's Flickers**, as well as sometimes holding Bee Hummingbird and, regularly, **Cuban Tody**, **Cuban Vireo** and **Yellow-headed Warbler**. It is possible to continue, beyond the semi-cleared area, along this track for some distance, but the first 500 m are best. Re-trace your steps to the first clearing and

then take the right-hand trail. Formerly, this immediately entered very productive dry, semideciduous forest, but the first several hundred meters were cleared in 2000. Proceed, however, and you will enter woodland rich in wintering warblers, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and with near-abundant **trogons**, **todies** and Great Lizard-cuckoos. After a relatively short distance another, much larger clearing is reached. This area is superb for **Fernandina's Flicker** and other woodpeckers, as well as **Bare-legged Owl**. **Cuban Grassquit** was formerly regular in this area but has been much less frequent in recent years. It is worth continuing beyond the clearing, even if you have found all of your target species, the forest in this area can be alive with wintering North American migrants in season, and many of the endemics are easily found here. **Blue-headed Quail-dove** and **Gray-fronted Quail-dove** are regularly seen along this trail. Eventually the trail reaches yet another clearing, which contains a waterlogged area surrounding a clump of trees. This part of the region is especially good for icterids, and may occasionally produce waterbirds.

Back at the main road, and if visiting the area at dusk, take the first right-hand turn when proceeding north through the village, by a small shop, and follow this through the houses to a small clearing in woodland. This, and many, other areas around Bermejas is a good area for **Cuban Nightjar**.

Another area recommended by visiting birders, but not visited by us, can be reached by continuing northeast beyond Bermejas for 2.4 km. At this point take a turn to the right and proceed a further 4 km to a small village beyond which the paved road ends after a further 1 km. The trail beyond the end of the road proceeds through yet more limestone-based dry woodland with opportunities for quail-doves, including **Blue-headed**, as well as **Gundlach's Hawk** and **Cuban Parakeet**. By taking a short, 250 m, trail between the houses, to the west of the village, an area of palms that, at least formerly, supported **Fernandina's Flicker** can be reached. Anyone having real problems with the latter species can also try areas even further north of Bermejas, along the main road towards Cienfuegos. Stop in likely areas with tall palms and suitable nesting holes.

### **Bermejas Bird List**

111 sp., including 23 target species.

#### **Gundlach's Hawk**

Key West Quail-dove

#### **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

Ruddy Quail-dove

#### **Blue-headed Quail-dove**

#### **Cuban Parakeet**

Rose-throated Parrot

#### **Cuban Parakeet**

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Great Lizard-cuckoo

Cuban Pygmy-owl

Antillean Nighthawk

#### **Cuban Nightjar**

#### **Bee Hummingbird**

**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**West Indian Woodpecker**  
Northern Flicker  
**Fernandina's Flicker**  
**Cuban Vireo**  
Cuban Martin  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.9: La Salina**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

At the beginning of the dry season, usually in late November, this can be one of the most impressive areas for birdwatching in Zapata. At this period the wetlands are drying out, leaving only scattered puddles and stagnant, shallow waters. These are ideal feeding conditions for many waterbirds, which come to feast on the fishes, crustaceans, and other invertebrates. If you are lucky to be in the area at this time, you will have the good fortune of visiting one of the richest birdwatching areas in the West Indies.

Reaching La Salina is very simple. The abandoned salt pans are approximately 26 km south of Buena Ventura, a small village just 3 km west of Playa Larga. From the entrance to the hotel at Playa Larga turn left, as if driving to Havana, and then left again into the village at the obvious bend in the road after a just a couple of hundred meters. Continue through Playa Larga village along the dirt road to Buena Ventura. The route is thereafter obvious. Because La Salina is a national sanctuary, you must first obtain permission to visit from the local authorities, at the Agriculture Ministry office in Playa Larga, and then contact a local guide (this can also be arranged by the park office), who will open the sanctuary gate. The area around the Agriculture Ministry office and nearby police station is an extremely regular locality for Cuban Crow.

For several km beyond Buena Ventura, there are open forests with limestone-rich soils. Many of the commoner resident bird species can be seen in these woods. At the forest edge, look for Common Black-hawk, which is very tame throughout this region. Also possible are **Gundlach's**, Red-tailed or Broad-winged Hawks along the way. At night along this road is a reliable area for **Bare-legged Owl** and **Cuban Nightjar**.

Soon the mangroves give way to more open, savanna-like terrain. Look for Sandhill Crane feeding approximately 200 m off the road, especially in the early morning. Once beyond the savannas, you enter a wetland area very typical of the Zapata region. The greatest diversity of waterbirds occurs in this region. Many species that in other areas are occasionally seen singly, or not at all, can be abundant here including American Flamingo, Roseate Spoonbill, both species of cormorants, Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, many herons including Reddish Egret, Osprey, Caspian Tern, White Ibis, and Wood Stork. With few exceptions, all of the species of sandpipers and plovers listed for Cuba can be abundant. Look for Peregrine Falcon, Clapper Rail, and Yellow Warbler as

well.

The road ends at an abandoned saltpan, where Wilson's Plover breeds. Occasionally American Crocodile may also be seen in this area.

### **La Salina Bird List**

119 sp., including 25 target species

American White Pelican

Neotropic Cormorant

Magnificent Frigatebird

Great Blue Heron (both morphs)

Reddish Egret (both morphs)

Roseate Spoonbill

Wood Stork

American Flamingo

Osprey

**Gundlach's Hawk**

**Cuban Black-Hawk**

Clapper Rail

Wilson's Plover

Caspian Tern

Royal Tern

**Bare-legged Owl**

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

**Cuban Nightjar**

**Cuban Trogon**

**Cuban Tody**

**Cuban Green Woodpecker**

**Cuban Vireo**

**Yellow-headed Warbler**

**Cuban Blackbird**

**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.10: Santo Tomás**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This area is the site where the Spanish naturalist, Fermín Cervera, discovered three of Cuba's most famous endemics—**Zapata Wren**, **Zapata Sparrow**, and **Zapata Rail**—in 1926. Following the official description of these species the area became famous. Surrounding the marsh is deciduous woodland with a high species diversity, including such sought-after birds as **Gundlach's Hawk**, **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**, and **Bee Hummingbird**. As with all localities within the swamp and national park, visiting the protected site north of Santo Tomás requires special permission from the local forestry authorities, the Agriculture Ministry office just north of Playa Larga, and the services of a

guide in this area are also compulsory.

Prior to 1960, it was practically impossible to reach Santo Tomás by land, as it is 36 km northwest of Playa Larga and lies almost in the heart of the swamp. Nowadays things are much easier. To reach the area follow the same initial directions as if going to La Salina, but at the control gate, instead of taking the left-hand road, keep going straight until you reach the village of Santo Tomás. At the local store, known as a 'bodega', take the narrow dirt road to the right (passing an outdoor oven used to make the charcoal), until you reach its end at a canal. Along the road are deciduous woods, but the species inhabiting this area can also be found in other forests in the region. We advise against the temptation to stop en route. It is necessary to reach Santo Tomás during the first hour of daylight, before the wind has picked up in the exposed sawgrass wetlands. Cutting through the marshland is a canal, La Cocodrila, formerly used as a route to extract timber from the woods. The best way to reach the marshes is to take a small boat along the canal, listening for the distant song of **Zapata Wren**, or watching for any **Zapata Sparrows**. The rail is also found in this area, but is practically impossible to see due to its secretive habits. However, at the beginning of its breeding season, in the winter, you may hear its peculiar call. The other way to enter the sawgrass wetland is to walk from the village. During the dry season this route is feasible; during the wet season, however, the water level is high, up to 1.5 m deep in places, and there are many sink holes, difficult to detect when the water level is high. You are almost sure to end up entirely soaked!

Almost all of the rails reported in Cuba occur in these wetlands, and some can usually be heard calling, especially King and Spotted Rails. This is also a good place to find Limpkin, Glossy Ibis, Common Snipe, and both night-herons. Usually Blue-winged Teal, gallinules, Masked and Wood Ducks can be found along the canal, as well as herons, cormorants, and a few species of warblers. Common Yellowthroat, Crescent-eyed Pewee, and kingbirds are rather common, and occasionally **Bee Hummingbird** can be found at the entrance of the canal, along with **Yellow-headed Warbler**, **Cuban Vireo**, Cuban Bullfinch, and **Cuban Tody**. The area is also an excellent one for **Gundlach's Hawk** and **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**. Your guide should have up-to-date information on the whereabouts of these species.

After visiting the sawgrass territory, look for **Bee Hummingbird** among the trees and gardens of the village houses, where it nests. Another target species here is Sandhill Crane, usually best located just to the north of the entrance of the reserve, at the point with road barrier and control guard. Just walk about 70 m along the narrow trail north of the road to watch for the cranes, which are usually present only early in the morning.

### **Santo Tomás Bird List**

112 sp., including 20 target species.

**Gundlach's Hawk**

**Zapata Rail**

Spotted Rail

**Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

**Bare-legged Owl**  
**Cuban Pygmy-owl**  
Stygian Owl  
**Cuban Nightjar**  
Chuck-will's-widow  
**Bee Hummingbird**  
**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Cuban Vireo**  
**Zapata Wren**  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
**Zapata Sparrow**  
**Red-shouldered Blackbird**  
**Cuban Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.11: Guamá**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This is a tourist resort, consisting of a pleasant-looking group of cabins, restaurants, bars, and bridges on the waters of Treasure Lake (Laguna del Tesoro). There is also an Indian village with stone statues depicting the various activities of the former inhabitants of the region, the Taíno Indians.

Treasure Lake comprises two parts: La Boca and Guamá. The first is located by the main road, 12 km north of Playa Larga and forms the entrance to the lake. There are souvenir shops, a bar, and a restaurant. La Boca's large gardens attract many species of birds, including Rose-throated Parrot, **Cuban Blackbird**, Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, Greater Antillean Grackle, Greater Antillean Oriole, and more occasionally **Red-shouldered Blackbird**. Cuban Crow is regular in the taller trees around the tourist buildings. Within aquatic vegetation, look for Least Bittern, Northern Jacana and gallinules. Behind the restaurant is a large crocodile farm, where about 12,000 crocodiles (most of which are the endemic species *Crocodylus rhombifer*) are raised. **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, as well as warblers, woodpeckers, and kingbirds can be seen around the farm.

After exploring La Boca and its surroundings, take the boat along the canal and across the lake to the tourist resort of Guamá. The trip lasts c.35 minutes, and along the way scan the exotic *Casuarina* (Australian pine) trees that fringe the banks for Osprey, **Gundlach's Hawk** (perhaps best searched for from the tower above the restaurant at Guamá), Peregrine Falcon, Barn Owl, Antillean Palm-swift and Crescent-eyed Pewee.

Once you've reached Guamá, search the trees of the village carefully for a Stygian Owl. Several species of warblers, including Yellow, Cape May, and American Redstart, may also be present. The less desirable Shiny Cowbird may be seen among flocks of

blackbirds in the gardens of Guamá; **Bee Hummingbird** regularly feeds on bottlebrush flowers (and can also be seen at La Boca). Along the interior canals of Guamá several species of waterbirds can be found, including Wood Duck, as well as Snail Kite, which can usually be seen perched at the end of the canal or patrolling the lake in search of snails. Along the lake's edge, look for Neotropic Cormorant and Anhinga. Coots, gallinules, and Pied-billed Grebes are common at certain times of year, especially during the winter months.

### **Guamá, Treasure Lake, and Boca Bird List**

104 sp., including 26 target species.

