

Dominica 9-17/2 2019

Lars Olausson

Introduction

My non-birding wife and I visited the small country of Dominica on a 9-night stay in combination with Antigua and Barbuda (separate trip report).

Even if going on a full day birding trip, or as we did, on a family vacation, don't expect a long species list.

After the devastating hurricane Maria in mid-September 2017 some islands in the Lesser Antilles were more affected than others. Among those affected Dominica was hit hard, as was St. Martin, Puerto Rico and Anguilla. The French Island of Martinique escaped Hurricane Maria largely unscathed, while the French island of Guadeloupe experienced widespread power outages.

After some research around the status of the island when comes to hotels/lodges, roads and other infrastructure we decided to give it a go. It was actually a relief to see that so much was repaired and rebuilt after such a short time.

The whole vacation (Antigua and Barbuda included) was bought as package from the UK based company Motmot Travel. This included return flights from London Gatwick to Antigua (international flights arrive in Antigua) and the return flight from Antigua to Dominica (with LIAT), all accommodations, transfers and day trips with local guides. In the end the whole trip went very well without any troubles at all.

We can really recommend Motmot Travel and their services.

Visit their web site <https://www.motmottravel.com/> (they have a lot to offer) or email/phone them. mail@motmottravel.com / [+44\(0\) 1327 359 622](tel:+4401327359622).

Accommodations

Tamarind Tree

This Swiss-owned lodge is situated on the west coast between Roseau and Portsmouth. Not an ideal location if one wants to visit Morne Diablotins National Park and the Syndicate Trail several times, unless a rental car is arranged.

There's a restaurant open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. At our stay it was closed for dinner one day in the week but the owners drove the guests to a nearby restaurant at Meró Beach, 10 minutes away.

www.tamarindtreedominica.com

Citrus Creek

French owned lodge with charming cottages and a very familiar atmosphere. It's placed just south of the village La Plaine on the Atlantic (east) side of the island. A stay here means you got breakfast supplies and make your own at the cottage. Lunch and dinner can be had at their small restaurant. This is a place we really can recommend.

<https://citruscreekplantation.com>



The cottage at Citrus Creek

Car rental and driving

No car was rented on Dominica even though that seems to be a good choice if staying for a week and to be independent.

Birding around

Dominica is host of a few endemic species and some more near endemic species that's shared with (a few) other islands in the Lesser Antilles. Most well-known among the endemic species are the two parrots of which the Imperial Parrot is Dominica's national bird.

We were visiting the island out of breeding season for seabirds and therefore we didn't see any tropicbirds, terns and other breeders.

During our day with Dr Birdy I had the opportunity to ask a little of the bird life after the devastating hurricane Maria.

Here are some of his comments.

The parrots are doing well and his opinion was that the numbers were the same as before the hurricane because he had seen the same breeding activities in the same areas after the hurricane as before.

The south end of the islands is the best for breeding tropicbirds and terns.

He had a few territories of Forest Thrush but not near Syndicate Trail.

I also asked if he did any trips for seabirds off Dominica, but has far as I understood that never happened, maybe too expensive for a one-man show.

Here are a few thoughts from me.

While speaking to Jenner, our guide and driver to Cabrit's N.P, and with locals around Citrus Creek it is clear that at least the Red-necked Parrot has changed behavior and now can be seen in quite large flocks near and inside villages where there are fruiting trees. The hurricane killed and destroyed a huge number (if not all) of the trees that were their food sources earlier. The parrots eat more than a dozen different fruits depending of the season. We did just see a few Red-necked at the lookout at Syndicate trail.



Hurricane affected Dominican roadside forest.

The birding overall was very slow along the Syndicate trail, we did just see a few of the Dominican race of House Wren and one brief encounter with Plumbeous Warbler, and a few observations of hummingbirds.

When talking to the owners at Citrus Creek they told us that the birdlife in their property was very poor at this moment compared with before the hurricane.

My impression after our visit is that the birdlife on Dominica was badly hurt and it will take some time for it to recover, maybe up to a decade. The only really common species was Bananaquit, the Grassquit and Bullfinch (fairly common). Elsewhere common Caribbean species like Carib Grackle, Zenaida Dove and Common Ground-dove were almost absent.

