

Report on a birding trip to Cuba

18–31 January 2006

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Introduction

This was a two week birding trip to Cuba with the main aim of seeing as many of Cuba's endemic bird species as possible. In addition lots of other birds would be present, including many wintering migrants. The trip was a great success, the birding was excellent, and we recorded a total of 154 species, including great views of all of the endemics except the extremely rare Cuban Kite. We only heard the Zapata Rail (rarely seen even by local birders). We got stunning views of Blue-headed, Grey-headed and Key West Quail-Dove as well as a good array of the often very attractive North American wood warblers. Other highlights were, among many others, two sightings of Gundlach's Hawk, Great Black-backed Gull (a common bird in Sweden but a rarity in Cuba, with only six previous records according to *Birds of Cuba*, Kirkconnell), four sightings of Stygian Owl, Bee Hummingbird, Fernandina's Flicker, Giant Kingbird, Cuban Grassquit, Zapata Wren and Zapata Sparrow. Among birds we missed or even did not try for (e.g. the crane) were West Indian Whistling-Duck, Sandhill Crane and Bahama Mockingbird.

Useful information

Cuba is one of the (extremely few) remaining communist dictatorships of the world. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Cuban state has turned to tourism as a source of precious income. In practice there are two economies: One for Cubans and one for tourists. The price level for tourists is of course very much higher and almost comparable to Sweden. Naturally police and military presence was also highly visible but seldom disturbing. You are free to move around but avoiding contact with police, military and authorities in general is good advice.

- We hired a car (pre-booked in advance) from Havanautos. Car hire is very expensive in Cuba. We paid around 1 000 euros for 12 days (including taxes and insurance) for a Toyota Yaris (sedan). The car itself was OK, but the tyres – which were in bad condition – were a permanent source of anxiety; we had three flat tyres during the trip.
- It's a good idea to bring some things to Cuba, e.g. soap, schampo and toilet paper. It is also very useful to speak some Spanish.
- Bring euro and change to convertible cuban pesos (CUC) at the airport. The exchange rate seemed to be similar irrespective of where you changed. At the time of our visit 1 euro equaled 1,08 CUC. We did not bother to try and get hold of ordinary Cuban pesos despite recommendations in some trip reports.

Our impression was that usage of ordinary pesos was extremely limited for us as tourists.

- Bring a good road map and be prepared to ask local people about where to drive; they are always willing to help.
- Guides in Zapata charge 10 CUC per person per excursion, i.e. 20 CUC if you go both in the morning and in the afternoon. Besides they expect to be tipped 10-20 CUC per day.
- There are many good trip reports on the Internet, and many of them have good maps and therefore we exclude maps in this report. We only missed more accurate maps when birding on Cayo Coco.
- We used Birds of Cuba (Garrido & Kirkconnell), New World Warblers (Curson, Quinn et al) and North American Bird Guide (Sibley).
- For our casa particular in Morón we paid per person and day: 25 CUC for a room each, 3 for breakfast and 10 for dinner. In addition we paid 2 CUC/day for parking.
- For our casa particular in Zapata (pre-booked via Chino from home; see address below) we paid 35 CUC per night for a double room. Cost for food more or less the same as in Morón.
- Cost for petrol was c. 1 CUC per litre.
- Speed limit on the autopista: 130 km/h, but watch out for signs and “punta de control” where speed limit is lower.
- Food was generally excellent at our casas particular; we often had lobster (langosta) or shrimps (camarones). If you value tasty food avoid eating at state-run hotels. Local beer Bucanero and Crystal superb, as well as Havana Club rum. Easy to find good fast food along the autopista.
- Weather was pleasant enough with 25-30 °C most days and low humidity. Some evenings rather cool. Only a couple of showers, but more than half of the days rather windy. Mosquitoes were never a problem, which was a relief!

Hotels, casas particular

We strongly recommend staying at Hotel Villa Soroa, our casas particular in Morón and Zapata/Playa Larga and the hotel in La Belen National Park:

HOTEL VILLA SOROA

Carretera Soroa, km 8
Candelaria, Pinar del Rio
Phone 53 7 85 35 34

Prices, information and photos of the place easily found on the Internet.

MORÓN

Tamara Companioni Medina (Run by Tamara and Mario)
Av. Marti 247 Moron, phone: 5-3630
A very good place to stay when birding in the keys.

PLAYA LARGA, ZAPATA

Fidel Silvestre Fuentes
Barrio Caletón, Playa Larga
(0145) 987359, mobile 0152646216

e-mail: fidelsfcaribe@yahoo.es

PEDRO REGALADO – LA BELEN NP

Pedro Regalado (bird guide at Najasa; we strongly recommend birders to work with him) can help you to arrange your stay at La Belen/Najasa.

Contact Pedro at his new e-mail: mnajasa@pprincipe.cult.cu

Pedro's postal address:

Apartado Postal #161

Camagüey 1, C.P. 70100

Provincia Camagüey

CUBA

BIRD GUIDES: CHINO AND ANGEL

E-mail worked very well corresponding with "Chino" (Orestes Martínez Garcia).

Angel is his brother living in the same village; both Chino and Angel are very professional guides and most birders work with both of them:

chino@cienaga1.mtz.jovenclub.cu or chino@zapata.atenas.inf.cu

Acknowledgements

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Itinerary

18 Jan Stockholm – Paris – Havana – Soroa

19 Jan Soroa and La Güira

20 Jan Soroa to Morón

21 Jan Cayo Coco – Cayo Paredón Grande

22 Jan Cayo Paredón Grande – Cayo Coco – C. Guillermo – Najasa

23 Jan Najasa – Playa Larga, Zapata

24 Jan Zapata

25 Jan Zapata

26 Jan Zapata

27 Jan Zapata

28 Jan Zapata

29 Jan Zapata

30 Jan Playa Larga – Havana

31 Jan Havana, evening flight to Paris

01 Feb Paris – Stockholm

DAILY ACCOUNT

Wednesday January 18

Departed Stockholm Arlanda half an hour late at 07.30 hrs with Air France for Paris, and later continued to Havana. Arrival in Havana on schedule at 19.00 hrs local time (5 hour time difference from Sweden). We had to wait more than an hour for our luggage. Picked up our pre-booked car at Havanautos and then fairly easy found our way to the autopista heading west to Soroa. Two **Barn Owls** were seen briefly along the road during the one-hour drive to our hotel Villa Soroa, where we arrived at 22.30

hrs. It was an unexpectedly cold evening, maybe +12 °C, with fairly strong winds. No problems to sleep after a long journey.