Osprey

Snail Kite

Northern Harrier

**Gundlach's Hawk**

**Zapata Rail**

Spotted Rail

Northern Jacana

**Cuban Parakeet**

Rose-throated Parrot

Great Lizard-cuckoo

Barn Owl

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

Antillean Nighthawk

**Bee Hummingbird**

West Indian Woodpecker

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

**Cuban Green Woodpecker**

**Fernandina's Flicker**

Northern Flicker

Northern Waterthrush

Louisiana Waterthrush

**Red-shouldered Blackbird**

Tawny-shouldered Blackbird

**Cuban Blackbird**

Greater Antillean Grackle

**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.12: Pálpite**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

Approximately 5 km south of Guamá is the village of Pálpite. The woodland surrounding the settlement is excellent for a broad selection of species, including many endemics. Upon entering the village take the first track on the right-hand side of the road, and park, after c.100 m, immediately beyond the last house on the right. Continue on foot into the forest. After just a few metres there is a three-way fork in the trail. By going either

straight ahead (from where a number of side trails emanate, all of which are good for birding, although some are currently a little too overgrown to readily find quail-doves), or left you enter excellent birding habitat, seasonally inundated limestone woodland. In our experience the left-hand track is consistently the most productive, while a trail off to the right, c.1 km along this track, is also worthy of exploration. It is possible to walk for several km along the left-hand trail, but in practice it is probably not worth going more than 2 km along here.

This area is superb for quail-doves, with all four species present. Most numerous are Ruddy and Key West Quail-doves, but **Grey-fronted Quail-dove** is also encountered relatively frequently, while **Blue-headed Quail-dove** is not uncommon, although this is not the best site for the species. Virtually any time of day can be productive, and with a significant slice of good fortune it would be possible to record all four within the course of a day. In practice, a number of visits, at different times of day, will be necessary for an observer to see three or four species. Zenaida Dove is also common in the area. As mentioned, a wide range of endemics and near-endemics occur here, with White-crowned Pigeon, Rose-throated Parrot, **Cuban Trogon**, Crescent-eyed Pewee, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Red-legged Thrush, Black-whiskered Vireo (March–October), **Cuban Vireo**, **Yellow-headed Warbler**, and **Cuban Tody** among the most frequent. **Bee Hummingbird** is regular along the left-hand trail, in tall, dead growth between the main fork and the first track off to the right, while Cuban Emerald is also, unsurprisingly, common. In winter, the area is a haven for many Nearctic migrants, including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Gray Catbird and almost innumerable North American warblers.

Cuban Crow is frequent around the village itself, as is Antillean Nighthawk, in season, and all of Cuba's icterids, with the exception of Red-shouldered Blackbird. The nighthawk should also be searched for over open ground, on both sides of the main road, just north of Pálpite, and along the dirt road east of the village. There is a small roost of Rose-throated Parrot in the village, and Cuban Martin is regularly recorded over the settlement in the early morning and evening. **Cuban Nightjar** and **Cuban Pygmy-owl** are reasonably regular along the first dirt road east of the main road within the village, and may also be found along other trails in the area, while Stygian Owl has been recorded on several occasions within the settlement. Indeed, any trail in the area is worthy of exploration; in April 2000, GMK recorded both rarer quail-doves along a short trail just south and east of the village in the same evening. However, given limited time, observers should concentrate on the trail west of the village that is described above.

### **Pálpite Bird List**

95 sp., including 19 target species.

#### **Gundlach's Hawk**

Key West Quail-dove

#### **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

Ruddy Quail-dove

#### **Blue-headed Quail-dove**

#### **Cuban Parakeet**



Rose-throated Parrot  
**Cuban Pygmy-owl**  
**Bare-legged Owl**  
Stygian Owl  
**Bee Hummingbird**  
**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Cuban Vireo**  
Cuban Crow  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
**Cuban Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**

### Site 1.12: La Turba

#### Access/Birding Sites

North of Guamá is an often very productive area of marshland known as Turba. If coming from the south, c.5 km beyond Guamá you will note a dirt road off to the left (west). Immediately beyond the dirt road is a compound, with a sign 'Turba, Zapata' and then a police checkpoint, which is rarely manned. If you reach these you need to turn round, although immediately beyond the checkpoint, on the right-hand (east) side of the main road there is a line of royal palms, which has hosted **Fernandina's Flicker**, while the adjacent wet area may produce **Red-shouldered Blackbird**. Other areas, a little further north of the checkpoint, and also to the east of the road, may also be worth checking for the woodpecker.

The road to Turba at first passes through dry woodland. In winter (October to late March) it is worth checking for Chuck-will's-widow, and for **Cuban Nightjar** at any season. After c.1 km there is a sharp left-hand bend in the road. Continue, and for the next ? km the road, which is tree-lined, passes through marsh, with a deep channel on the right-hand side. This area regularly produces Tricolored and other herons, Northern Harrier (winter only), and Belted Kingfisher, while **Gundlach's Hawk** has been recorded on a number of occasions. At the end there is a gate and a small fish farm. This area supports Pied-billed Grebe, Limpkin, Purple Gallinule, both species of waterthrush, **Zapata Wren** (which has apparently only recently colonized the area; its obvious song cannot previously have gone unnoticed by the many birders familiar with the species' vocalizations that have visited the area), and **Zapata Sparrow**, while both Swainson's Warbler and Lincoln's Sparrow have been recorded in winter. Turba also has the capacity to produce surprises; in recent years both American Goldfinch and American Black Duck have been reported (full details of the latter, which is the only Cuban record, are still unpublished).

Continue, on foot, beyond the fish farm. There are deep channels on both sides of the broad track; this area is superb for rallids and 'canned' tapes will be of real benefit. **Zapata Rail** has been heard on a number of occasions, all since 1997, in this area (and is

apparently regular), while Yellow-breasted Crake, Spotted and King Rails are also all recorded with some frequency. Nonetheless a considerable degree of fortune will be required to see any of these, with the exception of King Rail. Sora is also frequently heard in winter, and American Bittern can be expected to occur during the same season. In addition to species previously mentioned, the area just beyond the fish farm also harbours Anhinga, Least Bittern, many ducks (Blue-winged Teal is probably most frequent), passage shorebirds in season and if the water level is sufficiently low (both yellowlegs and Solitary Sandpiper are relatively common), hirundines (particularly during passage periods), and **Red-shouldered Blackbird**.

It should be noted that, at the time of writing (March 2001), access to this area had largely been suspended. Local guides can advise on the current situation, but should this situation persist it may still be worth visiting the crocodile breeding area, on the west side of the main road to Playa Larga, south of the entrance track to Turba. Access to this area can usually be obtained at the gate. By walking the dykes between the ponds you will have chances of both **Fernandina's Flicker** and **Red-shouldered Blackbird**, although the number of waterbirds in this area is considerably less than at Turba. Masked Duck may also be found here

#### **La Turba Bird List**

93 sp., including 21 target species.

Snail Kite

Northern Harrier

**Gundlach's Hawk**

Northern Caracara

King Rail

Sora

**Zapata Rail**

Yellow-breasted Crake

Spotted Rail

**Cuban Pygmy Owl**

Antillean Nighthawk

Chuck-will's-widow

**Cuban Nightjar**

**Cuban Green Woodpecker**

**Fernandina's Flicker**

**Yellow-headed Warbler**

Indigo Bunting

**Zapata Sparrow**

**Red-shouldered Blackbird**

**Cuban Blackbird**

**Cuban Oriole**

**Site 1.13: Peralta**

### **Access/Birding Sites**

Beside the highway between Havana and Santa Clara, Peralta is located at km 122, or from Zapata towards Havana it is approximately 20 km west of the entrance road to Zapata. Being within the national park, a guide is necessary to visit this area. At the start of the trail there is a reddish iron gate (which indicates the entrance). The trail is c.2.5 km long, and a broad selection of forest species, including several endemics, can be found along its length: **Fernandina's Flicker**, **Cuban Trogon**, **Yellow-headed Warbler**, **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, **Cuban Blackbird**, **Red-shouldered Blackbird** all occur, among others. Most of these are very common, the trogon even occurs in low trees within the more swampy areas. The best area for the flicker is around the Royal Palms at the entrance of the trail, but it is also frequently recorded along the first 500 m of the trail and around the large, obvious clearing reached after 1 km. This area is also good for both blackbirds. Migrant warblers, particularly Common Yellowthroat and both waterthrushes are particularly common in the dense, frequently waterlogged, trackside vegetation. Also, by walking this trail early in the morning (which we recommend, as it is essential to visit this area very early in order to find the key species of the region), it is possible to find Ruddy Quail-dove and **Gray-fronted Quail-dove** feeding on the path. But, the main targets of this area are the three rare endemics of the swamp: **Zapata Wren**, **Zapata Sparrow**, and **Zapata Rail**. After walking c.2 km you will notice the habitat transition, from forest to swamp vegetation. These three species are present only in the swamp, with the best access to the marsh being on the right-hand side of the trail. Just walking into the swamp for c.70 m it is possible to hear and see the wren, although by using a tape it may be possible to bring one to the trail edge. The sparrow can be detected in vegetation along the trail, but also within the swamp. It is very secretive and its slightly buzzing song is low pitched and easily overlooked, but, once learnt, provides an easy clue as to its presence. To find the rail is a very hard work, but there is no doubt that at present this area is the best place to try to find it. Vocalization activity appears to peak during the months of October to January, and any observers with the serious objective of trying to see this species are advised to visit during this period. The marshland is also excellent for **Red-shouldered Blackbird** as well. Visiting this area will be much more productive early in the morning, when all these species are more vocal. At present, about six pairs of wrens occupy this area, and several **Zapata Rails**. Spotted and King Rails are also present.

### **Peralta Bird List**

94 sp., including 22 target species.

Least Bittern

**Gundlach's Hawk**

King Rail

Sora

**Zapata Rail**

Spotted Rail

**Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

**Cuban Parakeet**

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

**Bee Hummingbird**

**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Fernandina's Flicker**  
**Cuban Vireo**  
**Zapata Wren**  
Swainson's Warbler  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
**Zapata Sparrow**  
**Red-shouldered Blackbird**  
**Cuban Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**

#### **Site 1.14: Hato de Jicarita (Hatiguanico River)**

##### **Access/Birding Sites**

This is a wonderful marshland, where it is possible, using a boat, to reach the heart of the swamp. As with other localities situated within the national park, permission and the services of a guide, both of which can be obtained from the Agriculture Ministry office in Playa Larga village, are essential. The locality lies south of the highway between Havana and Cienfuegos, at km 101. Turn south (right if coming from Havana) onto road intersecting the highway near the km post. (There is also a small service area nearby on the north side of the road.) Drive along the paved road for 1 km, before turning left onto a dirt road, and drive for 6 km until you reached its end at a forest guard station. It is possible to rent small boats along the Hatiguanico River here. Just 200 m before the end of the road both **Zapata Wren** and **Zapata Sparrow** can be found in the sawgrass beside the track. **Zapata Rail** has also been heard in this area, and seen and heard in marshland south of the river. **Red-shouldered Blackbird** also occurs around the guard station. A boat trip in this area is always worthwhile, as these offer the opportunity to get close views of Snail Kite, Neotropic Cormorant, many egrets, Rose-throated Parrot, **Gundlach's Hawk**, Northern Jacana, Limpkin, and others, although the main targets will once again be the three local endemics, the wren, sparrow and rail. The marshland habitat located south of the river after 300 m is probably the best area to find these three species.

##### **Hato de Jicarita Bird List**

74 sp., including 17 target species.

Snail Kite  
**Gundlach's Hawk**  
Spotted Rail  
**Bare-legged Owl**  
**Cuban Pygmy-owl**  
Antillean Nighthawk  
**Cuban Nightjar**  
Cuban Emerald

**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Fernandina's Flicker**  
**Zapata Wren**  
Louisiana Waterthrush  
**Zapata Sparrow**  
**Red-shouldered Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**

## **PINAR DEL RÍO PROVINCE**

### **Site 2.1: Guanahacabibes**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

Located 236 miles (380 km) west of Havana, the peninsula has several vegetation formations with dominating semideciduous woods. There is a high species diversity: so far 160 have been reported. Of special interest are **Blue-headed Quail-dove**, Rose-throated Parrot, **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, **Bare-legged Owl**, **Bee Hummingbird**, **Cuban Trogon**, and **Cuban Green Woodpecker**. During the winter, the following migrant species can be found: Northern Parula, Cerulean Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, and Savannah Sparrow. The closest tourist facility is María La Gorda, which is also a good spot for diving.