See for yourself in the species list.

Places visited

Tamarind Tree

The garden keeps some nice species and if not been in the Caribbean before, at least, the first mornings will be rewarding. They have a hummingbird feeder and some fruit on a pole at the restaurant.

We walked along the main road both to Salisbury and Meró Beach but not much was seen. The road on the west side of Dominica was much more trafficked than the road on the east side, at least during our stay.

Whale safari off Roseau

As with other whale watching trips we done also this one was run in a very professional way. We booked this as a part of the whole package and the trip out on the sea lasted for about 2 ½ hours and they did go quite far out. They used sonar to try to locate the Sperm Whales, but no luck on our trip.

Outside breeding season there are very few terns and other seabirds to be seen I can tell.

Syndicate Trail

This famous bird watching trail does not need any further presentation. The trail is mostly an easy walk and well maintained. Some shortcuts inside the forest are a little muddier and not widely cleared. The entrance road is a steep uphill road but if taking transportation to the park center one can have a nice walk back to the main road. I think that could be as rewarding as the hike along Syndicate Trail at the moment.

Don't forget to arrange with a park pass before entering the national parks. One pass fits as entrance card for all of them. Can be purchased

at the airport or Cabrit's N.P or simply include it when booking accommodation. Most lodge owners can arrange this.



Brown Trembler

Citrus Creek

Not a recognized birding area but the owners showed us a trail close to the lodge. This trail follows a valley a long way inland. Not as bird rich as I hoped for as we didn't come to mature forest and the side towards the valley were mostly plantations. After some kilometers we passed a small shed and the trail became overgrown of grass and herbs but still possible to continue further.

Indian River

A touristy place where we were rowed a mile up the river. Our guide showed us and told us about trees, plants and birds. We visited the place where a lot of Pirates of the Caribbean was filmed. Sadly the place was damaged by the hurricane but there were some remaining's. The trip then stopped at a small jetty and all the clients were shown to the bar.

Not much with birds was seen here either.

Cabrit's National Park

This is a restored military fortress from earlier days when the French and Brit's were fighting over the islands in this region. It's situated on the northwest part of the island. Nice forest and clearings to walk around on well-maintained trails. The area is quite big and I guess doing this on our

own without guide and time pressure to get to the next place could have been much more rewarding.

Emerald Pool

Another of those tourist places. After a short walk one will get the opportunity to take a bath in the pool below the small waterfall. Nice forest in the surroundings. We visited the area late in the afternoon and there were not much of bird activity. An early morning will probably be a better option.

Guides

Dr "Birdy" – Bertrand Baptiste is very useful for Syndicate trail but also for other destinations on the island. He can be contacted at: Drbirdy2@cwdom.com or cell phone 767 245 4768 or 767 446 6358.

Bertrand is nowadays living at/near Meró Beach.

Jenner Robinson is useful as a private "taxi driver" on day trips and general transportation. He lives just south of the airport and he also owns a car rental company.

Jenner can be contacted on phone 767 276 4659.

He is a Dominican tourist guide with a good knowledge of most things on the island. We had great company with him on our day trip to Cabrit's National Park, Indian River and Emerald Pool.

Litterature

As field guide the Helm guide Birds of West Indies, Raffale, H et al was used.

I downloaded some bird sounds from Zeno-Canto to use as a library. If going to Syndicate Trail with Dr "Birdy" there's no need for any MP3-player or similar as Bertrand knows all the calls and where the territories are for different species.

I found some useful, but rather old, trip reports at Cloudbirders and Surfbirds.

Day by day

8 Feb had a lazy morning at our resort on Antigua. After the breakfast we just packed and moved our luggage to the reception. After lunch our transfer showed up and took us to the airport. The flight was delayed one hour so we arrived to Dominica just before sunset and the transfer to our accommodation was a trip in the dark.

We arrived safely and had a dinner after seeing our room.

9 Feb We had breakfast at 07.30, after a short rest and birding from our veranda we headed for a walk to Meró Beach and back again. That walk took a little less than 2 hours in slow pace. After lunch and some veranda birding we took the short walk towards Salisbury and went to the small beach at the diving center.