Thursday January 19

Nice breakfast at 07.15 hrs at the restaurant called Centro. We met our guide Alberto at 08.45 hrs (6 CUC/person). We had not planned to have a guide here and it is not necessary, but after a recommendation from the hotel staff we decided to try him out. He proved to be an excellent birder and guide and a nice fellow, also speaking very good English. Birded the Mirador trail until 11.00 hrs. Lots of new birds for us, e.g. superb **Cuban Todys**, **Cuban Trogons** and **Cuban Woodpeckers**. Another common endemic was **Cuban Blackbird**. Smart **Red-legged Thrushes** were common and always a pleasure to see. Two **Ruddy Quail-Doves** were flushed in a gully and gave only flight views. One was later seen crossing a trail but quite far away. A **Cuban Vireo** was a bit odd here, according to Alberto and Tomas saw our only **Worm-eating Warbler**. In a stream near the hotel we saw our only **Louisiana Waterthrushes**. Bird activity was a bit slow this morning due to strong winds and some light rain. After a while it cleared up and we had a good morning despite that we only heard the **Cuban Solitaires** singing.

After lunch we went to La Güira (a one hour drive from Soroa). We had some initial problems finding the way to the "deserted cabins" mentioned in other trip reports but we soon found the rough road through an arcade on which is written "Hacienda Cortina". As usual very few road signs pointing out the direction; we had to stop many times to ask local people where to go – this always worked well though. On our first stop at the roadside we hit a cut wooden root and got our first flat tyre. **Olive-capped Warblers** – our target species at La Güira – and a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** gave good views while changing tyres. La Güira was a nice and beautiful area and we felt we would have liked to spend more than a few hours here, or if possible a morning. Many birders see the Solitaire here but we only heard its fascinating song, and we now became a bit nervous about seeing this species. We made some fruitful stops along the way back to Soroa and one dam produced ten **Snail Kites** – our only sighting of this species during the trip. The dams also held **Pied-billed Grebes**, lots of **Egrets**, **Ring-necked Duck**, **Hooded Merganser** and other wetland species. Tried the Mirador trail again in the afternoon (16.30–18.30) for Solitaire and possibly Blue-headed Quail-dove, but to no avail. Still very windy and after a disappointing dinner at the hotel we were too tired to search for Cuban Pygmy-Owls (they later showed to be easily seen and heard in Zapata Peninsula).

Friday January 20

Birded the Mirador trail in Soroa 8.00-10.30 hrs. Still very windy but clear skies. Fairly slow activity on the birds. There were two **American Kestrels** perched in the hotel garden of which one was of the scarcer rufous-bellied morph. Three **Cuban Solitaires** were singing and at last Tomas' focused hunt resulted in prolonged stunning views of a singing male – in a gully some hundred metres below the mirador. In the same area we heard a **Blue-headed Quail-Dove** calling. We left Soroa at 11.00 hrs and drove east. First stop was in Havana to pick up a new spare tyre at Havanautos. Two hitch-hikers helped us to find the way into Havana airport. Left Havana 13.00 hrs and again two hitch-hikers showed us out of Havana. Now we were on the autopista A1 again. Our first two hitch-hikers dropped off soon but our relief did not last for long as two police men soon stopped our car – only to ask if they could go with us to Ciego de Avila; they were not exactly the kind of hitch-hikers we

had on our want list... Well, it was a long journey east and while they were sleeping in the back seat we amused ourselves with all the political road signs: "Sin cultivado no revolución", "Cada día en cada barrio: revolución". Mostly boring landscape with vast plantations of sugar cane and tobacco. Not many birds along the autopista except the ubiquitous **Turkey Vulture** which is unbelievably common everywhere in Cuba. A heavy rainfall welcomed us to Morón at 18.30 hrs. We soon found our superb casa particular which we had booked the day before with help from our hotel staff in Soroa. Our hosts were Mario and Tamara and Mario was an excellent chef; he prepared a delicious lobster for us and served beer from Camagüey. We had one room each and thus slept like kings this night.

Saturday January 21

Left Morón at 07.00 hrs after breakfast 06.30. Reached the causeway to Cayo Coco after one hour driving. Had to pay 2 CUC for our car and show our passports before entering the causeway out to the keys. Again a windy day which hampered birding a bit. Only few waders and gulls in the areas we visited. Birded around Cueva de Jabáli in the morning and on Cayo Paredón Grande in the afternoon. Had some difficulties to find some of the stake-outs due to incomplete maps and no road signs. We tried to find the Zapata Sparrow at both the Cueva de Jabáli area and along the Flamenco road but failed. We also dipped on the Thick-billed Vireo on Cayo Paredón Grande leaving us with only one day left to nail these species. Highlights during the day were a beautiful **Key West Quail-Dove** near Cueva de Jabáli, at least 10 obliging **Cuban Gnatcatchers** at Cayo Paredón Grande and charming **Oriente Warblers**. A **Common Black-Hawk** gave great views when it perched close to the car.

At the restaurant in Playa Flamenco we saw (probably) the fattest cook in the world and although his companion joked and told us to "never trust a skinny chef" – and the food looked OK – we skipped lunch and instead continued our search for the Zapata Sparrow, but in vain. We later tried the good supply of fast food in the gas station at Cayo Coco. For dinner we had delicious shrimps (camarones) accompanied by a lengthy TV-speech by Fidel Castro. Tomas had a sturdy cockroach in his room, the only one seen during the trip.

Sunday January 22

Breakfast at 06.15 hrs, arrival Cayo Paredón Grande 08.10; birded there until 11.15. Continued to Flamenco road 12.00 and then a short stop at Cayo Guillermo until 13.00 hrs. Left the gas station at C. Coco at 14.15 and drove straight to Najasa where we arrived 18.00. Another day with strong wind.

Birding is a story of ups and downs; this day we looked on the bright side of life. Some of the pressure fell from our shoulders when we after hard work - and two and a half hours – at last found our only **Thick-billed Vireos** c. 500 m from the lighthouse, along the paved road. We later learned that they are far easier to find if you have a tape with its call, which we hadn't. Anyway, we got marvelous views of this near-endemic species and heard it calling as well. Strengthened by the Vireo we drove straight to Flamenco road for our last try on the Sparrow. We arrived midday and had no real hope of seeing this rare endemic. As so many birders before us we focused on the first hundred metres of the road when suddenly we saw a bird moving at the forest edge: a **Yellow-faced Grassquit**. But luckily Peter showed field craft and entered the forest a couple of metres and there – perched on a branch just above us, preening itself and totally unafraid – was a splendid male **Zapata Sparrow** (of the *varonai* race) and we finally connected which was a great relief for us. Of course we got

