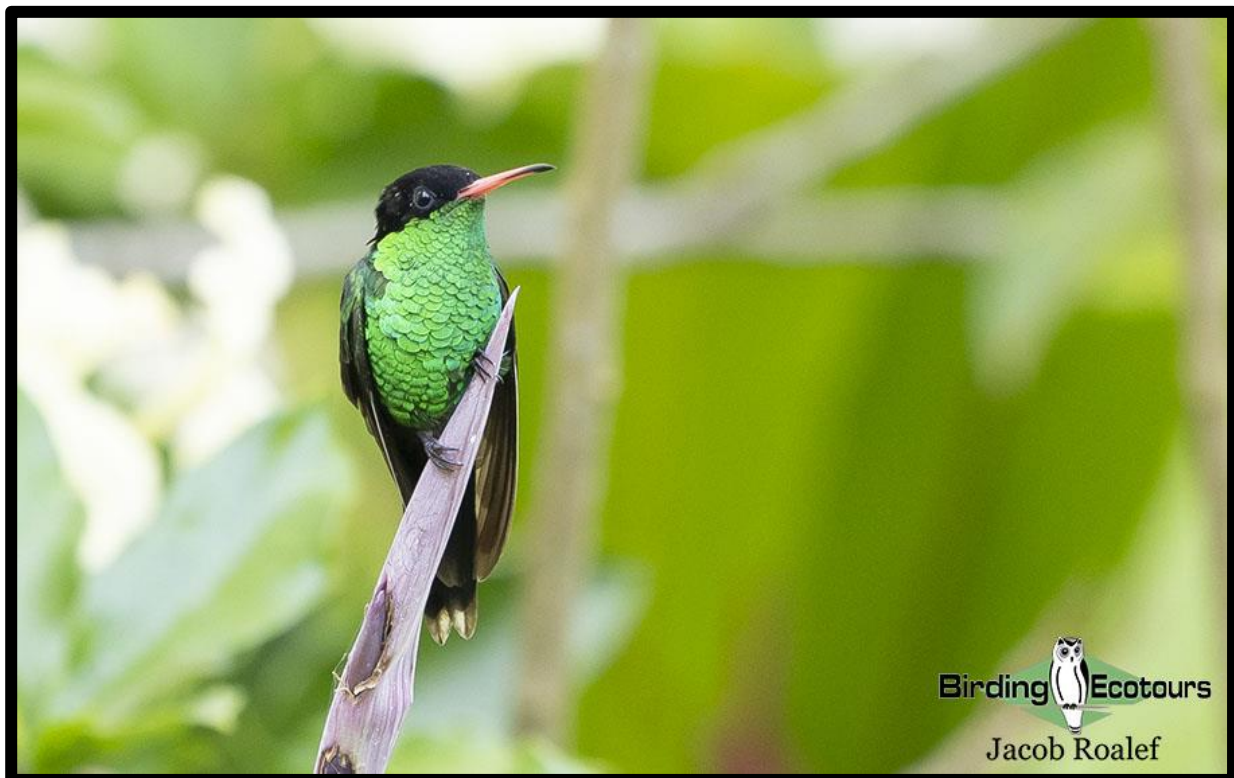




**JAMAICA BIRDING TOUR: ISLAND ENDEMICS
IN THE HEART OF THE CARIBBEAN**

**22 – 28 MARCH 2024
22 – 28 MARCH 2025**



*The **Red-billed Streamertail** is often referred to as the “doctor bird” by locals and is Jamaica’s national bird.*

Birding Ecotours invites you to explore the island nation of Jamaica, an extraordinary country in the heart of the Caribbean Sea. Jamaica is famous for its beautiful tropical shores lined with coral reefs, beach resorts, Rastafarian culture, reggae music, Jamaica Blue Mountain Coffee, and early James Bond adventures. Importantly for us, this island is also home to 30 endemic bird species, along with a good number of Caribbean specials shared only with neighboring islands in the Greater Antilles.

Being the third-largest island in the Caribbean, Jamaica hosts a wide array of habitats. On this tour we will explore various forested mountain ranges, lush lowland coastal bush, coastal shores, and several wetlands, giving us what are sure to be some of the finest birding experiences in the Caribbean. Our week-long tour will give you a realistic chance of seeing all of Jamaica's bird endemics. These include the gorgeous **Red-billed Streamertail** (known locally as the doctor bird), **Jamaican Mango, Crested Quail-Dove, Jamaican Tody, Jamaican Owl** and **Jamaican Blackbird**. We hope to find all these, along with many other regional specialties, in a comfortable time frame without rushing the trip. We will also make a special effort to look for the beautiful **White-tailed Tropicbird** while on the island.