#### **Bird List for Guanahacabibes**

160 sp., including 35 target species.

**Gundlach's Hawk**  
**Cuban Black Hawk**  
Broad-winged Hawk  
Plain Pigeon  
Key West Quail-dove  
Ruddy Quail-dove  
**Blue-headed Quail-dove**  
Rose-throated Parrot  
Great Lizard-cuckoo  
**Bare-legged Owl**  
**Cuban Pygmy-owl**  
Stygian Owl  
**Cuban Nightjar**  
**Bee Hummingbird**  
**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Cuban Vireo**

Cuban Crow  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
**Cuban Grassquit**  
Chipping Sparrow  
Clay-colored Sparrow  
Lark Sparrow  
Savannah Sparrow  
Grasshopper Sparrow  
Lincoln's Sparrow  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Indigo Bunting  
Painted Bunting  
Bobolink  
**Red-shouldered Blackbird**  
**Cuban Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**  
**Cuban Oriole**

## Site 2.2: La Güira

### Access/Birding Sites

This is a national park, located in Sierra de los Organos, 93 miles (150 km) west of Havana. The closest town is San Diego de los Baños. Main vegetation formations in the area are deciduous woods and pine forests.

There is a restaurant; you can either stay at La Güira overnight, make a day trip there from Soroa, only an hour away, or from Havana, or stay at any of the hotels in San Diego de los Baños, famous for their sulfurous baths. San Diego is only c.7 miles (12 km) from La Güira. About 100 species have been reported from the area.

The four best birdwatching trails at La Güira are close to each other. The first trail runs along the hillside, leaving from the cabins at the right side of the turbine (see map). Along this path you can find **Cuban Solitaire**, detected by its unmistakable song. Keep an eye out for **Cuban Trogon**, Ruddy Quail-dove, Scaly-naped Pigeon, and **Giant Kingbird**. This last species is very difficult to locate. The second path leaves from under a cave, downstairs from the turbine. From here, there are two paths with several intersections. These should be explored carefully for **Blue-headed** and **Gray-fronted Quail-doves**, **Cuban Solitaire**, and kingbirds. Downhill there is an intersection of the main trail where you can quite easily find Western Spindalis, Cuban Bullfinch, Olive-capped Warbler, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Broad-winged Hawk, and even a soaring **Gundlach's Hawk**. Look for flying pigeons: if large, probably they are Scaly-naped Pigeons. There are also smaller paths at both sides of the road; one of them leads to a small creek where Louisiana Waterthrush can be found.

When leaving the cabins downhill, search the low vegetation just beyond the lawn: if by

chance water is dripping on it, up to 16 species can be found foraging here, including rarities such as Swainson's, Hooded, and Kentucky Warblers, and also Ruddy Quail-dove. On the third trail, you may see many warblers: **Yellow-headed** and Olive-capped Warblers, and Red-legged Honeycreeper. On the way back, there is a small bridge. Search this area for **Blue-headed Quail-dove**, Ruddy Quail-dove and Louisiana Waterthrush. Some 30 m from the bridge there is a good trail on the right with plenty of birds.

Leaving the hill where the pine forest is located, turning right if you will drive to Cuevas de los Portales. There breeds Cave Swallows during the months of March to August. The cave is a very good site to find **Cuban Solitaire**, **Cuban Tody**, Scaly-naped Pigeon and several warblers.

Driving back from Cuevas the Los Portales is possible to find **Cuban Grassquit**. At the intersection with the main road where you must turn left to go back to La Guira, if you turn right, and if you walk along this road, and in the pines forest it can be observed.

When driving back from La Güira, about 1 km from the cabins there is a small bridge over a stream; c.50 m before you reach this bridge there is a trail that takes you to the stream. Along this trail it is possible to see species like Ruddy Quail-dove, **Blue-headed Quail-dove**, Louisiana Waterthrush, Worm-eating Warbler, Indigo Bunting among others. After you leave this trail the best in this area to find **Blue-headed Quail-dove** and Key West Quail-dove is to pass through the bridge and drive 200 hundred meters, and just right to the right of the curve is the trail.

On the highway back to Havana, at about km 101 after you leave La Güira, there is a small pond on the right side where Least Bittern and King Rail can be spotted. In the contiguous grass meadows, Northern Bobwhite has been observed.

### **Bird List for La Güira National Park**

113 sp., including 36 target species (includes nearby areas).

Sharp-shinned Hawk

**Gundlach's Hawk**

Broad-winged Hawk

Scaly-naped Pigeon

White-crowned Pigeon

Key West Quail-dove

Ruddy Quail-dove

**Blue-headed Quail-dove**

**Gray-fronted Quail Dove**

**Bare-legged Owl**

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

Stygian Owl

Antillean Nighthawk

**Cuban Nightjar**

Antillean Palm-swift

Cuban Emerald  
**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Fernandina's Flicker**  
**Cuban Vireo**  
Cuban Martin  
Cave Swallow  
**Cuban Solitaire**  
Olive-capped Warbler  
Worm-eating Warbler  
Swainson's Warbler  
Louisiana Waterthrush  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
Red-legged Honeycreeper  
Cuban Bullfinch  
**Cuban Grassquit**  
Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
Eastern Meadowlark  
**Cuban Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**  
Chestnut Mannikin

## **CIEGO DE ÁVILA PROVINCE**

### **Site 3.1: Cayo Coco**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

The second-largest key in Cuba (recently connected to the mainland by a rock-fill road). Located c.43 miles (70 km) northwest of Morón, it is mostly covered by deciduous forests; there are also mangroves, coastal shrubs, patches of grass, and lagoons. A total of over 200 species has been reported, including many Cuban rarities and several new birds to the entire West Indies region, although the most important species to visiting birders are Ruddy and Key West Quail-doves, a race of Great Lizard-cuckoo, **Cuban Tody**, West Indian Woodpecker, **Cuban Green Woodpecker**, Northern Flicker, **Cuban Gnatcatcher**, a race of **Zapata Sparrow**, Western Spindalis and Cuban Bullfinch. There are many waders and one of the largest groups of American Flamingo. In fall Merlin and Peregrine Falcon are not uncommon.

From the Club Tryp Hotel, or any of the other large hotels on the northern shore of Cayo Coco, turn right and drive for c.5 km passing through a roundabout. At a bend in the road there is dirt road off to the right (beneath a sign 'Cueva el Jabali'). Continue along this road for 2 km, and where is the intersection of two dirty roads, both are good for the **Zapata Sparrow** and **Oriente Warbler**. Another interesting location is driving straight from the Jabali when you reach the end, there is a parking lot where the cave is located. Surrounding this area there is a trail that goes into the forest where Key West Quail-dove



is not hard to see. Also in this area its good for **Oriente Warbler**, **Cuban Green Woodpecker** and several migrants. Another site is returning back from there are ponds to the left just a 100 meters before the curve in front of the ocean, also just to the left of this curve there is a sandy track, that when you reach the end turn left and walk along the sea shore for 40 m, and turn left onto a narrow sandy track through the mangrove which will shortly bring you to a pond.

Another pond can be reached by taking the main road to Cayo Guillermo, and turning left before you reach the sign for Flamingo Beach; this track will take you to another pond where there may many ducks in season, including **West Indian Whistling-duck**.

Any trail that take you to the forest or to mangrove is good for birding.

### **Bird List for Cayo Coco**

204 sp., including 33 target species.

Roseate Spoonbill  
American Flamingo  
West Indian Whistling-duck  
Red-breasted Merganser  
**Gundlach's Hawk**  
**Cuban Black Hawk**  
Northern Caracara  
Merlin  
Peregrine Falcon  
Clapper Rail  
Sora  
Key West Quail-dove  
Mangrove Cuckoo  
Great Lizard-cuckoo  
Barn Owl  
**Bare-legged Owl**  
Burrowing Owl  
Chuck-will's-widow  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
Northern Flicker  
**Cuban Vireo**  
Yellow-throated Vireo  
Cuban Martin  
**Cuban Gnatcatcher**  
Worm-eating Warbler  
Swainson's Warbler  
**Oriente Warbler**  
Red-legged Honeycreeper  
Western Spindalis

Summer Tanager  
Cuban Bullfinch  
**Zapata Sparrow**  
**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 3.2: Cayo Paredón Grande**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

From Cayo Coco you can reach Cayo Paredón Grande by turning left at the entrance to the Club Tryp Hotel and driving along the main paved road. Turn left at the second roundabout, and pass through a construction area. Turn left onto the wider road and keep straight ahead until reaching a junction, where you should turn left and continue straight ahead again to the key. Your destination will soon become recognizable in the distance due to its black-and-yellow painted lighthouse. Park by the lighthouse and walk along the trail to the right as far as the beach (1 km). Well over 100 species have been reported in the area including **Piping Plover** (among small numbers of other shorebirds also present along the beach), **Thick-billed Vireo** (of the recently described endemic subspecies *cubensis*) and **Bahama Mockingbird** (very rare in this area) among them. There is a lighthouse where during the fall migration many North American warblers can be spotted. The potential for vagrants is high on this isolated cay; several scarce migrants are included in the list below, and, in April 2001, the first Bahama Woodstar to be reported from Cuba was claimed in this area (this record awaits documentation). It is also an excellent area for Mangrove Cuckoo, **Cuban Gnatcatcher**, **Oriente Warbler** (both common and easily located, especially with a tape) and, among seabirds, Brown Booby.

#### **Bird List for Cayo Paredón Grande**

116 sp., including 11 target species.

#### **Cuban Black Hawk**

Northern Caracara

Clapper Rail

Piping Plover

Mangrove Cuckoo

Chuck-will's-widow

#### **Cuban Green Woodpecker**

Thick-billed Vireo

#### **Cuban Gnatcatcher**

Bahama Mockingbird

#### **Oriente Warbler**

North of Cayo Coco there are three small rocky keys, called **Los Felipes**, where several species of terns breed in the summer. There are several hotels to stay at in Cayo Coco.

### **Site 3.3: Cayo Guillermo**

Situated 34 km north west to Cayo Coco is Cayo Guillermo. To reach this key has to turn left in the first roundabout and drive straight ahead. This is a sandy key with xerophitic vegetation and lots of palms *Coccothrinax* sp. In this habitat is found the Bahama Mockingbird.

### **Bird List for Cayo Guillermo**

86 sp., including several target species.

Bahama Mockingbird

Shorebirds

## **CAMAGÜEY PROVINCE**

### **Site 4.1: Sierra de Najasa**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

Located about 70 km southeast of Camagüey city, this is a protected area of open country with many palm groves; and a mixture of deciduous woods at the foothills of low elevations. About 120 species of birds have been reported: **Plain Pigeon**, **Cuban Parakeet**, Rose-throated Parrot, **Bare-legged Owl**, **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, **Cuban Trogon**, **Cuban Tody**, three species of woodpeckers and **Giant Kingbird**. In two or three areas north, south and east of Camagüey (Miguel, El Jardín, Tayabito) the very rare and localized **Cuban Palm Crow** can be observed.