prolonged and stunning views and the bird was still there when we left and drove west to Cayo Guillermo to search for our last bird that we had to see in this area: the Bahama Mockingbird. We tried the classic spot – a bushy hill 3 kms west from where the paved road stops – but with little time, bad time of the day maybe and (again) with no tape we failed to locate this species, but encountered loads of **Northern Mockingbirds**. According to information we later gathered through Andy Mitchell, the best area for the Bahama Mockingbirds currently is closer to where the paved road ends. We had seen 4 **Crested Caracaras** on Cayo Paredón Grande earlier and now we added another 2 on Cayo Coco *en route* to Cayo Guillermo. Besides one in Najasa these were the only ones we saw during the trip of this smashing species. After a long journey to Najasa we finally arrived in time for one hour of productive birding around the graveyard that local birder Pedro Regalado has made famous among birders. We easily nailed some more endemics like the **Cuban Palm Crow** and **Cuban Parakeet** as well as the attractive, near endemic **Cuban Parrot**. We also got scope filling views of perched **Plain Pigeons**, an increasingly rare species. Around 19.00 hrs we knocked on Pedro Regalado's door and he was home. Cuban Parakeets regularly flew over his house. He had not received our e-mail but was happy to guide us the day after. At Pedro's we also met British birder Andy Mitchell (from RSPB; he first visited Cuba 20 years ago) and his wife, friends of Pedro. Pedro kindly helped to arrange a room for us at the hotel in La Belen National Park. This was a really nice place with very kind staff and they prepared a delicious dinner for us (chicken). On the down side there was neither light nor water in the toilets the following morning. Unfortunately we did not have time to try the hotel's swimming pool. After dinner we amused the staff and ourselves by studying – with help from our torch – about ten wall creeping frogs that were hiding themselves behind paintings. Later we did a night walk along the graveled road but only heard the last birds to go to rest: the calls from **Cuban Crows** that fired our imagination.

Monday January 23

Met Pedro at his home at 07.30 hrs. We left half an hour later and tried for a Fernandina's Flicker which Pedro and Andy had found nest building the day before (extremely early, probably due to early rains). The spot was c. 15 kms from Najasa and we dipped; no sign of any Flickers. We then drove to an area 8 kms east of the entrance to La Belen NP, an area Pedro called San Manuel. After some work with the tape recorder a pair of the rare **Giant Kingbird** responded and perched in a huge ceiba tree, where they gave prolonged scope views. Great success and luck, handshaking and photographing of ourselves with Pedro. We continued to more open savannah-like landscape where we obtained stunning views of a pair of **Cuban Grassquit**. We also had opportunity to study the **Eastern Meadowlarks** at close distance (the form concerned – *hippocrepis* – is endemic to Cuba). Pedro taped in our first delightful **Cuban Pygmy-Owl** which gave scope filling views!

Pedro Regalado is certainly one of Cuba's most dedicated birders. It was great to hear him talk about the research he does on the Giant Kingbird and about his many projects, e.g. a study on why the numbers of the Cuban Palm Crows are declining, feeding behaviour of wintering Black-throated Blue Warblers as well as an illustrated (by himself) bird book for Cubans. He also told us about his observation of Ivory-billed Woodpecker in eastern Cuba in 1987, making him the last person to have seen this species here. He believes that this species still is surviving in eastern Cuba and therefore plans an expedition there next year should any funding turn up.

At 13.00 hrs it was time to say goodbye to Pedro and head west again, to Playa Larga in the Zapata Peninsula. We had seen all the Najasa specialities in one evening and one morning. In retrospect we realise that we should have spent one more day here (and one day less in Zapata); the area is very rich in birds and there is a good chance to see West Indian Whistling-Duck here, a species we did not see during the whole trip. The drive to Playa Larga was more than six hours long and boring. The autopista was partly bad and the traffic annoying, the landscape was uniform with endless plantations of sugar cane. Again two younger policemen forced themselves into our car for a ride for two hours. A **Peregrine** – our second for the trip – crossed the autopista and brightened up a dull midday.

Chino's brother Angel – Chino and Angel are *the* bird guides in Zapata – directly found us when we arrived in Playa Larga. He took us to Chino and our casa particular where our host Fidel Silvestre Fuentes met us. This was a fantastic casa particular situated in Caletón, adjacent to the shoreline of the famous Bay of Pigs. Fidel and the women in his house were excellent chefs and our first evening we were served bean soup and lobster in abundance! Here we lived like kings again. A wall creeping frog tried to escape into one of Peter's bags.

Tuesday January 24

Chino met us at 07.30 hrs. Birded along trails and gravel roads in the forested area around Soplillar in the Zapata peninsula. Our start in Zapata couldn't have been better; the morning was sunny and crisp clear and in some dead trees both a pair of **Fernandina's Flicker** and a **Northern Flicker** ruled and gave excellent views. After that Chino scratched a palm tree with a hole and soon a **Bare-legged Owl** appeared and showed us most of his body but he didn't want to fly. Actually this was our only sighting of this species during the trip, as were two **Wood Ducks** in a small lake. In another lake we watched a **Least Grebe** and a **Pied-billed Grebe** almost side by side. But we couldn't find any Whistling-Ducks. In a third lake we checked was a male **Green-winged Teal**.

In the midday heat we did some birding ourselves around Playa Larga where we counted 15 **Killdeers** on a lawn. It was now time for us to swim in the Bay of Pigs and have some rest. Afternoon birding with Chino in the Soplillar area 16.30–19.00 didn't produce that much. Our target species today was – except our frantic hunt for Quail-Doves (Blue-headed and Grey-headed) – Bee Hummingbird but depressing news was that there were no reliable stake-outs because of last autumn's hurricane and lack of its favourite flowers.

Fidel arranged a delicious dinner: fried fish (red snapper) with rice and bananas. Later we met Chino again and went to his office CITMA 4 kms north of Playa Larga where a **Stygian Owl** soon appeared high up in a tree and gave scope filling views. In the garden we also had a close encounter with a **Cuban Pygmy-Owl**.

Wednesday January 25

Met Chino at 07.20 hrs, as usual very focused on Quail-Doves; he really gives 100 % trying to show us these jewels of the forest. This morning – bird-wise very slow but in other aspects very stimulating – Andy Mitchell joined us. We heard both **Blue-headed** and **Grey-headed Quail-Doves** briefly in the Soplillar area but failed to see them. Well, we have plenty of time yet, we thought. Chino worked hard with his tape recorder but the doves were singing slowly and too far away from the road: "No canta, no viene!", Chino said ("When they don't sing, they won't come"). Today's highlights were a **Stygian Owl** (a younger bird) perched just above our heads giving

stunning views, and a pair of (very early) nest-building **Fernandina's Flicker** at Los Canales.

