



Kirkconnell's Adventures

Dominican Republic - Enchanted Birding: Endemics and more!

Hispaniola Itinerary

Well known for its cigars, rum and baseball players, the Dominican Republic forms one half of the island of Hispaniola, the second largest of the Antilles. Santo Domingo is one of the oldest colonial cities in the New World, and the capital city of the Dominican Republic. Our visit to the Dominican Republic will be enriched by the hospitality of its people and their wonderful Caribbean-style cuisine.

The island's scenery is some of the most dramatic in the region. Situated at the center of the West Indies, Hispaniola has the highest avian endemism, with 32 species and three unique endemic families. This is due in part to its size, very ancient geological history, great diversity of habitats, from wetlands to cloud forests and the presence of the highest mountains in the region (highest elevation: Pico Duarte with 3098 m). A total of 306 bird species are recorded from Dominican Republic.

Our search for the endemics and regional specialties will take us to the cloud forest, pine forest and thorn scrub of the Sierra de Bahoruco where most of the birds could be found. A side trip to the very different north shore of the island will allow us to look for the extremely rare Ridgway's Hawk in the limestone karst forest.

Day 1: Arrival into Santo Domingo

Arrival day in Santo Domingo with participants flying in from different destinations.

The tour officially starts with a welcome dinner at a fine restaurant in the old town, where we will chat about the plans for the next day and review the target species we will expect to see. Our hotel will be situated close to the center of colonial Santo Domingo, and those who arrive early may wish to explore the nearby historical old section of the city.

Please do not forget to carry your binoculars because you could see some of the emblematic birds of the Hispaniolan avifauna such as Hispaniolan Parakeet, Hispaniolan Woodpecker and Palmchat.

We will spend the night in Santo Domingo.



Hispaniolan Woodpecker (©Doug Wechsler/VIREO)

Day 2: AM Birding at Botanical Garden; PM Departing to Barahona, stopping on the way in Las Salinas de Baní.

The garden is centered on a densely forested canyon. Several bird species could be seen including Hispaniola Woodpecker, Vervain Hummingbird (the second smallest bird in the world). Other species: West-Indian Whistling Duck, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Antillean Mango, Vervain Hummingbird, Hispaniolan Parakeet, Hispaniolan Parrot, Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo, Mangrove Cuckoo, Broad-billed Tody, White-necked Crow, Palmchat, Black-crowned Palm Tanager, Least Grebe, Palm-Swift, Red-legged Thrush, among others.



Broad-billed Tody (© Arturo Kirkconnell)



Hispaniolan Parakeet (© Arturo Kirkconnell)

Lunch in Santo Domingo. In the afternoon we will focus our birding in Las Salinas de Baní wetlands (about 1.5 hours from the capital). Most of the avifauna here can be seen from the roads. We will start our birding along the mangrove edges in search of the Caribbean race of Clapper Rail, Golden Warbler (Yellow Warbler resident population), Brown Booby, Brown Pelican and American Flamingo. A high diversity and numerous shorebirds could be seen here, including Black-necked Stilt, Black-bellied Plover, Snowy, Wilson's, Semipalmated, and Piping Plovers, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Stilt, Least, Semipalmated, Western and Spotted Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpiper, Red Knot, Short-billed Dowitcher, Willet, Royal Tern, Least Tern and Common Tern, Herring Gull, herons and egrets can also be found here. Also Merlin and Peregrine Falcon.

We expect to arrive to Barahona around 6:30pm. Night in Barahona



Black-crowned Palm-tanager (©Doug Wechsler/VIREO)

Day 3: AM. Birding at Cachote (1.5 h); PM Departing to Pedernales. Early departure at 4:30 am. We will need to change vehicles today and switch to 4x4. Birding in the morning at moist broadleaf forest in Cachote (eastern Bahoruco). This high elevation cloud forest contains the only known population of the Eastern Chat-Tanager which will be our main target species. Also other endemics can be watched, Golden Swallow, La Selle Thrush, White-fronted-Quail Dove, Hispaniolan Emerald, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Antillean Siskin, Hispaniolan Spindalis, and Narrow-billed Tody. Also Antillean Euphonia, resident in Hispaniola and Puerto Rico.

After lunch transfer to Pedernales. Our first stop of the day will be in the dry scrub vegetation looking for Black-faced Grassquit, Hispaniolan Pewee, Broad-billed Tody and Hispaniolan Lizard-cuckoo among others. We will stop along the way in Laguna Oviedo where we could observe West Indian Whistling Duck, American Flamingo, Roseate Spoonbill, Sandwich Tern, Sooty Tern, White-crowned Pigeon, White-necked Crow, Yellow Warbler and shorebirds.