To reach Najasa drive south from Camagüey city, taking a road known as Carretera de Santa Cruz, which can be accessed by turning left from the Hotel Camagüey and left again near a gas station (the latter is signed). Drive south for approximately 43 km. After 30 km road conditions deteriorate significantly and it will be necessary to reduce your speed. Turn right at km 43, by a bus stop, following a sign to Vertientes. Drive a further 22 km to the village of Cuatro Caminos, stopping just 1 km beyond Carretera de Santa Cruz at a large area of palms on both sides of the road, where **Plain Pigeon**, **Cuban Parakeet**, **Cuban Palm Crow** and Cuban Crow are all possible. Upon arriving at Cuatro Caminos, turn right at the first intersection (by a cup-shaped cafeteria) and drive for a further 9 km until you reach the village of Arroyo Hondo (also known as Reparto Manolin). Shortly after reaching the village there is a junction. Good birding can be had in this area. The Najasa reserve area (El Belén) can be reached by turning left; the entrance is immediately beyond the row of houses on the left-hand side of the road.

Another way to reach Najasa is to drive to the east by the Carretera Central in direction to Las Tunas Province. When you pass the sign that shows the limit of the city has to drive 13 more km. Where you reach a gas station on a small hill, turn right and drive to Cuatro Caminos, and keep going straight until you reach Arroyo Hondo.

### **Bird List for Sierra de Najasa**

124 sp., including 21 target species.

West Indian Whistling-duck  
Sharp-shinned Hawk  
**Gundlach's Hawk**  
Plain Pigeon  
**Cuban Parakeet**  
Rose-throated Parrot  
Barn Owl  
**Cuban Pygmy-owl**  
**Bare-legged Owl**  
Chuck-will's-widow  
**Cuban Nightjar**  
**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Fernandina's Flicker**  
Giant Kingbird  
**Cuban Vireo**  
**Cuban Palm Crow**  
Cuban Crow  
Cuban Martin  
**Cuban Grassquit**

## MAIN BIRDING SITES IN CUBA

### ZAPATA PENINSULA

Located in southern Matanzas Province, just over 150 km from Havana, the peninsula occupies an area of 4,700 km<sup>2</sup> and supports several different natural habitats, including semideciduous forest, swampy forest, mangrove swamp, cactus communities, dry forest, mudflats, and extensive wetlands, including salt pans and fresh- and brackish water marshes. Almost 70% of the region is covered by a dense layer of organic mud; the drier sections of Zapata have abundant limestone.

The journey to Playa Larga from Havana takes c.2.5 hours. At km 142 on the freeway between Havana and the east of the island, turn right (south) towards Playa Larga (the turn is clearly signposted to Zapata), and the resort is located 29 km along this road.

Most birders will prefer to stay in one of the two comfortable tourist hotels in the region, Playa Larga, or the more distant Playa Girón, which is 32 km further east along the coast. Both possess similar facilities, including a swimming pool and easy access to the beach, and all of the sites listed in this chapter can be comfortably visited within a day from either. Indeed, at most times of year it is sufficiently hot (and bird activity insufficiently high) to make returning to hotel for lunch and a short siesta an attractive and feasible option. If you prefer to remain all day in the field, stock up with provisions at the buffet breakfasts or purchase some snacks at one of the resort's on-site shops. Accommodation at both resorts is in small, but comfortable, en suite private chalets. Playa Larga is better positioned for easy access to most of the main birding sites in the Zapata region, and is especially convenient for visiting either Santo Tomás, or the two sites in the northern part of the swamp—Peralta and Hato de Jicarita—as a pre-dawn start is essential for visiting all of these localities. Nonetheless, Playa Girón still makes an excellent base, and has the advantage of being positioned close to the endemic-rich sites of Bermejas and Punta Perdiz. Both Playa Larga and Playa Girón offer reasonable birding on site, and both resorts possess an easily seen pair of Stygian Owls within their grounds. Another, less convenient, but scenically very attractive, option is to stay at Guamá, within Treasure Lake, which offers many excellent birding opportunities, but is distinctly less ideal in several other respects, especially if you intend to do much night birding, as all transportation to and from the hotel is by boat. In addition, the on-site facilities and restaurant are not of the same standard as those at the other two resorts mentioned above. Finally, there is the option to stay in private accommodation, in government licensed guesthouses (private homes), in Playa Girón, Playa Larga or even Jagüey Grande, although we would not recommend the latter, except for its close proximity to Peralta and Hato de Jicarita. Such accommodation usually costs \$15–25 per person per night, while meals can usually be obtained for a few dollars extra. Most such accommodation is clearly indicated, but some of those in Playa Larga are best found by asking for directions from local people. Staying with a Cuban family in this manner provides some insight into local life, but is not necessarily a lot cheaper than staying in one of the hotels. Nonetheless, it probably offers greater flexibility and most travelers to Cuba who try to break the habit of staying in hotels enjoy the experience.

We recommend that visitors will wish to spend a minimum of four or five days in the Zapata region. In the following pages we present a near-exhaustive list of localities liable to be of interest to birders, but those with limited time we suggest should concentrate on the following, most important areas: at least one of Santo Tomás, Peralta or Hato de Jicarita, as well as Los Sabálos, Bermejas, Pálpite, Mera, El Cenote and Los Canales. These areas should offer the keen birder the opportunity to find most of the endemics and specialities of the region.

### **ZAPATA'S OTHER WILDLIFE**

In addition to the birdlife, among other endemic fauna perhaps the most impressive is the Cuban Crocodile *Crocodylus rhombifer*. The likelihood of finding this species in the wild is very low, with the best locality being the river Hatiguanico, located near Hato de Jicarita (site 1.19), although the only sure place to see one is at the Boca crocodile farm, not in the wild. The American Crocodile *C. acutus* also occurs. The endemic Cuban ground lizard *Leiocephalus cubensis*, two unique subspecies of the Cuban giant anole *Anolis luteogularis*, as well as a subspecies of another endemic lizard *Leiocephalus stictigaster* all occur in Zapata. The peninsula harbors yet another four endemic species of anoles, three endemic snakes, including the Cuban racer *Alsophis cantherigerus* and Cuba's giant boa *Epicrates angulifer*.

There are also a few native mammals. Several species of bats spend the day resting in hollow trees and caves. Hutias are comparatively large, largely tree-dwelling rodents. Three species inhabit Zapata, the two largest are fairly common but the smallest, the Dwarf Hutia *Capromys garridoi*, is extremely rare and on the verge of extinction.

During March and April, the road between Playa Larga and Playa Girón can be virtually covered with crabs *Geocarcinus ruricola* migrating from inland forests to the sea, where they lay their eggs. They are variously coloured red, black and pale cream. So abundant are these creatures that nine out of ten rustlings that you hear on the forest floor can be traced to a crab.

### **ZAPATA'S BIRDS**

Zapata Peninsula is, undoubtedly, the best birdwatching area in Cuba, and possibly the entire Caribbean region. It supports all but four of Cuba's 23 avian endemics, as well as many other native species, both winter residents and transients, along with several summer and spring visitors (which breed in Cuba but return south in fall). Over 205 species have been reported in the area. We have selected a number of different locations for inclusion here, based on several criteria, including relatively high diversities of birds, easy access, and greatest variety of habitats.

Several species that reside in Zapata also occur on other West Indian islands, and keen life listers may be tempted to almost ignore those species they have already seen elsewhere in the West Indies, or even North America. In some cases it is as well to note that future taxonomic revisions, based on differences in vocalizations, behavior, genetic make-up, or morphological features, may result in what is currently considered a race or subspecies being regarded as a separate species. A good example of this, which has already been

resolved, is the Greater Antillean Pewee, found in Cuba, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Hispaniola. The Cuban and Bahamian populations have been reclassified as one species, consisting of two races, here called Crescent-eyed Pewee, while those populations in Jamaica and Hispaniola are now considered separate species. Incipient 'splits' include the Greater Antillean Oriole (formerly known as the Black-cowled Oriole), Gray-headed Quail-dove and Eastern Meadowlark. Even the apparently familiar should not be ignored!

## Site 1.1: Playa Larga

### Access/Birding Sites

This resort is that most commonly used by birdwatchers staying in Zapata. The complex consists of four streets with chalets on each side, a restaurant, bar, nightclub, and several small souvenir shops. The restaurant is just a few meters from the beach. The closest town is Jagüey Grande, c. 30 km to the north. Access is straightforward from the main freeway between Havana and the east of the island. Turn south at the crossroads at km 142 on this road, just beyond a Rumbos bar with a boat beside it, which is on the same side of the road as the exit. After approximately 1 km take a right-hand turn (the first one along this road) just ahead of a large citrus processing factory. Continue south along the road, passing the Boca resort and through Pálpite village, to Playa Larga village where the road bends to the left. The entrance to the hotel is on the right, a couple of hundred metres further along the road.

There are several tall trees in Playa Larga resort, and the forest is very close on the opposite of the main road. Within and just outside the resort look for Yellow-crowned Night-heron, Common Black-hawk, Zenaida Dove, Rose-throated Parrot, Antillean Palm-swift, Cuban Emerald, **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, West Indian Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, **Cuban Martin** (summer), Cave Swallow, Black-whiskered Vireo (from mid-March), Cape May Warbler (winter and spring), Cuban Crow, Greater Antillean Grackle, **Cuban** and Tawny-shouldered Blackbirds, Greater Antillean Oriole, and others. Coconut trees may harbor Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Yellow-throated Warbler in winter and spring. The most important feature of the Playa Larga avifauna is the pair of Stygian Owls that can be reliably found in the area. They are best searched for on dark nights, when the moon is either new or in its first quarter, at which times the male may be heard calling from several areas within the compound, although the isolated large tree behind the swimming pool and those tall trees close to the restaurant are consistently favored. Later in the lunar cycle, when the nights are not so dark, the birds may be very elusive or even impossible to find; the same holds true for the pair at Playa Girón.

It also pays to stroll along the shore among the sea grape trees, where you may find **Cuban Trogon**, **Cuban Green Woodpecker**, Northern Flicker, and several species of shorebirds, including Ruddy Turnstone and Spotted Sandpiper. Situated at the head of the Bay of Pigs, Playa Larga does very occasionally attract seabirds, such as terns and gulls, including, in 1999, Cuba's second Franklin's Gull. Less than a 0.5 miles from the cabins, along the coast towards Playa Girón, is a huge *Ficus* tree. Its blossoms may attract several species, including Red-legged Honeycreeper, which, in Cuba, is most easily seen at La

Güira, in Pinar del Río Province, but is usually very rare elsewhere. Also, Bee Hummingbird has been observed at these flowers.

Traveling east along the road towards Playa Girón, you will notice American Kestrels, every 2–3 km, perched on the wires or atop telephone poles; most are winter visitors from North America. Cuban resident birds are often found near habitations and are much tamer, often permitting close approach. Also on these roadside wires, watch for widespread species such as Belted Kingfisher, Mourning and White-winged Doves, Gray and Loggerhead Kingbirds, and Northern Mockingbird.

### **Playa Larga Bird List**

112 sp., including 14 target species (endemic species in bold).

**Gundlach's Hawk**

**Cuban Black Hawk**

**Cuban Parakeet**

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

Stygian Owl

**Cuban Nightjar**

Antillean Nighthawk

**Bee Hummingbird**

**Cuban Trogon**

**Cuban Tody**

**Cuban Green Woodpecker**

**Cuban Vireo**

Cuban Crow

**Yellow-headed Warbler**

**Cuban Blackbird**

**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.2: Mera**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

Approximately 100 m southeast of Soplillar (see above for directions to this village), take a narrow road on the left (just before a cattle grid), and drive about 150 m until you reach a fork. Walk the trail on the right, which initially passes through a gate and then semideciduous forest holding **Blue-headed** and **Gray-fronted Quail-doves**, Yellow-throated and White-eyed Vireos, **Cuban Vireo**, Blue-winged, Worm-eating and Palm Warblers, American Redstart, and Yellow-faced Grassquit. Once you reach an open area with scattered palm trees, where the ground can be very wet, you also have a chance of **Cuban Parakeet**, Rose-throated Parrot, **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, **Bare-legged Owl**, and **Bee Hummingbird**. Also, this is one of the best areas to find **Gundlach's Hawk** and **Fernandina's Flicker** during the breeding season. The latter is best searched for among the trees surrounding the final section of trail before the open area. You should also find



West Indian Woodpecker and **Cuban Blackbird**. When returning, look for Crested Caracara among the high and scattered *Ceiba* trees.