Tomas had a bad cold so we had a "tranquilo" afternoon going by car to Playa Girón. The quotation of the day by Peter was: "You spend a lot of money in Cuba, but there is nothing to buy!".

Thursday January 26

Met Chino and Andy Mitchell just before 07.30 and drove to Los Sabalos. After some calm days it was a bit windy today again. We strongly felt that we needed a success after yesterday's mediocre birding. Our prayers were fulfilled as we had great views of **Bee Hummingbird**, **Gundlach's Hawk**, **Grey-headed Quail-Dove** and **Cuban Nightjar**! Our morning started with fumbling efforts to see a Grey-headed Quail-Dove which called close but refused to show more than a short glimpse in flight. We continued and tried another trail and a clearing in the forest. Just as we were about to leave the spot Tomas discovers a Bee Hummer coming into the canopy of a tall tree. Amazingly quick though and before Chino and Peter arrive – Andy gets a glimpse – the tiny little bird disappears like a rocket insect. Luckily the hummer comes back and perches on a branch giving stunning views. A female! After a while she flies straight up in the air like a Jas fighter aircraft, calling and then suddenly she is gone. Great happiness in the group: "That's how you spell relief!" Andy and Chino also heard a singing male Bee Hummingbird which could explain the female's high flight; the males only connect with the females when they are ready to mate. On to next trail and suddenly Chino shouts: "Gundlachs's Hawk!" Soaring just above us, in great morning light, giving excellent views.

Sleeping, reading and bathing during the warm hours. Walked along the beach and added a **Spotted Sandpiper** to our list which is now growing at lower and lower pace. At 16.15 we set off for Soplillar again. Initially birding was slow going. We dispersed along a graveled road to scan for Quail-Doves. Luck was on my (Tomas') side; 20 m away from me a **Grey-headed Quail-Dove** crossed the road walking. Then, when Peter and Chino arrived, two birds were crossing the road giving great views. Relieved again! At dusk when driving back home Chino catch a **Cuban Nightjar** with his torch, sitting on the road. We try to approach the bird but our torch is too weak and it flies off. Anyway we are satisfied with the sighting: "a nightjar is a nightjar". As a bonus we saw our third **Stygian Owl**, this one flying over the road. After this superb birding we go home to our welcoming casa particular and with great appetite we attack the delicious crocodile stew.

Friday January 27

Early breakfast again – thank you Fidel! – and a lengthy car ride (1 hour) into the forest at Los Sabalos, with Chino and Andy Mitchell. We continued our search for the Blue-headed Quail-Dove but bird activity was slow. We now began to be a bit nervous for the BHQD. Today's highlight in the forest was a great view of a **Key West Quail-Dove**.

In the afternoon we made a tour west from Playa Larga to Las Salinas with a compulsory guide from the national park staff (Sebastian). This area was very productive and nice to visit. Among many shorebirds and wetland species we saw hundreds of beautiful **American Flamingos**, 3 **Forster's Terns** and a flock of 15 **Stilt Sandpipers**. **Common Black-Hawk** was (yes!) common out here and we saw at least six individuals. On the way back we got our second flat tyre and Peter announced his "constant worries for this f-n car!" Well, we brightened up the evening

with camarones and beer for dinner. Looked almost in vain for a bar in the evening; ending up in the bar at Hotel Playa Larga where we tried a mojito before we walked home for some hours sleep.

Saturday January 28

Well, this morning could have started better... After 100 metres driving we had our third flat tyre! Luckily we could change to Andy's car and, together with Andy's wife and Angel, continue to La Turba at 07.30 hrs. La Turba is an open area with extensive sawgrass beds and a canal paralleling a road running through the area. The canal is bordered by trees and lower bush. It's a good place to look for rails and it is particularly good for the rare and endemic Zapata Wren. We had just left our car at 08.30 hrs when Angel almost immediately taped in a **Zapata Wren** which perched on a branch maybe seven metres away from us singing and giving prolonged stunning views; you can't see this species better! Again we were in high spirits! Another Zapata Wren was singing further out. We continued our birding along the canal looking for rails. Angel spotted a **Sora** and we got great views. Unfortunately this was the only rail we saw, but we heard at least three **Spotted Rails**. About 100 **Tree Swallows** were flying over the sawgrass. The only **Limpkin** of the trip – heavy at the front and a bit clumsy in flight – passed by. Tomas spotted our second **Gundlach's Hawk** at distance. On the road was a male **Indigo Bunting**.

In the afternoon we went ourselves to Palpite (west of the main road), but birding was very slow. We met two local hunters who had collected eight turtles in a bag – they offered us two of them but we said "no gracias". Chino helped us to get our two flat tyres repaired for a few CUC's.

Chino invited us to his home and offered rum (ron) and crocodile meat (cocodrilo) – excellent! Visited a local outdoor disco in Palpite later in the evening, with Chino and the Mitchells, and tried some Cuban dancing and Cuban ron...

Sunday January 29

Success in Palpite with Angel when we finally connected with **Blue-headed Quail-Dove**. A BHQD was calling close to the road but refused to come out in the open so we entered the forest, as silently as we could, and suddenly: there it was, this sought-after, endemic Crown jewel of Cuba, giving stunning views both on the ground and perched on branches. Another BHQD was calling nearby. We also got excellent views of a sunlit **Grey-headed Quail-Dove**, which we left in the same place where we had discovered him (on a branch about 5 metres up). We discovered a rare beautiful **Blue-winged Warbler**, which was only the second ever for Angel.

Medio día: resting.

To La Turba again in the afternoon with Angel. A stop along the main road near the entrance to La Turba produced a pair of the endemic **Red-shouldered Blackbird**. We came as close as 3 m (damn, no camera!) and the male showed delicious red wingspots in flight. A **Glossy Ibis** in La Turba was the only one during the trip. We heard lots of rails but failed to see them. We had a very interesting discussion about the true call of the **Zapata Rail**. There seems to be some confusion and maybe lots of birders should make back step on this species! According to some prominent birders no one could be 100 % sure of which call belongs to the Zapata Rail. Anyway, we heard rails calling which – according to a CD with recordings of these rails and also according to Angel – could have been Zapata Rail and **Black Rail**. We also saw two **Bee Hummingbirds**, but unfortunately only in flight.

In the evening we joined some festivities together with Chino's friends, with more ron and we played domino with the guys.

Monday January 30

Had a nice lie-in this morning and breakfast at 09.00. A last beach walk at the Bay of Pigs. Donated T-shirts and bathing-trunks to a man on the beach. Said goodbye to Fidel and the others in our casa particular and to Chino ("El Chino de Zapata") – which of course was a bit melancholic. We strongly recommend Fidel and his casa particular in Playa Caletón – a perfect base for birders! We also admire both our guides – Chino and Angel – for their willingness to show birders all the difficult species in Cienega de Zapata and for their great knowledge of Cuban birds. Besides they are – including Fidel – very friendly and always full of fun, we really enjoyed our stay in Zapata.