10 Feb A slow and peaceful day until lunch. After the meal we had a transfer to Roseau and our whale watching trip. We got back in time for dinner.

11 Feb Another very lazy day of vacation. In the afternoon we walked to Salisbury and back, just for the exercise.

12 Feb Early breakfast and then off towards Syndicate trail with Dr Birdy. A really windy day and that had most likely a negative impact on the parrot watching in particular and for bird watching in general. Even though the wind was not so obvious inside the forest it certainly didn't help us to find birds. Came back to Tamarind 13.30, for a late lunch.

The afternoon was spent in vacation pace.

13 Feb After breakfast our transfer showed up and we had an almost 2 hours' drive across the island to Citrus Creek, where we arrived well before lunchtime. We took an afternoon walk along the trail that the lodge owner had pointed out for us.

14 Feb After breakfast we had a long walk along the trail we were advised the yesterday. A few rain showers right after lunch kept us reading a book on the veranda. In the late afternoon we had a walk along the main road to La Plaine and back again.

15 Feb Before lunch it was mostly rain showers. When the weather improved we took a long walk northward along the main road. Nice walk in what earlier must have been really good patches of forest, now dead trees covered with fast-growing climbing herbs. Very low bird activity here as well.

16 Feb Full day with Jenner Robinson. We were picked up around 08.30 and came back to Citrus Creek around 17.00. We visited Indian River, Cabrit's N.P and Emerald Pool.

17 Feb Travelling day, with afternoon flight to Antigua and overnight flight to London/Gatwick where we arrived shortly after breakfast time the day after (18/2).

Species list (follows IOC)

Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*)

1 seen well off Roseau on the whale safari 10/2.

Size and coloration gives us no other species to mix with.

Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*)

1 immature Indian River 16/2.



Young Yellow-crowned Night-heron

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)

1 seen on several occasions in the small creek at Citrus Creek 13-16/2 and at least 3 Indian River 16/2.

Western Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

1 seen Salisbury 9/2 and 1 seen just outside Cabrit's N.P 16/2.

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)

1 young bird Indian River 16/2.

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

1-5 seen on several places from Roseau to Portsmouth on the west coast Caribbean Sea). Along the east coast (Atlantic Ocean) only seen once, around Citrus Creek (1 seen 14/2) and 2 Marigot 17/2.

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*)

Fairly common from Roseau to Portsmouth. Just one or two seen along the east coast.

Compare with previous species.

Western Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

1 Tamarind Tree 11/2 and 1 Citrus Creek 14 and 16/2.



Brown Pelican

Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*)

Fairly common, seen in pairs on several locations all over the island.

Common Gallinule (*Gallinula galeata*)

3 seen Indian River 16/2.

Royal Tern (*Thalasseus maximus*)

Seen in small numbers along the west coast.

Compare with Brown Pelican, pretty much the same locations (bays).

Rock (Feral) Dove (*Columba Livia "feral"*)

Only 1 seen, in a small village south of Marigot.

White-crowned Pigeon (*Patagioenas leucocephala*)

2 (a pair) near Meró Beach 9/2.

Common Ground-Dove (*Columbina passerina*)

Uncommon, only seen a few times.

Zenaida Dove (*Zenaida aurita*)

The most common one of the dove species, but nowhere numerous.

Smooth-billed Ani (*Crotophaga ani*)

1 near Meró Beach 9/2, 5 Roseau 10/2 and 6 near Citrus Creek 15/2.

Lesser Antillean Swift (*Chaetura martinica*)

30-35 seen at the parrot look out Syndicate Trail 12/2 and pretty much the same size of flock near Emerald Pool 16/2.

Purple-throated Carib (*Eulampis jugularis*)

Up to 4 in the garden at Tamarind Tree 9-12/2, up to 3 Citrus Creek 12-17/2 and 1 Syndicate Trail 12/2.



Purple-throated Carib

Green-throated Carib (*Eulampis holosericeus*)

2 Tamarind Tree 9/2 and 1 Citrus Creek 13/2.

Antillean Crested Hummingbird (*Orthorhyncus cristatus*)

Fairly common and also the most common "hummer".