Also, we will visit Cabo Rojo wetlands, a locality near the southern slope of Sierra de Bahoruco. Here we might encounter White-cheeked Pintail, White Ibis, Mango Hummingbird, Vervain Hummingbird, Stolid Flycatcher, Village Weaver and Nutmeg Mannikin wintering ducks and shorebirds. Here we also hope to find Mangrove Cuckoo and Golden Warblers (Yellow-Warbler native population). The bluffs around the cape provide nesting habitat for White-tailed Tropicbird, Cave Swallows and Caribbean Martins and Brown Booby offshore. Near Pedernales some landbirds can be watched: Black-crowned Palm-Tanager, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, and Greater Antillean Bullfinch.

After we are done with our birding in Cabo Rojo. Night in Pedernales. Dinner in a local restaurant. At night looking for Ashy-faced Owl.

Day 4: AM Birding Los Arroyos cloud forest; PM Birding in Aceitillar and Alcoa Transfer to Puerto Escondido.

This morning we will drive north to near the Haitian border to Los Arroyos, which is part of the Bahuco National Park. Due to poor road conditions, we will have an early morning departure at 4:15 am. For the difficult and time-consuming drive to this locality we will need to change vehicles today and switch to 4x4. It is necessary to reach the forest during the most active period for our target birds, the endemic and endangered La Selle Thrush and Western Chat Tanager will be the most important target species. Arriving before sunrise is a must if we want to have better chances to see the endemic Hispaniolan Nightjar, Ashy-faced Owl, and endemic race of the Burrowing Owl. Other species that can be found at Los Arroyos include Antillean Mango, Hispaniolan Hummingbird, Hispaniolan Trogon, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, Narrow-billed Tody, Greater Antillean Elaenia, Loggerhead Kingbird, Hispaniolan Pewee, Golden Swallow,



White-winged Warbler and Narrow-billed Tody (©Doug Wechsler/VIREO)

Rufous-throated Solitaire, Bicknell's Thrush, White-winged Warbler, Green-tailed Warbler, Hispaniolan Spindalis, Antillean Siskin and more.

By lunch time we will make our way back to Pedernales to get our transportation and luggage.



Rufous throated Solitaire (© Arturo Kirkconnell)



Antillean Piculet (© Arturo Kirkconnell)

Early lunch in Pedernales. After lunch we will resume our birding, and this time we will head to Alcoa and Aceitillar, which are located on the southern slope of Sierra de Bahoruco. This excellent road will allow us to easily reach the top of the mountain. The transition of the vegetation (fifteen natural vegetation zones exist in Bahoruco National Park) during our drive will be quite noticeable, beginning with thorn-scrub habitat, then deciduous woodland, humid montane broadleaf forest, and ending with a cover of pine forest at the top. These changes in habitats obviously give us an opportunity to observe changes in the bird species occupying their respective habitats. The target bird on the top will be Hispaniolan Crossbill and Golden Swallow. Also, we will be looking for a number of species this afternoon, including Hispaniolan Emerald, Hispaniolan Trogon, Broad-billed Tody, Narrow-billed Tody, Bay-breasted Cuckoo, Antillean Piculet, Olive-throated Parakeet, Hispaniolan Parrot, Plain Pigeon, Greater Antillean Elaenia, Hispaniolan Pewee, Flat-billed Vireo, Hispaniolan Palm Crow, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Pine Warbler, Green-tailed Warbler, Hispaniolan Spindalis, Antillean Euphonia, Antillean Siskin and possibly a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

After some birding we depart to Puerto Escondido. Early dinner and during sunset looking for Ashy-faced Owl, Hispaniolan Nightjar, Least Poorwill, and Northern Potoo

Night in Puerto Escondido

Day 5: AM Birding Rabo Gato trail; PM Birding La Placa.

We will make another early departure to support our early morning birding along the Rabo de Gato trail (5:30 am). Before dawn, Northern Potoo can be found in this area, as can Least Poorwill, Ashy-faced Owl and Barn Owl.

This area is a narrow trail of riparian habitat with a great diversity of birds. Many interesting species can be viewed along the crystal-clear stream. Both the Broad-billed Tody and Narrow-billed Tody occur here, as well as Hispaniolan Lizard-cuckoo, Antillean Piculet, Antillean Mango, Hispaniolan Trogon, Flat-billed Vireo, White-necked Crow, Hispaniolan Oriole, Antillean Euphonia, Bay-breasted Cuckoo, Antillean Siskin, Palmchat and Mangrove Cuckoo. Additional target species here are Key West Quail-Dove, White-fronted Quail-dove, Western Chat-Tanager and La Selle Thrush.