*We will search for **Jamaican Owl** on a nocturnal birding session.*

This tour begins with some birding around the capital city, Kingston, before we head into the heights of the spectacular Blue Mountains National Park, then on to Portland Parish, our base to explore the John Crow Mountains National Park. We have chosen lodges giving the best access to the birding sites, when possible with good birds within their grounds. With ample time to explore the diverse Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park and Ecclesdown Road, this tour is perfect for a great week of birding, targeting all of Jamaica's endemic bird species.

This trip can easily be combined with our **Cuba: Endemics and Culture in Paradise** tour and our **Complete Dominican Republic** tour for a comprehensive birding experience in the Caribbean.

Itinerary (7 days/6 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Jamaica

Today is a travel day and you can arrive at your leisure in Kingston, Jamaica (though, we suggest arriving before 2 pm to be able to join us for some local birding). After a short transfer from Norman Manley International Airport, we check in at our comfortable hotel in Kingston. If time permits, we will visit one of the city parks to start getting familiar with Caribbean birds. This will act as a great introduction to birding in Jamaica, and we hope to start seeing our first endemics of the tour, such as **Yellow-billed Amazon**, **White-chinned Thrush**, and **Jamaican Woodpecker**.

Overnight: Terra Nova All Suite Hotel or similar

Day 2. Birding Kingston and the Hellshire Hills

We first travel to the arid Hellshire Hills to the south-west of Kingston, an area which is more reminiscent of an African savanna than of a Caribbean coastline. The coastal scrub-woodlands are productive for Jamaica's dry-forest species. Our principal target will be **Bahama Mockingbird**, a very localized species in Jamaica, found only here and in adjacent Clarendon Parish. Our other major targets will be the endemic **Jamaican Vireo** and near-endemic **Stolid Flycatcher**, which, while present throughout the island, are more common in arid woodlands. Here we have a good chance of encountering the stunning endemic hummingbird, **Jamaican Mango**, alongside the tiny **Vervain Hummingbird** as it darts between flower patches – although only a mere inch larger than the world's smallest bird (and close relative, the Bee Hummingbird) this species makes up for its size with a lot of character!

Leaving Hellshire Hills we visit wetlands along the western edge of Kingston where we should see a range of waterbirds such as **Northern Jacana**, **Purple Gallinule**, **Least Grebe**, and **Black-necked Stilt**, alongside waders and heron species, with **Least Bittern**, and **Tricolored Heron** perhaps the most notable. The grassland and scrub surrounding these wetlands are frequented by comical parties of **Smooth-billed Ani**, small groups of **Saffron Finch**, and wintering neotropical warblers, while groups of **Cave Swallow** swirl overhead.

We eventually depart for the Blue Mountains National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where we have a two-night stay nestled within montane forests of the Silver Hill Gap where we seek Jamaica's rarest birds.

Overnight: Starlight Chalet. **This is basic accommodation but is in the best position for birding.**



Jamaican Oriole can be seen around Starlight Chalet.

Day 3. Birding the Blue Mountains National Park

At almost 4,000 feet (1,220 meters) above sea level, the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park is classified as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International and host the rarest of Jamaica's endemics. Today we'll focus on birding the Hardwar Gap, Silver Hills Gap, and Cascade Falls, these sites all merge seamlessly into each other along a rugged mountain road on the cool western slopes of the Blue Mountains National Park.

Our lodge is well situated, nestled high in the Silver Hill Gap, and with an early departure we will be in prime position to find the secretive **Crested Quail-dove**, which is often seen waddling along the forested edges of the road in the early morning. We will visit the Hardwar gap area early as it is perfect for **Rufous-throated Solitaire** – a gorgeous bird we will try to find by following its haunting whistles. Out on the trails and along the mountain road, we will search for the unobtrusive **Jamaican Elaenia** and **Greater Antillean Bullfinch**, and the region's namesake, the **Blue Mountain Vireo**. The vireo is very localized, being found only here and in Cockpit Country, and is a secretive species, often creeping quietly through dense vegetation, but it is common enough in the right habitat. One of the most exciting prospects of birding these high-elevation forests, however, is the chance of encountering a mixed species flock, with **Jamaican Becard**, **Jamaican Spindalis**, and **Arrowhead Warbler** sometimes present in these. The unusual **Jamaican Blackbird** may associate with these flocks too, and hopefully we will see them foraging in epiphytes and tree ferns. Another section is ideal for finding small parties of **White-eyed Thrush** and is, importantly, one of the best places for **Greater Antillean Elaenia**. At this time of year, the species will be returning to high-elevation forests in preparation to breed, but pairs will often join mixed species flocks.