### **Mera Bird List**

102 sp., including 22 target species.

#### **Gundlach's Hawk**

Key West Quail-dove

#### **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

Ruddy Quail-dove

#### **Blue-headed Quail-dove**

#### **Cuban Parakeet**

Rose-throated Parrot

Great Lizard-cuckoo

#### **Bare-legged Owl**

#### **Cuban Pygmy-owl**

Stygian Owl

Antillean Nighthawk

#### **Cuban Nightjar**

#### **Bee Hummingbird**

#### **Cuban Trogon**

#### **Cuban Tody**

#### **Cuban Green Woodpecker**

#### **Fernandina's Flicker**

#### **Cuban Vireo**

#### **Yellow-headed Warbler**

#### **Cuban Blackbird**

#### **Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.3: La Majagua**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This spot is located about 5 km southeast of Soplillar on the left-hand side of the road. You will have to walk into forest that is flooded during the rainy season. This is a difficult trail, and it is recommended that you visit it with an experienced guide. Follow the trail for c.100 m to an open area. Most of the herons can be found here, as well as Blue-winged Teal, Northern Jacana, Limpkin, Common Moorhen, and American Coot. Among the scattered trees and shrubs, look for **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**, **Cuban Parakeet**, and several species of warblers and vireos.

### **Site 1.4: Molina**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This is an area of semideciduous forest c.2 km southeast of Soplillar. Look for a narrow dirt road on the right-hand side just before you reach an area of open country that has

been fenced. Drive the dirt track for about 500 m and then walk. This is an excellent area for **Blue-headed Quail-dove**.

### **La Majagua and Molina Bird List**

94 sp., including 21 target species

#### **Gundlach's Hawk**

Key West Quail-dove

#### **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

Ruddy Quail-dove

#### **Blue-headed Quail-dove**

#### **Cuban Parakeet**

Rose-throated Parrot

Great Lizard-cuckoo

Barn Owl

#### **Bare-legged Owl**

#### **Cuban Pygmy-owl**

Stygian Owl

Antillean Nighthawk

#### **Cuban Nightjar**

#### **Bee Hummingbird**

#### **Cuban Trogon**

#### **Cuban Tody**

#### **Cuban Green Woodpecker**

#### **Fernandina's Flicker**

#### **Cuban Vireo**

#### **Yellow-headed Warbler**

### **Site 1.5: Los Sábalos**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

An area of semideciduous forest c.15 km southeast of Playa Larga. To reach the area from Playa Larga, drive along the coast road towards Playa Girón and take the second paved road on the left. Drive due north for 5 km, passing through a small village, known as Los Hondones, and subsequently past a fenced-off, small military post. Follow the road to the right until you reach an intersection, marked by three houses. Turn right, and after 800 m take the first trail on the left that enters the forest (there are palm trees marking the entrance). Proceed along this trail, turn right and continue straight ahead until you reach the first left-hand turn.

The tall trees here are probably the best place in Cuba to find **Bee Hummingbird**, though this entire area is excellent for the species. At this point, you may either continue further or return via the same route. A few meters beyond the left-hand turn, there is a track off to the right. Taking this will bring you back to the main, driveable, road, and by turning right

you will reach your starting point. You may also find that it pays to walk even further along the principal track inside the forest, returning via either of the routes mentioned. In addition to **Bee Hummingbird**, the area holds many other sought-after species and we recommend that visiting birders make this one of their principal destinations within Zapata. The rare **Gundlach's Hawk** may also be encountered, as well as Broad-winged Hawk, **Cuban Parakeet**, all four quail-doves (the two rarer species are frequently seen), Great Lizard-cuckoo, Cuban Emerald, **Cuban Tody**, **Cuban Trogon**, three species of woodpeckers, Red-legged Thrush, **Cuban Vireo**, Blue-winged, Worm-eating and **Yellow-headed Warblers**, Cuban Bullfinch, **Cuban Grassquit**, and Indigo Bunting. Another means of reaching the area is to take the road that passes through Soplillar, Molina, and La Majagua. Thereafter you cross a bridge over a canal, then turn right and subsequently left, before you eventually reach the previously mentioned house at the intersection of the two roads.

### **Los Sábalos Bird List**

88 sp., including 12 target species.

#### **Gundlach's Hawk**

#### **Gray-fronted Quail-dove \**

Ruddy Quail-dove

#### **Blue-headed Quail-dove**

#### **Cuban Parakeet**

#### **Cuban Pygmy-owl**

#### **Cuban Nightjar**

#### **Bee Hummingbird**

#### **Cuban Trogon**

#### **Cuban Tody**

#### **Cuban Green Woodpecker**

#### **Cuban Vireo**

### **Site 1.6: Los Canales**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This is a complex of canals, created to irrigate rice plantations in the district of Aguada de Pasajeros, and lagoons. Many aquatic species can be observed in the area, as well as along the edges of the road that runs parallel to it. On the opposite side of the road are extensive stands of palm trees, bushes, and sawgrass, offering a good opportunity to see many different bird species.

To reach the first canal, follow the previous directions to Los Sábalos from Playa Larga, taking the only unpaved road on the left, or follow the road that passes through Soplillar, Molina, La Majagua, etc. The canal is reached at the end of this road; go over the bridge, turn left, and follow the road until you reach open pastures, where some cattle and the first rice fields are found. These pastures are approximately 30 minutes from the canal bridge. Proceed to explore as much of the wetland complex as time permits. It is worth

checking as many areas as you can, especially during passage periods and when water levels are lower, when there may be many shorebirds using the lagoons and fields.

Species to watch for during the drive include Masked and Ruddy Ducks, herons, Least Bittern, both cormorants, Snail Kite, **Gundlach's Hawk**, Northern Harrier, Osprey, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, coots and gallinules, Sora, Northern Jacana, Common Snipe, Caspian, Royal and Forster's Terns, Mourning Dove, Barn and Short-eared Owls, Antillean Nighthawk, Belted Kingfisher, Tree Swallow, **Red-shouldered Blackbird**, Eastern Meadowlark, Indigo and Painted Buntings, Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrows. The open pastures are the best spots for finding migrant sparrows. During the rainy season both King Rail and Least Bittern are frequently observed.

### **Los Canales Bird List**

124 sp., including 6 target species.

Northern Harrier

**Gundlach's Hawk**

Red-tailed Hawk

Northern Caracara

**Red-shouldered Blackbird**

**Cuban Blackbird**

### **Site 1.7: El Cenote**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This limestone-based semideciduous forest area is c.18 km southeast of Playa Larga and on the left-hand-side of the road. It is well signposted, 'Cueva de los Peces' (Cave of the Fishes) and can be popular with tourists, particularly in the hottest part of the day, as there is a restaurant on site. Most visitors congregate around the large natural pool, which is primarily fresh water but with an underground channel connecting it to the sea that has led to its use by many coral fishes. In the surrounding woodland, a variety of forest species can be found including **Blue-headed Quail-dove**, which regularly visits the restaurant in mid-afternoons (at the time of writing this may be considered the most regular location for the species in Cuba). The staff at the restaurant know the species by the Cuban name Paloma Perdiz, and should be able to give you up-to-date news on when, or if, it is being seen. Also search this area for Swainson's Warbler, Cuban Bullfinch, and Western Spindalis. Migrant warblers and other Nearctic visitors can be common in season, and other endemics and near-endemics that are regularly found in this area include **Bare-legged Owl** (a pair has occupied a tree directly between the pool and open-air eating area for several years), Cuban Emerald (which has even nested inside the restaurant), **Cuban Green Woodpecker**, Crescent-eyed Pewee and **Cuban Blackbird**. Ask directions to the refuse tip, which is situated in a small, very degraded area of woodland near a tiny compound directly behind the main restaurant building, and reached by a short, narrow trail; this area has often held **Blue-headed** and Key West Quail-doves, and on occasion Ruddy Quail-dove, in recent years, but is increasingly disturbed.

### **El Cenote Bird List**

86 sp., including 18 target species

Key West Quail-dove

**Blue-headed Quail-dove**

Rose-throated Parrot

Great Lizard-cuckoo

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

**Bare-legged Owl**

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

**Cuban Trogon**

**Cuban Tody**

**Cuban Green Woodpecker**

**Cuban Vireo**

**Yellow-headed Warbler**

Western Spindalis

Summer Tanager

Cuban Bullfinch

Tawny-shouldered Blackbird

**Cuban Blackbird**

**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.8: Bermejas**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

An open area with royal and cabbage palms, bushes and shrubbery, 12 km north of Playa Girón. This is *the* place to look for **Fernandina's Flicker**, as well as all of the other woodpecker species known from Cuba (with the exception of the Ivory-billed). Cuba's two endemic owls, **Cuban Nightjar**, **Cuban Parakeet**, White-winged Dove, and all four quail-dove species (the two rarer species are frequently encountered) can also be seen here, as well as many Nearctic warblers, **Cuban Trogon**, **Cuban Tody**, Great Lizard-cuckoo, **Cuban Grassquit**, and most species of flycatcher found in Cuba.

Bermejas is situated north of Playa Girón on the paved road towards Cienfuegos. After approximately 8 km bear right within the village of Helechal and after another 4.1 km you reach the settlement of Bermejas. The best way to find this place is to ask local people, because the entrance is a left turn by the road, practically in front of the first house in the village on the left, if driving north. On entering the woods, and before reaching the area with cabbage palms, look for **Bee Hummingbird** among the roadside bushes and flowers. Just a few metres from the road the track reaches a clearing. **Cuban Parakeet** is often seen around here and over the adjacent village in the evening. Go left at the clearing and upon re-entering forest, take the first track on the left. This area, including the semi-cleared area to the right of the trail is excellent for many hole-nesting species including Rose-throated Parrot (especially in early morning and late afternoon), **Bare-legged Owl**, **Cuban Trogon**, and Northern and **Fernandina's Flickers**, as well as sometimes holding Bee Hummingbird and, regularly, **Cuban Tody**, **Cuban Vireo** and **Yellow-headed Warbler**. It is possible to continue, beyond the semi-cleared area, along this track for some distance, but the first 500 m are best. Re-trace your steps to the first clearing and

then take the right-hand trail. Formerly, this immediately entered very productive dry, semideciduous forest, but the first several hundred meters were cleared in 2000. Proceed, however, and you will enter woodland rich in wintering warblers, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and with near-abundant **trogons**, **todies** and Great Lizard-cuckoos. After a relatively short distance another, much larger clearing is reached. This area is superb for **Fernandina's Flicker** and other woodpeckers, as well as **Bare-legged Owl**. **Cuban Grassquit** was formerly regular in this area but has been much less frequent in recent years. It is worth continuing beyond the clearing, even if you have found all of your target species, the forest in this area can be alive with wintering North American migrants in season, and many of the endemics are easily found here. **Blue-headed Quail-dove** and **Gray-fronted Quail-dove** are regularly seen along this trail. Eventually the trail reaches yet another clearing, which contains a waterlogged area surrounding a clump of trees. This part of the region is especially good for icterids, and may occasionally produce waterbirds.

Back at the main road, and if visiting the area at dusk, take the first right-hand turn when proceeding north through the village, by a small shop, and follow this through the houses to a small clearing in woodland. This, and many, other areas around Bermejas is a good area for **Cuban Nightjar**.

Another area recommended by visiting birders, but not visited by us, can be reached by continuing northeast beyond Bermejas for 2.4 km. At this point take a turn to the right and proceed a further 4 km to a small village beyond which the paved road ends after a further 1 km. The trail beyond the end of the road proceeds through yet more limestone-based dry woodland with opportunities for quail-doves, including **Blue-headed**, as well as **Gundlach's Hawk** and **Cuban Parakeet**. By taking a short, 250 m, trail between the houses, to the west of the village, an area of palms that, at least formerly, supported **Fernandina's Flicker** can be reached. Anyone having real problems with the latter species can also try areas even further north of Bermejas, along the main road towards Cienfuegos. Stop in likely areas with tall palms and suitable nesting holes.