In the afternoon we will visit La Placa. The target species will be Bay-breasted Cuckoo. Here will be looking for any missing endemic. This area is very important to look for Antillean Piculet, and Flat-billed Vireo. Also, in this area is possible to find nocturnal birds such: Least Poorwill, Hispaniolan Nightjar and Northern Potoo.

We will spend two nights in Puerto Escondido.



Bay-breasted Cuckoo (© Arturo Kirkconnell)



Hispaniolan Pewee (© Arturo Kirkconnell)



Hispaniolan Lizard-cuckoo (©Héctor Andújar)



Hispaniolan Parrot ((©Doug Wechsler/VIREO)

Day 6: AM Birding at Zapotén and Laguna Enriquillo. Transfer to Santo Domingo in early afternoon.

Be prepared for another early departure (4:30 am) as we will head to Zapotén. Today we will be using 4x4 again in order to get to the site. Zapotén is the best site for high-elevation endemics such as White-fronted Quail-Dove, Hispaniolan Emerald, Hispaniolan Trogon, Antillean Piculet, Narrow-billed Tody, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Greater Antillean Elaenia, La Selle Thrush, Green-tailed Warbler, White-winged Warbler, Western Chat-Tanager, Black-crowned Palm-Tanager, Hispaniolan Spindalis, Antillean Euphonia and Antillean Siskin.

By mid-morning we should be done with our birding in Zapotén, and will make our way back to the lodge to pick our bags, and continue our way to Lago Enriquillo. about 30 minutes' drive (120 feet below sea level) which is the largest lake in the Caribbean region. This saline lake of over 40,000 hectares is the remnant of a channel that once divided Hispaniola into two islands. It is a National Park and Ramsar site. Among the birds we could see are Hispaniolan Palm Crow, White-necked Crow, Palm Crow, and Plain Pigeon. Other species are West Indian Whistling Duck, American Flamingo, Glossy ibis, Hispaniolan Parrot, Hispaniolan Oriole, and also shorebirds.

We will have possibilities to visit Laguna El Rincon (Laguna Cabral) which is the only large freshwater lake on the island. Here it is possible to see White-cheeked Pintail, American Wigeon, Lesser Scaup, Masked Duck and Ruddy Duck. The elusive Spotted Rail is known to breed here and Yellow-breasted Crake has also been recorded.

Lunch in Puerto Escondido

PM Transfer to Santo Domingo. Dinner in town

Night in Santo Domingo.

Day 7 Transfer from Santo Domingo to Sabana de La Mar. Night in Paraíso Caño Hondo.

Consisting of about 995 square miles, the unique landscape of Los Haitises National Park is a real natural jewel. Here we plan to search for the critically endangered Ridgway's Hawk, a very rare raptor with a restricted distribution, usually found on a small part of northern parts of the island. In the flowering trees, we should also see Hispaniolan Oriole, Black-crowned Palm-Tanager, White-necked Crow, Broad-billed Tody, Palmchat, Pearly-eyed Thrasher, Tanager. Ruddy Quail-dove can be found on the forest floor.



Ridgway Hawk (© Arturo Kirkconnell)



Broad-billed Tody (© Arturo Kirkconnell)

Among the birds also found in the area are: Antillean Piculet, Plain Pigeon, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Antillean Mango, Hispaniolan Parrot, White-necked Crow, Black-whiskered Vireo, Bananaquit, Yellow-faced Grassquit, Gray Kingbird, Red-tailed Hawk, Ashy-faced Owl. Also, mangrove Cuckoo.

After lunch we should be getting back to our lodge, where we are going to have supper. We will conduct some nocturnal birding in the area

Night in Paraiso Caño Hondo. Dinner at lodge.

Day 8 AM Birding in Los Haitises. PM returning to Santo Domingo

Farewell dinner in Santo Domingo

Day 9. Departure to United States.

Transfer to the airport.

Dominican Republic - Birding Tour

Dominican Republic Birding Tour

- 1 Santo Domingo
- 2 Salinas de Bani
- 3 Barahona
- 4 Cabo Rojo
- 5 Pedernales
- 6 Rabo de Gato
- 7 La Placa
- 8 Lago Enriquillo
- 9 Sabana de la Mar