Although we'll be targeting the more localized species, 28 of the 30 Jamaican endemics have been recorded within the Blue Mountains National Park, and many migrants winter here so birding can be very productive. We will relax at the lodge when the birding quietens down but have the option to bird again in the afternoon once things start moving again, either visiting the lodge trails or picking another local site depending on our targets.

Overnight: Starlight Chalet. **This is basic accommodation but is in the best position for birding.**



*The endemic **Jamaican Tody** is one of our special targets on this trip.*

Day 4. Birding the Blue and John Crow Mountains and transfer to Port Antonio

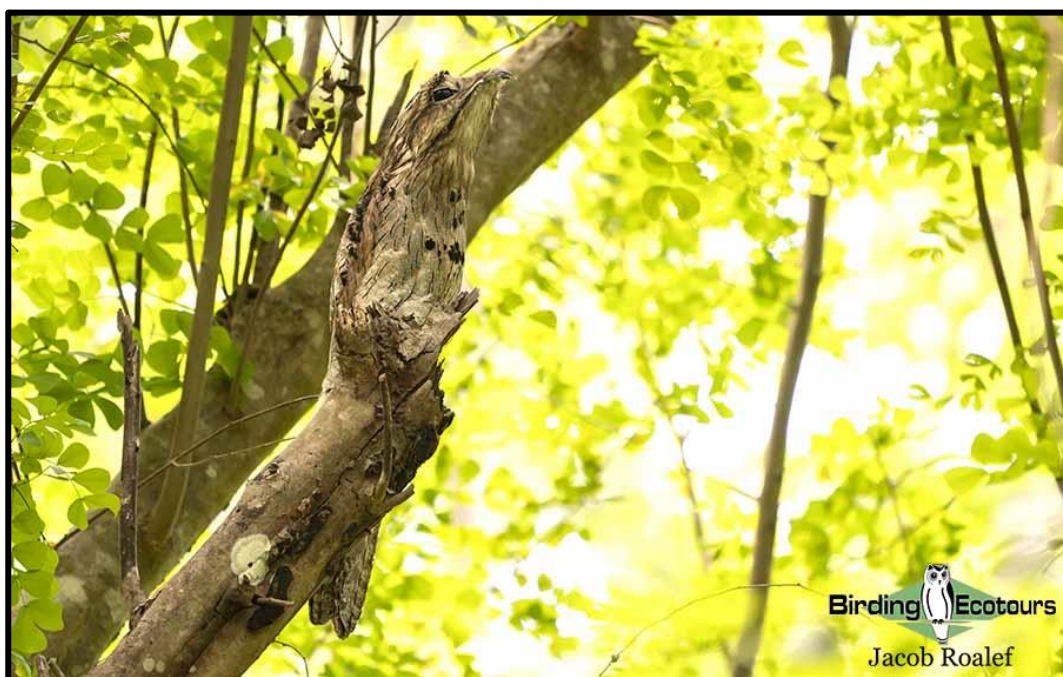
As with all great birdwatching in the Caribbean, ours will be at a relaxed pace and today we plan to bird the grounds and nearby trails of Starlight Chalet. We will take time to enjoy good views of many of the Jamaican endemics which are in abundance here, including one of the world's most iconic species, **Red-billed Streamertail** – as males jostle over flowers in the garden and chase one another, displaying their gorgeous tail streamers. The gardens and surrounding forests host colorful and exotic endemics such as **Jamaican Oriole**, **Jamaican Woodpecker**, **Jamaican Euphonia**, **Orangequit**, and the unobtrusive but incredibly beautiful **Jamaican Tody**. We hope to find the bird known locally as the 'Old Man Bird' – **Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo**, which is surprisingly nimble despite its size. We will have a good chance of finding many of Jamaica's endemic tyrant flycatchers too, with **Jamaican Pewee**, **Sad Flycatcher** and **Rufous-tailed Flycatcher** all seen regularly.

After an exciting morning, we will descend from the mountains and transfer to Port Antonio in the north-east of the island, to relax at our hotel for the afternoon. Here, **Black-billed Streamertail** replace their red-billed counterparts and on arrival at the Hotel Mockingbird, we should be greeted

by these gorgeous hummingbirds as they squabble over the feeders. **Jamaican Mango** is also usually in attendance, and while it's likely we would have encountered this species previously, here we can enjoy prolonged views of these lovely and surprisingly timid birds. The hotel is situated near good quality lowland forest, which is especially productive for the globally threatened **Ring-tailed Pigeon**, which is satisfyingly abundant here, and busy flocks often pass overhead.