We left Playa Larga at 11.45 for a last long drive to Havana. Stopped for lunch along the autopista (a tasty sandwich with ham & cheese). A dead **Barn Owl** was observed on the road halfway to Havana. It was a relief to return and get rid of our rental car. Took a taxi (25 CUC) from the airport to our hotel in Havana Vieja (Hotel Sevilla). After inspection of our room in this hotel with its fine old traditions we took a walk along Paseo Marti and in the Old town, mainly Obispo road with lots of nice bars where cold beer was served and groups of musicians played traditional Cuban music.

Tuesday January 31

Spent the day strolling around in Old Havana. Taxi to the airport at 18.30 hrs. Flight bound for Paris at 21.15 hrs.

Wednesday February 1

Arrival in Paris at 11.00 hrs. Departed Paris at 16.00, arrival in Stockholm Arlanda two hours later in a snowy cold landscape. But enriched with a fantastic experience of Cuban nature and culture as well as 154 species of birds – among them many stunning species.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

- 1. Least Grebe** *Tachybaptus dominicus* A single bird at Soplillar, Zapata.
- 2. Pied-billed Grebe** *Podilymbus podiceps* Small numbers (4) on the dams by the autopista between Soroa and La Güira. A single bird at Soplillar, Zapata.
- 3. Brown Pelican** *Pelecanus occidentalis* Common in the keys. A single bird seen in Zapata.
- 4. Double-crested Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax auritus* Common in the keys and locally in Zapata.
- 5. Neotropic Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* Small numbers recorded on several days at freshwater wetlands in Zapata.

- 6. Magnificent Frigatebird** *Fregata magnificens* Common in the keys and single birds in Zapata.
- 7. Great Blue Heron** *Ardea herodias* Noted on many days with up to three in the keys and up to 10 in Zapata.
- 8. Great Egret** *Ardea alba* The form *egretta* was fairly common and widespread in suitable habitat throughout.
- 9. Reddish Egret** *Egretta rufescens* Noted as common one day in the keys and also a single bird at Las Salinas, Zapata.
- 10. Tricolored Heron** *Egretta tricolor* Small numbers noted along the autopista. Common in the keys and up to 10 daily in suitable habitat in Zapata, e.g. Las Salinas.
- 11. Little Blue Heron** *Egretta caerulea* Noted on five days; common on the dams by the autopista between Soroa and La Güira and up to 10 almost daily in Zapata.
- 12. Snowy Egret** *Egretta thula* Noted on many days; common and widespread in suitable habitat throughout.
- 13. Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* Noted on many days; common and widespread in suitable habitat throughout. The Cattle Egret arrived in Cuba in the 1950's.
- 14. Green Heron** *Butorides virescens* A single bird by the autopista between Soroa and La Güira, noted on three days at Zapata with 1, 2 and 5 birds.
- 15. Black-crowned Night-Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* A group of 15 the first evening at Zapata and single birds there on two other days (only flight views).
- 16. Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** *Nyctanassa violacea* 1–3 birds noted on three days at Zapata (Playa Larga), often giving flight views but one juvenile gave excellent views.
- 17. White Ibis** *Eudocimus albus* 13 birds showing well in the keys (Cayo Coco and Cayo Paredón Grande), one at Los Canales and 15 at Las Salinas
- 18. Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* A single bird at La Turba, Zapata.
- 19. Roseate Spoonbill** *Platalea ajaja* Two birds at Cayo Coco and a single bird at Las Salinas, Zapata.
- 20. American Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus ruber* A flock of 100 seen in the distance from the causeway out to the keys and 500 showed well at Las Salinas, Zapata. The paler Old World form is now often split off as a separate species, the Greater Flamingo *P. roseus*.
- 21. Wood Duck** *Aix sponsa* Two seen briefly at Soplillar.
- 22. American Wigeon** *Anas americana* A pair at Las Salinas.

- 23. Green-winged Teal** *Anas carolinensis* Two males seen on three days in a small lake near Soplillar.
- 24. Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* Noted on six days, mainly in the Zapata Peninsula with a maximum of 300 at Las Salinas; otherwise 5–30 daily.
- 25. Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* 10 at Las Salinas.
- 26. Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* A female on a dam by the autopista between Soroa and La Güira.
- 27. Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* A lone male at Soplillar and three at Las Salinas.
- 28. Hooded Merganser** *Lophodytes cucullatus* A lone female on a dam by the autopista between Soroa and La Güira.
- 29. Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* 11 seen from the causeway on the way back from the keys. Cuba is near the extreme southern limit of the wintering range for this species.
- 30. Turkey Vulture** *Cathartes aura* An amazingly abundant species throughout Cuba.
- 31. Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* One seen along the road between Morón and Najasa, up to six birds daily in the Zapata Peninsula.
- 32. Snail Kite** *Rostrhamus sociabilis* Ten birds – both adults and juveniles – gave excellent views at a dam by the autopista between Soroa and La Güira.
- 33. Gundlach's Hawk** *Accipiter gundlachi* Two sightings in Zapata of this rare and elusive bird. The first one, an immature, gave excellent flight views when soaring above us at Los Sabalos, the second was only seen briefly by Tomas at La Turba.
- 34. Common Black-Hawk** *Buteogallus anthracinus* In total four birds seen very well in the keys, one seen near Playa Larga and at least six at Las Salinas. The distinctive Cuban form is considered by Cuban ornithologists to be a separate species, the Cuban Black-Hawk *B. gundlachii*.
- 35. Broad-winged Hawk** *Buteo platypterus* A single bird at La Güira and one at La Turba.
- 36. Red-tailed Hawk** *Buteo jamaicensis* One seen along the road between Morón and Najasa and one in the Zapata Peninsula.
- 37. Northern Harrier** *Circus cyaneus* One seen at La Turba.
- 38. Crested Caracara** *Caracara cheriway* Six seen in the keys: four at Cayo Paredón Grande and two at Cayo Coco. Also a single bird at Najasa. All showing very well.

39. American Kestrel *Falco sparverius* This fine little falcon was fairly common throughout the trip with often five to ten birds daily. The form occurring in Cuba – *sparveroides* – is notable for having two colour phases; a very clean-looking white-bellied morph and a much scarcer rufous-bellied morph. This subspecies is also found in southern Bahamas and possibly Jamaica. We saw at least two specimens of the rufous-bellied morph, both of them at Soroa; one of them gave extremely close views in the garden at Villa Soroa.