### **Bermejas Bird List**

111 sp., including 23 target species.

#### **Gundlach's Hawk**

Key West Quail-dove

#### **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

Ruddy Quail-dove

#### **Blue-headed Quail-dove**

#### **Cuban Parakeet**

Rose-throated Parrot

#### **Cuban Parakeet**

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Great Lizard-cuckoo

Cuban Pygmy-owl

Antillean Nighthawk

#### **Cuban Nightjar**

#### **Bee Hummingbird**

**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**West Indian Woodpecker**  
Northern Flicker  
**Fernandina's Flicker**  
**Cuban Vireo**  
Cuban Martin  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.9: La Salina**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

At the beginning of the dry season, usually in late November, this can be one of the most impressive areas for birdwatching in Zapata. At this period the wetlands are drying out, leaving only scattered puddles and stagnant, shallow waters. These are ideal feeding conditions for many waterbirds, which come to feast on the fishes, crustaceans, and other invertebrates. If you are lucky to be in the area at this time, you will have the good fortune of visiting one of the richest birdwatching areas in the West Indies.

Reaching La Salina is very simple. The abandoned salt pans are approximately 26 km south of Buena Ventura, a small village just 3 km west of Playa Larga. From the entrance to the hotel at Playa Larga turn left, as if driving to Havana, and then left again into the village at the obvious bend in the road after a just a couple of hundred meters. Continue through Playa Larga village along the dirt road to Buena Ventura. The route is thereafter obvious. Because La Salina is a national sanctuary, you must first obtain permission to visit from the local authorities, at the Agriculture Ministry office in Playa Larga, and then contact a local guide (this can also be arranged by the park office), who will open the sanctuary gate. The area around the Agriculture Ministry office and nearby police station is an extremely regular locality for Cuban Crow.

For several km beyond Buena Ventura, there are open forests with limestone-rich soils. Many of the commoner resident bird species can be seen in these woods. At the forest edge, look for Common Black-hawk, which is very tame throughout this region. Also possible are **Gundlach's**, Red-tailed or Broad-winged Hawks along the way. At night along this road is a reliable area for **Bare-legged Owl** and **Cuban Nightjar**.

Soon the mangroves give way to more open, savanna-like terrain. Look for Sandhill Crane feeding approximately 200 m off the road, especially in the early morning. Once beyond the savannas, you enter a wetland area very typical of the Zapata region. The greatest diversity of waterbirds occurs in this region. Many species that in other areas are occasionally seen singly, or not at all, can be abundant here including American Flamingo, Roseate Spoonbill, both species of cormorants, Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, many herons including Reddish Egret, Osprey, Caspian Tern, White Ibis, and Wood Stork. With few exceptions, all of the species of sandpipers and plovers listed for Cuba can be abundant. Look for Peregrine Falcon, Clapper Rail, and Yellow Warbler as

well.

The road ends at an abandoned saltpan, where Wilson's Plover breeds. Occasionally American Crocodile may also be seen in this area.

### **La Salina Bird List**

119 sp., including 25 target species

American White Pelican

Neotropic Cormorant

Magnificent Frigatebird

Great Blue Heron (both morphs)

Reddish Egret (both morphs)

Roseate Spoonbill

Wood Stork

American Flamingo

Osprey

**Gundlach's Hawk**

**Cuban Black-Hawk**

Clapper Rail

Wilson's Plover

Caspian Tern

Royal Tern

**Bare-legged Owl**

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

**Cuban Nightjar**

**Cuban Trogon**

**Cuban Tody**

**Cuban Green Woodpecker**

**Cuban Vireo**

**Yellow-headed Warbler**

**Cuban Blackbird**

**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.10: Santo Tomás**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This area is the site where the Spanish naturalist, Fermín Cervera, discovered three of Cuba's most famous endemics—**Zapata Wren**, **Zapata Sparrow**, and **Zapata Rail**—in 1926. Following the official description of these species the area became famous. Surrounding the marsh is deciduous woodland with a high species diversity, including such sought-after birds as **Gundlach's Hawk**, **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**, and **Bee Hummingbird**. As with all localities within the swamp and national park, visiting the protected site north of Santo Tomás requires special permission from the local forestry authorities, the Agriculture Ministry office just north of Playa Larga, and the services of a



guide in this area are also compulsory.

Prior to 1960, it was practically impossible to reach Santo Tomás by land, as it is 36 km northwest of Playa Larga and lies almost in the heart of the swamp. Nowadays things are much easier. To reach the area follow the same initial directions as if going to La Salina, but at the control gate, instead of taking the left-hand road, keep going straight until you reach the village of Santo Tomás. At the local store, known as a 'bodega', take the narrow dirt road to the right (passing an outdoor oven used to make the charcoal), until you reach its end at a canal. Along the road are deciduous woods, but the species inhabiting this area can also be found in other forests in the region. We advise against the temptation to stop en route. It is necessary to reach Santo Tomás during the first hour of daylight, before the wind has picked up in the exposed sawgrass wetlands. Cutting through the marshland is a canal, La Cocodrila, formerly used as a route to extract timber from the woods. The best way to reach the marshes is to take a small boat along the canal, listening for the distant song of **Zapata Wren**, or watching for any **Zapata Sparrows**. The rail is also found in this area, but is practically impossible to see due to its secretive habits. However, at the beginning of its breeding season, in the winter, you may hear its peculiar call. The other way to enter the sawgrass wetland is to walk from the village. During the dry season this route is feasible; during the wet season, however, the water level is high, up to 1.5 m deep in places, and there are many sink holes, difficult to detect when the water level is high. You are almost sure to end up entirely soaked!

Almost all of the rails reported in Cuba occur in these wetlands, and some can usually be heard calling, especially King and Spotted Rails. This is also a good place to find Limpkin, Glossy Ibis, Common Snipe, and both night-herons. Usually Blue-winged Teal, gallinules, Masked and Wood Ducks can be found along the canal, as well as herons, cormorants, and a few species of warblers. Common Yellowthroat, Crescent-eyed Pewee, and kingbirds are rather common, and occasionally **Bee Hummingbird** can be found at the entrance of the canal, along with **Yellow-headed Warbler**, **Cuban Vireo**, Cuban Bullfinch, and **Cuban Tody**. The area is also an excellent one for **Gundlach's Hawk** and **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**. Your guide should have up-to-date information on the whereabouts of these species.

After visiting the sawgrass territory, look for **Bee Hummingbird** among the trees and gardens of the village houses, where it nests. Another target species here is Sandhill Crane, usually best located just to the north of the entrance of the reserve, at the point with road barrier and control guard. Just walk about 70 m along the narrow trail north of the road to watch for the cranes, which are usually present only early in the morning.

### **Santo Tomás Bird List**

112 sp., including 20 target species.

**Gundlach's Hawk**

**Zapata Rail**

Spotted Rail

**Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

**Bare-legged Owl**  
**Cuban Pygmy-owl**  
Stygian Owl  
**Cuban Nightjar**  
Chuck-will's-widow  
**Bee Hummingbird**  
**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Cuban Vireo**  
**Zapata Wren**  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
**Zapata Sparrow**  
**Red-shouldered Blackbird**  
**Cuban Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.11: Guamá**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

This is a tourist resort, consisting of a pleasant-looking group of cabins, restaurants, bars, and bridges on the waters of Treasure Lake (Laguna del Tesoro). There is also an Indian village with stone statues depicting the various activities of the former inhabitants of the region, the Taíno Indians.

Treasure Lake comprises two parts: La Boca and Guamá. The first is located by the main road, 12 km north of Playa Larga and forms the entrance to the lake. There are souvenir shops, a bar, and a restaurant. La Boca's large gardens attract many species of birds, including Rose-throated Parrot, **Cuban Blackbird**, Tawny-shouldered Blackbird, Greater Antillean Grackle, Greater Antillean Oriole, and more occasionally **Red-shouldered Blackbird**. Cuban Crow is regular in the taller trees around the tourist buildings. Within aquatic vegetation, look for Least Bittern, Northern Jacana and gallinules. Behind the restaurant is a large crocodile farm, where about 12,000 crocodiles (most of which are the endemic species *Crocodylus rhombifer*) are raised. **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, as well as warblers, woodpeckers, and kingbirds can be seen around the farm.

After exploring La Boca and its surroundings, take the boat along the canal and across the lake to the tourist resort of Guamá. The trip lasts c.35 minutes, and along the way scan the exotic *Casuarina* (Australian pine) trees that fringe the banks for Osprey, **Gundlach's Hawk** (perhaps best searched for from the tower above the restaurant at Guamá), Peregrine Falcon, Barn Owl, Antillean Palm-swift and Crescent-eyed Pewee.

Once you've reached Guamá, search the trees of the village carefully for a Stygian Owl. Several species of warblers, including Yellow, Cape May, and American Redstart, may also be present. The less desirable Shiny Cowbird may be seen among flocks of

blackbirds in the gardens of Guamá; **Bee Hummingbird** regularly feeds on bottlebrush flowers (and can also be seen at La Boca). Along the interior canals of Guamá several species of waterbirds can be found, including Wood Duck, as well as Snail Kite, which can usually be seen perched at the end of the canal or patrolling the lake in search of snails. Along the lake's edge, look for Neotropic Cormorant and Anhinga. Coots, gallinules, and Pied-billed Grebes are common at certain times of year, especially during the winter months.

### **Guamá, Treasure Lake, and Boca Bird List**

104 sp., including 26 target species.

Osprey

Snail Kite

Northern Harrier

**Gundlach's Hawk**

**Zapata Rail**

Spotted Rail

Northern Jacana

**Cuban Parakeet**

Rose-throated Parrot

Great Lizard-cuckoo

Barn Owl

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

Antillean Nighthawk

**Bee Hummingbird**

West Indian Woodpecker

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

**Cuban Green Woodpecker**

**Fernandina's Flicker**

Northern Flicker

Northern Waterthrush

Louisiana Waterthrush

**Red-shouldered Blackbird**

Tawny-shouldered Blackbird

**Cuban Blackbird**

Greater Antillean Grackle

**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 1.12: Pálpite**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

Approximately 5 km south of Guamá is the village of Pálpite. The woodland surrounding the settlement is excellent for a broad selection of species, including many endemics. Upon entering the village take the first track on the right-hand side of the road, and park, after c.100 m, immediately beyond the last house on the right. Continue on foot into the forest. After just a few metres there is a three-way fork in the trail. By going either

straight ahead (from where a number of side trails emanate, all of which are good for birding, although some are currently a little too overgrown to readily find quail-doves), or left you enter excellent birding habitat, seasonally inundated limestone woodland. In our experience the left-hand track is consistently the most productive, while a trail off to the right, c.1 km along this track, is also worthy of exploration. It is possible to walk for several km along the left-hand trail, but in practice it is probably not worth going more than 2 km along here.

This area is superb for quail-doves, with all four species present. Most numerous are Ruddy and Key West Quail-doves, but **Grey-fronted Quail-dove** is also encountered relatively frequently, while **Blue-headed Quail-dove** is not uncommon, although this is not the best site for the species. Virtually any time of day can be productive, and with a significant slice of good fortune it would be possible to record all four within the course of a day. In practice, a number of visits, at different times of day, will be necessary for an observer to see three or four species. Zenaida Dove is also common in the area. As mentioned, a wide range of endemics and near-endemics occur here, with White-crowned Pigeon, Rose-throated Parrot, **Cuban Trogon**, Crescent-eyed Pewee, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Red-legged Thrush, Black-whiskered Vireo (March–October), **Cuban Vireo**, **Yellow-headed Warbler**, and **Cuban Tody** among the most frequent. **Bee Hummingbird** is regular along the left-hand trail, in tall, dead growth between the main fork and the first track off to the right, while Cuban Emerald is also, unsurprisingly, common. In winter, the area is a haven for many Nearctic migrants, including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Gray Catbird and almost innumerable North American warblers.