Blue-headed Hummingbird (*Cyanophaia bicolor*)

1 male at the parrot look out Syndicate Trail 12/2.

Ringed Kingfisher (*Megaceryle torquata*)

2 seen flying by at Tamarind Tree 9/2 and 1 seen there 11/2.

1 (sometimes 2) seen around Citrus Creek 13-17/2.

Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

1 male near Tamarind Tree 10/2, 1 female Citrus Creek 14/2 and 2 there 16/2.

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)

1 near Meró Beach and Salisbury 9/2, 1 Tamarind Tree 10/2

Red-necked Amazon (*Amazona arausiaca*)

5-10 seen and heard at the parrot lookout at Syndicate Trail, Morne Diablotins N.P 12/2. 3 roadside birds seen along the east coast south of the airport 17/2.

See note in my personal comments above, around birding on Dominica after the hurricane Maria.

Imperial Amazon (*Amazona imperialis*)

2 flew over our heads Citrus Creek Trail 14/2.

A real surprise, when we thought our chances to see this parrot was long gone. See also previous species comment.

Caribbean Elaenia (*Elaenia martinica*)

Fairly common, easily detected by the call.



Caribbean Elaenia

Gray Kingbird (*Tyrannus dominicensis*)

A fairly common species, most often seen on wires along roads.

Lesser Antillean Flycatcher (*Myiarchus oberi*)

1 seen at the start of Syndicate Trail, Morne Diablotins N.P 12/2 and 1 seen along the Citrus Creek Trail 14/2.

Black-whiskered Vireo (*Vireo altiloquus*)

1 seen along the entrance road up to Morne Diablotins N.P 12/2.

Caribbean Martin (*Progne dominicensis*)

1 seen Tamarind Tree 13/2.

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*)

Only seen along the Syndicate Trail, Morne Diablotins N.P 12/2.
Around 5 seen and another 3-5 heard singing.



Dominican race of House Wren

Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus gilvus*)

Only seen at Tamarind Tree, where a pair held territory.

Scaly-breasted Thrasher (*Allenia fusca*)

1 breeding pair Tamarind Tree 9-12/2, 2 seen along the Citrus Creek

Trail 13 and 14/2 and 1 Cabrit's N.P 16/2.



Scaly-breasted Thrasher

Pearly-eyed Thrasher (*Margarops fuscatus*)

1 (maybe 2) seen at the parking lot at Emerald Pool 16/2.

Brown Trembler (*Cinlocerthia ruficauda*)

2 seen well along the entrance road up to Morne Diablotins N.P 12/2.

Red-legged Thrush (*Turdus plumbeus*)

2 pairs seen regular around Tamarind Tree during our stay and 2 seen Salisbury 9/2.

Carib Grackle (*Quiscalus lugubris*)

2 seen Roseau 10/2 and 2 Portsmouth 16/2.

No matter how I looked these were the only ones we recorded.

Plumbeous Warbler (*Setophaga plumbea*)

1 seen briefly (and one also heard) Syndicate Trail and 1 seen well along the entrance road to Morne Diablotins N.P 12/2.

Mangrove Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*)

1-3 seen most days.



Red-legged Thrush

Lesser Antillean Saltator (*Saltator albicollis*)

1 seen Cabrit's N.P 16/2.



Lesser Antillean Bullfinch

Bananaquit (*Coereba flaveola*)

Annoyingly common.

Black-faced Grassquit (*Tiaris bicolor*)

Common.

Lesser Antillean Bullfinch (*Loxigilla noctis*)

Fairly common.

Mammals

Fraser's Dolphin (*Lagenodelphis hosei*)

2 seen on the whale safari off Roseau 10/2.

Pantropical Spotted Dolphin (*Stenella attenuate*)

More than 30 seen on the whale safari off Roseau 10/2.

Red-rumped Agouti (*Dasyprocta leporina*)

1 seen near Syndicate Trail, Morne Diablotins National Park 12/2.

Compiled by Lars Olausson

Email: birdinglarne@gmail.com

Cell phone +46 (0)70 6500592