40. Merlin *Falco columbarius* One at Cueva de Jabáli (Cayo Coco), two Cayo Paredón Grande and one Las Salinas. The Merlins here are from North America and may prove to be a different species from Old World populations (Birdquest 2005).

41. Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* Two flight views: One just south of the causeway to the keys and another 345 kms east of Havana, between Ciego de Avila and Santa Clara.

42. Limpkin *Aramus guarauna* Only one sighting of a flying bird at La Turba.

43. Black Rail *Laterallus jamaicensis* This obviously rare bird (noted in very few reports by other birders) was heard calling on a few occasions one late afternoon at La Turba, together with Angel. The call was almost identical to the call on our CD and we are quite sure it was this species we heard.

44. King Rail *Rallus elegans* One heard at Soplillar.

45. Sora *Porzana carolina* Excellent views of one bird at La Turba and c. 5 heard there.

46. Zapata Rail *Cyanolimnas cerverai* With Angel we heard one, possibly two, calling a number of times close to the road at La Turba one late afternoon. The call is a strange, hollow, accelerating drumming sound. In *Threatened birds of the world* (BirdLife International 2000) the call is described as a bouncing “*cutucutu- cutucutu- cutucutu*” and also a Limpkin-like “*kuvk kuck*”. We had an interesting discussion about the true call of this species with Chino, Angel and Andy Mitchell. It seems that different authorities have different opinions about the true call of the Zapata Rail. As long as the contrary is not verified we – as do other birders – will consider the call we heard as belonging to Zapata Rail. This species is listed as Endangered in *Threatened birds of the world* with a population of 250–999 and decreasing, but BirdLife also mention that this species is “more common than previously thought”.

47. Spotted Rail *Pardirallus maculatus* Between three and five heard on two days at La Turba. The fact that we didn’t see this species was one of our major disappointments of the trip.

48. (American) Purple Gallinule *Porphyryla martinica* Seen well on several occasions at La Boca resort in Zapata, with a maximum of 20.

49. Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Common in suitable habitat in Zapata.

- 50. American Coot** *Fulica americana* Ten on the dams by the autopista between Soroa and La Güira, four between Morón and Najasa and huge flocks in Las Salinas, Zapata where c. 2000 were seen split in five flocks.
- 51. Northern Jacana** *Jacana spinosa* One at Najasa and 1–3 seen on three different days in Zapata.
- 52. Black-necked Stilt** *Himantopus mexicanus* A flock of 50 on Cayo Paredón Grande. This form, along with several others, is often lumped in Black-winged Stilt *H. himantopus*.
- 53. Black-bellied Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* 20 in the keys and 50 at Las Salinas.
- 54. Semipalmated Plover** *Charadrius semipalmatus* Two observed in the keys and three in Las Salinas.
- 55. Killdeer** *Charadrius vociferus* Seen almost daily in Zapata with a maximum of 15 on a lawn near Hotel Playa Larga.
- 56. Wilson's Snipe** *Gallinago delicata* One seen and heard in flight at La Turba.
- 57. Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus* Three in the keys and 300 at Las Salinas.
- 58. Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca* One between Soroa and La Güira, 10 in the keys and some in Zapata, notably 30 at Las Salinas.
- 59. Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* 100 at Las Salinas, Zapata.
- 60. Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularia* One seen daily on the beach outside our casa particular in Caletón, Zapata.
- 61. Willet** *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus* Two in the keys and a flock of 15 at Las Salinas.
- 62. Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* 10 at the passage between Cayo Romano and Cayo Paredón Grande.
- 63. Sanderling** *Calidris alba* c. 20 seen in the keys.
- 64. Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla* Five at Las Salinas.
- 65. Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla* 300 at Las Salinas.
- 66. Stilt Sandpiper** *Calidris himantopus* A flock of 15 at Las Salinas.
- 67. Ring-billed Gull** *Larus delawarensis* Two at the passage between Cayo Romano and Cayo Paredón Grande.

68. Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* One bird in its 3rd calendar year at the passage between Cayo Romano and Cayo Paredón Grande. This species is very rare in Cuba. We are well aware of that an (now) adult Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* has been present right here the last seven years. Our bird was not fully adult and it is a common bird where we live in Sweden, thus we are very familiar with this species. The Lesser Black-backed Gull is a very rare straggler to the Caribbean, not listed for Cuba by Raffaele *et al.* (1998), but reported from the keys on several occasions in recent years (Birdquest 2005).

69. American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus* One seen in Havana.

70. Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* Common in the keys, 10 at Las Salinas and a few in Havana.

71. Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* Three at Las Salinas, Zapata.

72. Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* Three between Soroa and La Güira, a single bird in the keys, one at Los Canales and eight at Las Salinas. This species seems to have become commoner in Cuba in recent years (Birdquest 2005).

73. Royal Tern *Sterna maxima* Common in the keys, noted on three days in Zapata with a maximum of 20 at Las Salinas.

74. Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* Three seen at Las Salinas.

75. Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* Seen in urban areas.

76. White-crowned Pigeon *Patagioenas leucocephala* Five at Cueva de Jabáli of which one beautiful bird was seen well, 1–5 seen almost daily in Zapata (mostly flight views of this shy bird).

77. Scaly-naped Pigeon *Patagioenas squamosa* One seen at Soroa and one in La Güira were the only ones during the trip.

78. Plain Pigeon *Patagioenas inornata* Ten seen daily in Najasa. We got excellent scope filling views of this beautiful pigeon on our arrival in Najasa in late afternoon. This species is confined to the Greater Antilles and is listed as Vulnerable in *Threatened birds of the world*. The total population is estimated at only 1000–2500 birds, and thought to be declining rapidly.

79. Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* At least five in Old Havana seen from our hotel.

80. Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* Fairly common to common and noted throughout on many days.