Cuban Crow is frequent around the village itself, as is Antillean Nighthawk, in season, and all of Cuba's icterids, with the exception of Red-shouldered Blackbird. The nighthawk should also be searched for over open ground, on both sides of the main road, just north of Pálpite, and along the dirt road east of the village. There is a small roost of Rose-throated Parrot in the village, and Cuban Martin is regularly recorded over the settlement in the early morning and evening. **Cuban Nightjar** and **Cuban Pygmy-owl** are reasonably regular along the first dirt road east of the main road within the village, and may also be found along other trails in the area, while Stygian Owl has been recorded on several occasions within the settlement. Indeed, any trail in the area is worthy of exploration; in April 2000, GMK recorded both rarer quail-doves along a short trail just south and east of the village in the same evening. However, given limited time, observers should concentrate on the trail west of the village that is described above.

### **Pálpite Bird List**

95 sp., including 19 target species.

#### **Gundlach's Hawk**

Key West Quail-dove

#### **Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

Ruddy Quail-dove

#### **Blue-headed Quail-dove**

#### **Cuban Parakeet**

Rose-throated Parrot  
**Cuban Pygmy-owl**  
**Bare-legged Owl**  
Stygian Owl  
**Bee Hummingbird**  
**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Cuban Vireo**  
Cuban Crow  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
**Cuban Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**

### Site 1.12: La Turba

#### Access/Birding Sites

North of Guamá is an often very productive area of marshland known as Turba. If coming from the south, c.5 km beyond Guamá you will note a dirt road off to the left (west). Immediately beyond the dirt road is a compound, with a sign 'Turba, Zapata' and then a police checkpoint, which is rarely manned. If you reach these you need to turn round, although immediately beyond the checkpoint, on the right-hand (east) side of the main road there is a line of royal palms, which has hosted **Fernandina's Flicker**, while the adjacent wet area may produce **Red-shouldered Blackbird**. Other areas, a little further north of the checkpoint, and also to the east of the road, may also be worth checking for the woodpecker.

The road to Turba at first passes through dry woodland. In winter (October to late March) it is worth checking for Chuck-will's-widow, and for **Cuban Nightjar** at any season. After c.1 km there is a sharp left-hand bend in the road. Continue, and for the next ? km the road, which is tree-lined, passes through marsh, with a deep channel on the right-hand side. This area regularly produces Tricolored and other herons, Northern Harrier (winter only), and Belted Kingfisher, while **Gundlach's Hawk** has been recorded on a number of occasions. At the end there is a gate and a small fish farm. This area supports Pied-billed Grebe, Limpkin, Purple Gallinule, both species of waterthrush, **Zapata Wren** (which has apparently only recently colonized the area; its obvious song cannot previously have gone unnoticed by the many birders familiar with the species' vocalizations that have visited the area), and **Zapata Sparrow**, while both Swainson's Warbler and Lincoln's Sparrow have been recorded in winter. Turba also has the capacity to produce surprises; in recent years both American Goldfinch and American Black Duck have been reported (full details of the latter, which is the only Cuban record, are still unpublished).

Continue, on foot, beyond the fish farm. There are deep channels on both sides of the broad track; this area is superb for rallids and 'canned' tapes will be of real benefit. **Zapata Rail** has been heard on a number of occasions, all since 1997, in this area (and is

apparently regular), while Yellow-breasted Crake, Spotted and King Rails are also all recorded with some frequency. Nonetheless a considerable degree of fortune will be required to see any of these, with the exception of King Rail. Sora is also frequently heard in winter, and American Bittern can be expected to occur during the same season. In addition to species previously mentioned, the area just beyond the fish farm also harbours Anhinga, Least Bittern, many ducks (Blue-winged Teal is probably most frequent), passage shorebirds in season and if the water level is sufficiently low (both yellowlegs and Solitary Sandpiper are relatively common), hirundines (particularly during passage periods), and **Red-shouldered Blackbird**.

It should be noted that, at the time of writing (March 2001), access to this area had largely been suspended. Local guides can advise on the current situation, but should this situation persist it may still be worth visiting the crocodile breeding area, on the west side of the main road to Playa Larga, south of the entrance track to Turba. Access to this area can usually be obtained at the gate. By walking the dykes between the ponds you will have chances of both **Fernandina's Flicker** and **Red-shouldered Blackbird**, although the number of waterbirds in this area is considerably less than at Turba. Masked Duck may also be found here

#### **La Turba Bird List**

93 sp., including 21 target species.

Snail Kite

Northern Harrier

**Gundlach's Hawk**

Northern Caracara

King Rail

Sora

**Zapata Rail**

Yellow-breasted Crake

Spotted Rail

**Cuban Pygmy Owl**

Antillean Nighthawk

Chuck-will's-widow

**Cuban Nightjar**

**Cuban Green Woodpecker**

**Fernandina's Flicker**

**Yellow-headed Warbler**

Indigo Bunting

**Zapata Sparrow**

**Red-shouldered Blackbird**

**Cuban Blackbird**

**Cuban Oriole**

**Site 1.13: Peralta**

### **Access/Birding Sites**

Beside the highway between Havana and Santa Clara, Peralta is located at km 122, or from Zapata towards Havana it is approximately 20 km west of the entrance road to Zapata. Being within the national park, a guide is necessary to visit this area. At the start of the trail there is a reddish iron gate (which indicates the entrance). The trail is c.2.5 km long, and a broad selection of forest species, including several endemics, can be found along its length: **Fernandina's Flicker**, **Cuban Trogon**, **Yellow-headed Warbler**, **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, **Cuban Blackbird**, **Red-shouldered Blackbird** all occur, among others. Most of these are very common, the trogon even occurs in low trees within the more swampy areas. The best area for the flicker is around the Royal Palms at the entrance of the trail, but it is also frequently recorded along the first 500 m of the trail and around the large, obvious clearing reached after 1 km. This area is also good for both blackbirds. Migrant warblers, particularly Common Yellowthroat and both waterthrushes are particularly common in the dense, frequently waterlogged, trackside vegetation. Also, by walking this trail early in the morning (which we recommend, as it is essential to visit this area very early in order to find the key species of the region), it is possible to find Ruddy Quail-dove and **Gray-fronted Quail-dove** feeding on the path. But, the main targets of this area are the three rare endemics of the swamp: **Zapata Wren**, **Zapata Sparrow**, and **Zapata Rail**. After walking c.2 km you will notice the habitat transition, from forest to swamp vegetation. These three species are present only in the swamp, with the best access to the marsh being on the right-hand side of the trail. Just walking into the swamp for c.70 m it is possible to hear and see the wren, although by using a tape it may be possible to bring one to the trail edge. The sparrow can be detected in vegetation along the trail, but also within the swamp. It is very secretive and its slightly buzzing song is low pitched and easily overlooked, but, once learnt, provides an easy clue as to its presence. To find the rail is a very hard work, but there is no doubt that at present this area is the best place to try to find it. Vocalization activity appears to peak during the months of October to January, and any observers with the serious objective of trying to see this species are advised to visit during this period. The marshland is also excellent for **Red-shouldered Blackbird** as well. Visiting this area will be much more productive early in the morning, when all these species are more vocal. At present, about six pairs of wrens occupy this area, and several **Zapata Rails**. Spotted and King Rails are also present.

### **Peralta Bird List**

94 sp., including 22 target species.

Least Bittern

**Gundlach's Hawk**

King Rail

Sora

**Zapata Rail**

Spotted Rail

**Gray-fronted Quail-dove**

**Cuban Parakeet**

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

**Bee Hummingbird**

**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Fernandina's Flicker**  
**Cuban Vireo**  
**Zapata Wren**  
Swainson's Warbler  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
**Zapata Sparrow**  
**Red-shouldered Blackbird**  
**Cuban Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**

#### **Site 1.14: Hato de Jicarita (Hatiguanico River)**

##### **Access/Birding Sites**

This is a wonderful marshland, where it is possible, using a boat, to reach the heart of the swamp. As with other localities situated within the national park, permission and the services of a guide, both of which can be obtained from the Agriculture Ministry office in Playa Larga village, are essential. The locality lies south of the highway between Havana and Cienfuegos, at km 101. Turn south (right if coming from Havana) onto road intersecting the highway near the km post. (There is also a small service area nearby on the north side of the road.) Drive along the paved road for 1 km, before turning left onto a dirt road, and drive for 6 km until you reached its end at a forest guard station. It is possible to rent small boats along the Hatiguanico River here. Just 200 m before the end of the road both **Zapata Wren** and **Zapata Sparrow** can be found in the sawgrass beside the track. **Zapata Rail** has also been heard in this area, and seen and heard in marshland south of the river. **Red-shouldered Blackbird** also occurs around the guard station. A boat trip in this area is always worthwhile, as these offer the opportunity to get close views of Snail Kite, Neotropic Cormorant, many egrets, Rose-throated Parrot, **Gundlach's Hawk**, Northern Jacana, Limpkin, and others, although the main targets will once again be the three local endemics, the wren, sparrow and rail. The marshland habitat located south of the river after 300 m is probably the best area to find these three species.

##### **Hato de Jicarita Bird List**

74 sp., including 17 target species.

Snail Kite  
**Gundlach's Hawk**  
Spotted Rail  
**Bare-legged Owl**  
**Cuban Pygmy-owl**  
Antillean Nighthawk  
**Cuban Nightjar**  
Cuban Emerald



**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Fernandina's Flicker**  
**Zapata Wren**  
Louisiana Waterthrush  
**Zapata Sparrow**  
**Red-shouldered Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**

## **PINAR DEL RÍO PROVINCE**

### **Site 2.1: Guanahacabibes**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

Located 236 miles (380 km) west of Havana, the peninsula has several vegetation formations with dominating semideciduous woods. There is a high species diversity: so far 160 have been reported. Of special interest are **Blue-headed Quail-dove**, Rose-throated Parrot, **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, **Bare-legged Owl**, **Bee Hummingbird**, **Cuban Trogon**, and **Cuban Green Woodpecker**. During the winter, the following migrant species can be found: Northern Parula, Cerulean Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, and Savannah Sparrow. The closest tourist facility is María La Gorda, which is also a good spot for diving.

#### **Bird List for Guanahacabibes**

160 sp., including 35 target species.

**Gundlach's Hawk**  
**Cuban Black Hawk**  
Broad-winged Hawk  
Plain Pigeon  
Key West Quail-dove  
Ruddy Quail-dove  
**Blue-headed Quail-dove**  
Rose-throated Parrot  
Great Lizard-cuckoo  
**Bare-legged Owl**  
**Cuban Pygmy-owl**  
Stygian Owl  
**Cuban Nightjar**  
**Bee Hummingbird**  
**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Cuban Vireo**

Cuban Crow  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
**Cuban Grassquit**  
Chipping Sparrow  
Clay-colored Sparrow  
Lark Sparrow  
Savannah Sparrow  
Grasshopper Sparrow  
Lincoln's Sparrow  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Indigo Bunting  
Painted Bunting  
Bobolink  
**Red-shouldered Blackbird**  
**Cuban Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**  
**Cuban Oriole**

## Site 2.2: La Güira

### Access/Birding Sites

This is a national park, located in Sierra de los Organos, 93 miles (150 km) west of Havana. The closest town is San Diego de los Baños. Main vegetation formations in the area are deciduous woods and pine forests.

There is a restaurant; you can either stay at La Güira overnight, make a day trip there from Soroa, only an hour away, or from Havana, or stay at any of the hotels in San Diego de los Baños, famous for their sulfurous baths. San Diego is only c.7 miles (12 km) from La Güira. About 100 species have been reported from the area.