After eating some of the best Jamaican food, we will look for one of the less common endemics, the **Jamaican Owl**, which is resident within the grounds and often picked out by its hoarse, far-carrying calls. We will also look for the local subspecies of **American Barn Owl**, and **Northern Potoo**, which can often be found right outside the hotel.

Overnight: Hotel Mockingbird Hill



Cryptically camouflaged Northern Potoo can often be found at their day roosts.

Day 5. Birding the Ecclesdown Road

Today we will have an early departure from our eco-lodge as we head to the far east of the island, to explore Ecclesdown Road. This is one of the country's best-known birding sites: an overgrown and seldom-used road that travels along the foothills of the John Crow Mountains for approximately eleven miles (18 kilometers). Ecclesdown Road winds through a mix of secondary closed and open forests as well as small patches of scrub, cultivation, and plantation, which together create a very productive area to bird. We will spend a long morning slowly birding along this flat road, making our way back to our lodge in the afternoon. This promises to be an exciting morning, as here we have chances at finding most of Jamaica's endemics along with many other specials, and we will devote our time to the species we still need. Our main targets are likely to be

Black-billed Amazon, which appear to be more numerous than **Yellow-billed Amazon** here, and **Yellow-shouldered Grassquit**, as small groups forage along the roadside and forest-scrub edge. Ecclesdown Road is also good for **Jamaican Crow**, which, despite uninspiring plumage, has remarkable vocalizations comprised of mechanical gurgles, clucks, pops, and jabbering. Other species of interest include the Jamaican subspecies of the raucous **Olive-throated Parakeet**, **Ring-tailed Pigeon**, **Crested Quail-Dove**, **Jamaican Blackbird** and **Black-billed Streamertail**.

Once we have had our fill of Ecclesdown, we will start heading back to our eco-lodge, but we'll check for impressive **White-tailed Tropicbird** and **Magnificent Frigatebird** which can be seen just offshore. We can also check for wintering **Belted Kingfisher**, which fishes from the beaches and mangroves. Returning in good time, we will have the afternoon at leisure, to either enjoy birding the hotel veranda and gardens, or visit the beautiful Frenchman's Creek.

Overnight: Hotel Mockingbird Hill



*We will look for the beautiful **White-tailed Tropicbird**.*

Day 6. Birding Portland Parish

Our sixth day in Jamaica will be flexible and we have a wide variety of options available to us. Should we have missed any notable birds on the Ecclesdown Road, or indeed within the Blue Mountains, we will undertake a trip into these areas to try once more. Alternatively, there are productive sites close to our eco-lodge which we may choose to explore instead, particularly if we have yet to encounter the cautious **Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo**, or 'Old Lady Bird' as it's known locally, as the dense forests near Frenchman's cove and San-San beach are a familiar haunt for this uncommon endemic. These coastal forests can be an exciting prospect to bird as they are a hotspot

for neotropical migrants, so we'll have a chance of seeing some less commonly encountered species in Jamaica, such as **Worm-eating Warbler**, and **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**. However, given that most of Jamaica's endemics have been recorded within the grounds of our eco-lodge, we may opt to bird from the comfort of the lodge. Time here will be put to good use with many excellent birds possible, and it will allow photographic opportunities for spectacular **Black-billed Streamertail** or **Jamaican Mango**. Should it be of interest, we can help arrange a trip to experience one of the natural beauty spots which Jamaica is renowned for (please note this may require additional costs).

Overnight: Hotel Mockingbird Hill



*Yet another of our endemic targets; **Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo**.*

Day 7. Departure from Kingston

Following a spectacular week, this tour will conclude after breakfast when we will transfer back to Kingston where the tour will end. If time allows, we may drop into one of the coastal wetlands for some final Jamaican birding before departing, particularly if **West Indian Whistling Duck** or **American Flamingo** have been reported in the area. Please note, we ask if you can try to book afternoon or evening flights out of Kingston to allow for necessary travel time (at least three hours to the airport) and flight check-in formalities.

Don't forget to check out our **Cuba: Great Caribbean Birding and Endemics** tour and **Complete Dominican Republic** tour to extend your amazing Caribbean birding experience!

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	7 days
Group Size:	4 – 8
Dates:	22 – 28 March 2024 22 – 28 March 2025
Start:	Kingston
End:	Kingston
Prices:	US\$3,522 per person sharing, assuming 4-8 participants (2024) US\$3,909 per person sharing, assuming 4-8 participants (2025)
Single supplements:	US\$448 (2024) US\$497 (2025)

Price includes:

Meals/water
Accommodation
Transport
Guiding fees

Price excludes:

Flights
Personal insurance
Alcoholic beverages
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))
Laundry service
Personal expenses such as gifts