81. Zenaida Dove *Zenaida aurita* Eight birds seen very well at Los Sabalos were the only ones noted.

- 82. Common Ground-Dove** *Columbina passerina* Fairly common to common and noted throughout almost daily.
- 83. Grey-headed Quail-Dove** *Geotrygon caniceps* One heard calling in the Soplillar area. Next day with Chino in the same area we got great views of two birds walking on the road and at Los Sabalos the same day we heard one and got a flight view of another bird. Our last day we obtained stunning views of a perched bird just off a trail near Palpite. This bird – a beauty – was sunlit and was still there when we left.
- 84. Key West Quail-Dove** *Geotrygon chrysia* One bird showing very well on a trail near Cueva de Jabáli, up to three heard in the Soplillar area and another seen very well at Los Sabalos.
- 85. Ruddy Quail-Dove** *Geotrygon montana* Two birds were flushed in a gully along the mirador trail in Soroa giving unsatisfactory views, the next day one bird was seen at distance walking on the mirador trail.
- 86. Blue-headed Quail-Dove** *Starnoenas cyanocephala* We had to work really hard before we got our eyes on this sought-after endemic. One was heard along the mirador trail, Soroa and another in the Soplillar area with Chino. On our last full day in Zapata, near Palpite with Angel, we got prolonged stunning views of this Crown jewel among Cuban birds – perched on branches as well as walking on the ground. We heard the bird calling close to the road and we finally connected when we cautiously entered the forest. In the same area a second bird was calling. This species is listed as Endangered in *Threatened birds of the world*; the total population is estimated at only 1000–2500 individuals, and is declining.
- 87. Cuban Parakeet** *Aratinga euops* 20 seen in Najasa, most of them flying around Pedros house, and two seen in the Zapata Peninsula. Endemic.
- 88. Cuban Parrot** *Amazona leucocephala* Two seen in Najasa, noted on five days in Zapata with a maximum of 15 one day.
- 89. Great Lizard-Cuckoo** *Saurothera merlini* Six seen at Soroa and two at La Güira, noted daily with 1–5 birds in the Zapata Peninsula.
- 90. Smooth-billed Ani** *Crotophaga ani* Noted as common on most days and seen throughout except in the keys.
- 91. Barn Owl** *Tyto alba* Two flying in front of the car our first evening on the autopista driving west to Soroa, one roadkilled bird seen on the autopista near Havana.
- 92. Bare-legged Owl** *Gymnoglaux lawrencii* Chino lined up a bird for us in the Soplillar area; we got excellent views of this nice owl when it peered out at us from its hole in a dead palm.
- 93. Cuban Pygmy-Owl** *Glaucidium siju* Pedro taped in a bird which gave scope filling views at San Manuel, Najasa. This species was easy to connect with in the Zapata Peninsula where we heard it almost daily and saw seven, often with great

views. Chino and Angel often used the call of this attractive Cuban endemic for attracting other birds, which worked out well.

94. Stygian Owl *Asio stygius* We were very lucky with this scarce species and saw three, maybe four, different birds in the Zapata Peninsula. Chino showed us the first one at 21 hrs in the garden at his office CITMA, 4 kms north of Playa Larga. After a while he found it perched in the top of a tall tree and we got excellent scope views. We heard this bird calling once. The next day we heard one calling and saw it flying over a road at dawn at 07.45 hrs and later this day Tomas found a younger bird in the forest perched just above our heads giving stunning views (both in the Soplillar area). The next day (at dawn) we saw one flying over the road, possibly the same individual as the day before.

95. Cuban Nightjar *Caprimulgus cubanensis* Two sightings of this endemic: one seen at dusk on the road on the way back from Soplillar; seen fairly well in the torch light. Another bird was seen the next morning flying over the road on our way to Los Sabalos. This species is now split off from Hispaniolan Nightjar; both forms were formerly known as the Greater Antillean Nightjar.

96. Antillean Palm Swift *Tachornis phoenicobia* Noted on three days: three between Soroa and La Güira, ten in the Najasa area and three in Havana.

97. Cuban Emerald *Chlorostilbon ricordii* Between one and ten individuals logged daily; most common at Soroa and Soplillar.

98. Bee Hummingbird *Mellisuga helenae* Great views of a female perched in a tree at Los Sabalos; it was also fantastic to see this little bird flying. The Bee Hummingbird is obviously scarce in the Zapata Peninsula – one of its strongholds in Cuba – as we only glimpsed two other individuals at La Turba. This Cuban endemic is the world's smallest bird.

99. Cuban Trogon *Priotelus temnurus* A beautiful multi-coloured bird, locally common and pleasingly tame, e.g. at Soroa and the Zapata Peninsula. The Trogon was often heard and often seen, and we had many stunning views. This species is Cuba's national bird and another endemic.

100. Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon* Widespread and seen daily in the keys (single birds) and in the Zapata Peninsula (2–5 daily).

101. Cuban Tody *Todus multicolor* A brilliant endemic bird with extraordinary colouration. Noted almost daily and surprisingly common some days.

102. West Indian Woodpecker *Melanerpes superciliaris* Noted on seven days; Soroa 4, La Güira 1, Najasa 3 and Zapata 7 in total.

103. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* This winter visitor from North America was observed with single birds on five days, in La Güira, Soroa and in the Zapata Peninsula.

104. Cuban Woodpecker *Xiphidiopicus percussus* Another Cuban endemic that gave close views on many occasions, especially common at Soroa with ten seen; three in the Najasa area and 1–5 daily in Zapata.

105. Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus* Seen well on two occasions, at Soplillar and Los Sabalos. This endemic form *chrysocaulosus* is sometimes treated as a separate species, the Cuban Flicker.

106. Fernandina's Flicker *Colaptes fernandinae* Stunning views of a pair in the Soplillar area and one pair at Los Canales. Another bird was heard at Los Sabalos. This is a scarce and very striking Cuban endemic. The total population is estimated at only 300–400 pairs.

107. Cuban (Crescent-eyed) Pewee *Contopus caribaeus* Commonly recorded daily (between one and ten birds). Often very tame.

108. La Sagra's Flycatcher *Myiarchus sagrae* Seen fairly frequently in many wooded areas throughout, especially in the Zapata Peninsula.

109. Loggerhead Kingbird *Tyrannus caudifasciatus* Fairly common in wooded areas throughout. Most common at Soroa (10) and Cayo Coco (10). Up to three daily in Zapata.

110. Giant Kingbird *Tyrannus cubensis* Pedro Regalado – who is studying this little known species – taped in a pair at a locality near Najasa (c. 8 kms east of the entrance to La Belen NP); we obtained excellent scope views of this rare and declining endemic species.

111. Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor* Commonly recorded along the autopista throughout. A flock of 100 was seen at La Turba.

112. Zapata Wren *Ferminia cerverai* A bird taped in by Angel at La Turba gave superb prolonged views at 7 m distance! Another bird was heard singing during two days at La Turba. This endemic has a tiny range (confined to the Zapata Swamp). Recent estimates suggest a total population of 120–140 pairs, quite extensively distributed in the swamp (*Handbook of the Birds of the World*, Vol. 10).

113. Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis* Noted almost daily throughout with 1–5 individuals. Often responded well to *pishing*.

114. Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos* Very common and widespread, recorded daily.

115. Cuban Solitaire *Myadestes elisabeth* Two heard at Soroa and one calling at La Güira on our first day. Three birds were singing near the top of the mirador trail at Soroa the second day and Tomas got stunning views of one of them in a ravine. Endemic.

116. Red-legged Thrush *Turdus plumbeus* A very attractive thrush, common and widespread, and often tame. The distinctive rufous-bellied race in Cuba is *rubripes*.