The four best birdwatching trails at La Güira are close to each other. The first trail runs along the hillside, leaving from the cabins at the right side of the turbine (see map). Along this path you can find **Cuban Solitaire**, detected by its unmistakable song. Keep an eye out for **Cuban Trogon**, Ruddy Quail-dove, Scaly-naped Pigeon, and **Giant Kingbird**. This last species is very difficult to locate. The second path leaves from under a cave, downstairs from the turbine. From here, there are two paths with several intersections. These should be explored carefully for **Blue-headed** and **Gray-fronted Quail-doves**, **Cuban Solitaire**, and kingbirds. Downhill there is an intersection of the main trail where you can quite easily find Western Spindalis, Cuban Bullfinch, Olive-capped Warbler, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Broad-winged Hawk, and even a soaring **Gundlach's Hawk**. Look for flying pigeons: if large, probably they are Scaly-naped Pigeons. There are also smaller paths at both sides of the road; one of them leads to a small creek where Louisiana Waterthrush can be found.

When leaving the cabins downhill, search the low vegetation just beyond the lawn: if by

chance water is dripping on it, up to 16 species can be found foraging here, including rarities such as Swainson's, Hooded, and Kentucky Warblers, and also Ruddy Quail-dove. On the third trail, you may see many warblers: **Yellow-headed** and Olive-capped Warblers, and Red-legged Honeycreeper. On the way back, there is a small bridge. Search this area for **Blue-headed Quail-dove**, Ruddy Quail-dove and Louisiana Waterthrush. Some 30 m from the bridge there is a good trail on the right with plenty of birds.

Leaving the hill where the pine forest is located, turning right if you will drive to Cuevas de los Portales. There breeds Cave Swallows during the months of March to August. The cave is a very good site to find **Cuban Solitaire**, **Cuban Tody**, Scaly-naped Pigeon and several warblers.

Driving back from Cuevas the Los Portales is possible to find **Cuban Grassquit**. At the intersection with the main road where you must turn left to go back to La Guira, if you turn right, and if you walk along this road, and in the pines forest it can be observed.

When driving back from La Güira, about 1 km from the cabins there is a small bridge over a stream; c.50 m before you reach this bridge there is a trail that takes you to the stream. Along this trail it is possible to see species like Ruddy Quail-dove, **Blue-headed Quail-dove**, Louisiana Waterthrush, Worm-eating Warbler, Indigo Bunting among others. After you leave this trail the best in this area to find **Blue-headed Quail-dove** and Key West Quail-dove is to pass through the bridge and drive 200 hundred meters, and just right to the right of the curve is the trail.

On the highway back to Havana, at about km 101 after you leave La Güira, there is a small pond on the right side where Least Bittern and King Rail can be spotted. In the contiguous grass meadows, Northern Bobwhite has been observed.

### **Bird List for La Güira National Park**

113 sp., including 36 target species (includes nearby areas).

Sharp-shinned Hawk

**Gundlach's Hawk**

Broad-winged Hawk

Scaly-naped Pigeon

White-crowned Pigeon

Key West Quail-dove

Ruddy Quail-dove

**Blue-headed Quail-dove**

**Gray-fronted Quail Dove**

**Bare-legged Owl**

**Cuban Pygmy-owl**

Stygian Owl

Antillean Nighthawk

**Cuban Nightjar**

Antillean Palm-swift

Cuban Emerald  
**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Fernandina's Flicker**  
**Cuban Vireo**  
Cuban Martin  
Cave Swallow  
**Cuban Solitaire**  
Olive-capped Warbler  
Worm-eating Warbler  
Swainson's Warbler  
Louisiana Waterthrush  
**Yellow-headed Warbler**  
Red-legged Honeycreeper  
Cuban Bullfinch  
**Cuban Grassquit**  
Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
Eastern Meadowlark  
**Cuban Blackbird**  
**Cuban Oriole**  
Chestnut Mannikin

## **CIEGO DE ÁVILA PROVINCE**

### **Site 3.1: Cayo Coco**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

The second-largest key in Cuba (recently connected to the mainland by a rock-fill road). Located c.43 miles (70 km) northwest of Morón, it is mostly covered by deciduous forests; there are also mangroves, coastal shrubs, patches of grass, and lagoons. A total of over 200 species has been reported, including many Cuban rarities and several new birds to the entire West Indies region, although the most important species to visiting birders are Ruddy and Key West Quail-doves, a race of Great Lizard-cuckoo, **Cuban Tody**, West Indian Woodpecker, **Cuban Green Woodpecker**, Northern Flicker, **Cuban Gnatcatcher**, a race of **Zapata Sparrow**, Western Spindalis and Cuban Bullfinch. There are many waders and one of the largest groups of American Flamingo. In fall Merlin and Peregrine Falcon are not uncommon.

From the Club Tryp Hotel, or any of the other large hotels on the northern shore of Cayo Coco, turn right and drive for c.5 km passing through a roundabout. At a bend in the road there is dirt road off to the right (beneath a sign 'Cueva el Jabali'). Continue along this road for 2 km, and where is the intersection of two dirty roads, both are good for the **Zapata Sparrow** and **Oriente Warbler**. Another interesting location is driving straight from the Jabali when you reach the end, there is a parking lot where the cave is located. Surrounding this area there is a trail that goes into the forest where Key West Quail-dove

is not hard to see. Also in this area its good for **Oriente Warbler**, **Cuban Green Woodpecker** and several migrants. Another site is returning back from there are ponds to the left just a 100 meters before the curve in front of the ocean, also just to the left of this curve there is a sandy track, that when you reach the end turn left and walk along the sea shore for 40 m, and turn left onto a narrow sandy track through the mangrove which will shortly bring you to a pond.

Another pond can be reached by taking the main road to Cayo Guillermo, and turning left before you reach the sign for Flamingo Beach; this track will take you to another pond where there may many ducks in season, including **West Indian Whistling-duck**.

Any trail that take you to the forest or to mangrove is good for birding.

### **Bird List for Cayo Coco**

204 sp., including 33 target species.

Roseate Spoonbill  
American Flamingo  
West Indian Whistling-duck  
Red-breasted Merganser  
**Gundlach's Hawk**  
**Cuban Black Hawk**  
Northern Caracara  
Merlin  
Peregrine Falcon  
Clapper Rail  
Sora  
Key West Quail-dove  
Mangrove Cuckoo  
Great Lizard-cuckoo  
Barn Owl  
**Bare-legged Owl**  
Burrowing Owl  
Chuck-will's-widow  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
Northern Flicker  
**Cuban Vireo**  
Yellow-throated Vireo  
Cuban Martin  
**Cuban Gnatcatcher**  
Worm-eating Warbler  
Swainson's Warbler  
**Oriente Warbler**  
Red-legged Honeycreeper  
Western Spindalis

Summer Tanager  
Cuban Bullfinch  
**Zapata Sparrow**  
**Cuban Oriole**

### **Site 3.2: Cayo Paredón Grande**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

From Cayo Coco you can reach Cayo Paredón Grande by turning left at the entrance to the Club Tryp Hotel and driving along the main paved road. Turn left at the second roundabout, and pass through a construction area. Turn left onto the wider road and keep straight ahead until reaching a junction, where you should turn left and continue straight ahead again to the key. Your destination will soon become recognizable in the distance due to its black-and-yellow painted lighthouse. Park by the lighthouse and walk along the trail to the right as far as the beach (1 km). Well over 100 species have been reported in the area including **Piping Plover** (among small numbers of other shorebirds also present along the beach), **Thick-billed Vireo** (of the recently described endemic subspecies *cubensis*) and **Bahama Mockingbird** (very rare in this area) among them. There is a lighthouse where during the fall migration many North American warblers can be spotted. The potential for vagrants is high on this isolated cay; several scarce migrants are included in the list below, and, in April 2001, the first Bahama Woodstar to be reported from Cuba was claimed in this area (this record awaits documentation). It is also an excellent area for Mangrove Cuckoo, **Cuban Gnatcatcher**, **Oriente Warbler** (both common and easily located, especially with a tape) and, among seabirds, Brown Booby.

#### **Bird List for Cayo Paredón Grande**

116 sp., including 11 target species.

#### **Cuban Black Hawk**

Northern Caracara

Clapper Rail

Piping Plover

Mangrove Cuckoo

Chuck-will's-widow

#### **Cuban Green Woodpecker**

Thick-billed Vireo

#### **Cuban Gnatcatcher**

Bahama Mockingbird

#### **Oriente Warbler**

North of Cayo Coco there are three small rocky keys, called **Los Felipes**, where several species of terns breed in the summer. There are several hotels to stay at in Cayo Coco.

### **Site 3.3: Cayo Guillermo**

Situated 34 km north west to Cayo Coco is Cayo Guillermo. To reach this key has to turn left in the first roundabout and drive straight ahead. This is a sandy key with xerophitic vegetation and lots of palms *Coccothrinax* sp. In this habitat is found the Bahama Mockingbird.

### **Bird List for Cayo Guillermo**

86 sp., including several target species.

Bahama Mockingbird

Shorebirds

## **CAMAGÜEY PROVINCE**

### **Site 4.1: Sierra de Najasa**

#### **Access/Birding Sites**

Located about 70 km southeast of Camagüey city, this is a protected area of open country with many palm groves; and a mixture of deciduous woods at the foothills of low elevations. About 120 species of birds have been reported: **Plain Pigeon**, **Cuban Parakeet**, Rose-throated Parrot, **Bare-legged Owl**, **Cuban Pygmy-owl**, **Cuban Trogon**, **Cuban Tody**, three species of woodpeckers and **Giant Kingbird**. In two or three areas north, south and east of Camagüey (Miguel, El Jardín, Tayabito) the very rare and localized **Cuban Palm Crow** can be observed.

To reach Najasa drive south from Camagüey city, taking a road known as Carretera de Santa Cruz, which can be accessed by turning left from the Hotel Camagüey and left again near a gas station (the latter is signed). Drive south for approximately 43 km. After 30 km road conditions deteriorate significantly and it will be necessary to reduce your speed. Turn right at km 43, by a bus stop, following a sign to Vertientes. Drive a further 22 km to the village of Cuatro Caminos, stopping just 1 km beyond Carretera de Santa Cruz at a large area of palms on both sides of the road, where **Plain Pigeon**, **Cuban Parakeet**, **Cuban Palm Crow** and Cuban Crow are all possible. Upon arriving at Cuatro Caminos, turn right at the first intersection (by a cup-shaped cafeteria) and drive for a further 9 km until you reach the village of Arroyo Hondo (also known as Reparto Manolin). Shortly after reaching the village there is a junction. Good birding can be had in this area. The Najasa reserve area (El Belén) can be reached by turning left; the entrance is immediately beyond the row of houses on the left-hand side of the road.

Another way to reach Najasa is to drive to the east by the Carretera Central in direction to Las Tunas Province. When you pass the sign that shows the limit of the city has to drive 13 more km. Where you reach a gas station on a small hill, turn right and drive to Cuatro Caminos, and keep going straight until you reach Arroyo Hondo.

### **Bird List for Sierra de Najasa**

124 sp., including 21 target species.

West Indian Whistling-duck  
Sharp-shinned Hawk  
**Gundlach's Hawk**  
Plain Pigeon  
**Cuban Parakeet**  
Rose-throated Parrot  
Barn Owl  
**Cuban Pygmy-owl**  
**Bare-legged Owl**  
Chuck-will's-widow  
**Cuban Nightjar**  
**Cuban Trogon**  
**Cuban Tody**  
**Cuban Green Woodpecker**  
**Fernandina's Flicker**  
Giant Kingbird  
**Cuban Vireo**  
**Cuban Palm Crow**  
Cuban Crow  
Cuban Martin  
**Cuban Grassquit**