Other forms occur in the Bahamas, the Cayman Islands, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and Dominica.

117. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Polioptila caerulea* Two at Soroa and between one and five individuals daily in the Zapata Peninsula.

118. Cuban Gnatcatcher *Polioptila lembeyi* Seen extremely well and close – birds were often very tame. The first was at Cueva Jabáli, nine were seen on Cayo Paredón Grande our first day there and 11 the second day; one individual was also seen on Cayo Guillermo. This Cuban endemic is considered to be rather scarce and local.

119. Cuban Palm Crow *Corvus minutus* We had great views of this endemic at Najasa – c. 15 individuals seen and heard. The nasal, Rook-like call is diagnostic, and very different from the strange calls of the Cuban Crow. The Cuban Palm Crow has recently been split off from the Hispaniolan form *C. palmarum*. It is listed as Endangered in *Threatened birds of the world* (small population size: 2500–10000 and declining numbers). The reasons for the decline are unknown. Cuban ornithologist Pedro Regalado has started a study on the ecology of this species.

120. Cuban Crow *Corvus nasicus* Common in the Najasa area and recorded in small numbers in the Zapata Peninsula. This near-endemic also occurs on the Caicos Islands.

121. Thick-billed Vireo *Vireo crassirostris* After a fruitless search the first afternoon we had to return to Cayo Paredón Grande for this species. We had almost given up when we found two individuals c. 500 m from the lighthouse along the paved road. At last we connected and also got excellent views.

122. Cuban Vireo *Vireo gundlachii* One individual seen at Soroa, mirador trail. It was common in parts of the keys and two were noted at Najasa. Between one and five individuals were noted daily in Zapata.

123. Blue-winged Warbler *Vermivora pinus* One individual was seen well near Palpite. This migrant is rare in Cuba.

124. Northern Parula *Parula americana* Widespread and commonly recorded throughout.

125. Magnolia Warbler *Dendroica magnolia* One at Soroa and one near Palpite were the only ones observed.

126. Cape May Warbler *Dendroica tigrina* Seven individuals noted on two days in the keys.

127. Black-throated Blue Warbler *Dendroica caerulescens* Noted on seven days: a male at Soroa, two females in the keys, two males at Najasa and 12 individuals in the Zapata Peninsula.

- 128. Black-throated Green Warbler** *Dendroica virens* One at La Güira and a total of five individuals noted on five different days in the Zapata Peninsula. Like the Black-throated Blue this is a very attractive wintering warbler.
- 129. Yellow-throated Warbler** *Dendroica dominica* Single individuals recorded on Cayo Coco and in the Zapata Peninsula.
- 130. Olive-capped Warbler** *Dendroica pityophila* We connected easily with this beautiful species in the pines at La Güira; at least four individuals seen very well. This near-endemic also occurs in the Bahamas.
- 131. Prairie Warbler** *Dendroica discolor* Between one and three individuals noted on seven days: in the keys, at Najasa and in the Zapata Peninsula.
- 132. Palm Warbler** *Dendroica palmarum* A common wintering warbler of open areas, seen daily throughout.
- 133. Black-and-white Warbler** *Mniotilta varia* Between one and five individuals noted on seven days: at Soroa (5), in the keys (3) and daily in Zapata (1–2). One of our favourites among the wood warblers!
- 134. American Redstart** *Setophaga ruticilla* Recorded at Soroa with a maximum of ten per day; fairly common in the Zapata Peninsula.
- 135. Worm-eating Warbler** *Helmitheros vermivorus* A single bird seen well at Soroa, mirador trail.
- 136. Ovenbird** *Seiurus aurocapilla* This charming species was noted on nine days throughout; in total 13 individuals logged.
- 137. Northern Waterthrush** *Seiurus noveboracensis* Noted on three days in the Zapata Peninsula (5 individuals).
- 138. Louisiana Waterthrush** *Seiurus motacilla* Two were regularly seen by the stream at Soroa.
- 139. Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas* Single individuals were noted at Soroa and in the keys; locally common in the Zapata Peninsula (La Turba).
- 140. Yellow-headed Warbler** *Teretistris fernandinae* A common resident in the woodlands of western Cuba, first seen at Soroa and La Güira and then in the woodlands of the Zapata Peninsula. This endemic responds very well to *pishing*.
- 141. Oriente Warbler** *Teretistris fornsi* Seen only in the keys, mainly on Cayo Coco, where common, with 20 birds noted on our first day and 10 the next day. Endemic.
- 142. Western Stripe-headed Tanager (Western Spindalis)** *Spindalis zena* Regularly recorded and often in good numbers, e.g. ten at Soroa, common on Cayo

Coco and six seen in the Zapata Peninsula. A striking and colourful tanager, at times very confiding.

143. Cuban Bullfinch *Melopyrrha nigra* First seen on Cayo Coco, where ten were recorded, and then noted on two days in the Zapata Peninsula (2+5).

144. Cuban Grassquit *Tiaris canora* Stunning views of a pair at San Manuel, Najasa area together with Pedro; we saw totally six individuals in that area. Endemic.

145. Yellow-faced Grassquit *Tiaris olivacea* Seen in small numbers almost daily throughout.

146. Zapata (Cuban) Sparrow *Torreornis inexpectata* Superb views of a male at the Flamenco road, Cayo Coco. The birds at Zapata are of the nominate race, while those at Cayo Coco are of the race *varonai*. This endemic is classified as Endangered in *Threatened birds of the world*, with a world population of between 250 and 999 and decreasing.

147. Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* A single male seen well at La Turba.

148. Tawny-shouldered Blackbird *Agelaius humeralis* Only noted on three days: four at Najasa, 80 at Soplillar and 20 in the same area next day. A near-endemic, it also occurs in Haiti, where it is uncommon.

149. Red-shouldered Blackbird *Agelaius assimilis* With Angel we got stunning views of a very confiding pair of this endemic, along the road between La Boca and La Turba. We saw them perched down to three metres distance as well as excellent flight views!

150. Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna* Scope filling views of ten birds at San Manuel, Najasa and two seen north of Najasa. The form concerned (*hippocrepis*) is endemic to Cuba.

151. Cuban Blackbird *Dives atrovilacea* This endemic was noted on five days: ten at Soroa, three at Najasa and seven birds seen in the Zapata Peninsula.

152. Greater Antillean Grackle *Quiscalus niger* One of the commonest birds of the Cuban countryside, recorded in good numbers daily.

153. Greater Antillean Oriole (Black-cowled Oriole) *Icterus dominicensis* Noted on five days: two individuals at Cayo Paredón Grande and totally eight birds in Zapata.

154. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Common around towns and villages.