

Jamaica

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 - 6

Jamaica – Ecclesdown Road & Port Antonio

An evening arrival will see us settling into our hotel in the quiet of Port Royal. The next morning the island's capital belies its sometimes awkward reputation by showing us a sunny persona of leafy suburbs abutting the blue Caribbean. Behind the city is the impressive outline of the Blue Mountains a beguiling landscape we'll visit later in the tour, for now we'll travel round the island's coast to our base for the next five nights.

Chirping *Eleutherodactylus* frogs provide the soundtrack to evenings at Goblin Hill, our base for exploring Jamaica's east coast. Navy Island sits offshore of Port Antonio, and this pretty town is surrounded by lush gardens, plantations and forest edge. Offshore is some great snorkelling and you'll have as much opportunity to get your masks and fins on as you wish. The waters are clear and there's good coral and a rich assortment of fish here. Back on land Zebra Heliconids flutter about the gardens of our hotel and we'll see birds such as Rufous-tailed Flycatcher and Jamaican Elaenia. Greater Antillean Grackles are frequent and we'll soon be introduced to the gorgeous Black-billed Streamertail, which replaces its red-billed cousin this far east.

The Eastern slopes of the John Crow Mountains still have much fine forest, here and there decorated with aliens such as *Spathodea campanulata* and Breadfruit. The Ecclesdown Road allows relatively undisturbed access to much fine habitat. Endemic Yellow-billed and Black-billed Parrots fly backwards and forwards. Quail-Doves are some of the region's most sought after and difficult to see endemics as they are both very beautiful and very shy birds, so we'll need to be quiet to stand a chance of seeing them. Here it is the neatly coiffured Crested Quail-Dove that we seek, a predominantly grey bird, with purplish wings, and a small crest. Male Jamaican Becards sing their lovely song as we watch Ring-tailed Pigeon and Greater Antillean Bullfinch.

Days 8 & 9

Jamaica – The Blue Mountains & Strawberry Hill

Inland is the impressive outline of the Blue Mountains and we'll head up into this famous landscape. Coral Vine is prominent along our route, and Cloudless Sulphurs and Julia butterflies flit across the road. As we rise into the hills red *Achimenes erecta* dominates roadsides whilst the yellow sprays of flowering Logwood illuminate the forest. Arriving at the stunning Strawberry Hills we'll soon settle in. The impressive swallowtail *Papilio andraemon* flies round the garden almost the same size as the diminutive regional endemic Vervain Hummingbird, and the unusual Jamaican Owl is found at night close to the lodge. There are no

less than twenty-eight bird species found only on Jamaica and several of them are really very beautiful birds, the two Streamertail hummingbirds perhaps the finest. The fantastic Red-billed Streamertail frequents the garden, and indeed is quite common in suitable habitat everywhere. It is a gorgeous bird, the shimmering green plumage offset by the brilliant red beak, the two tail feathers streaming far beyond the rest of the tail. Nearby streams fall through broadleaf forests in pretty waterfalls as we admire Greater Antillean Bullfinch, Jamaican Oriole, and Bananaquit, whilst noisy Olive-throated Parakeets fly overhead

We'll walk through Shola-like forests where the forest floor is dotted with John Crow Noses! For he (John Crow that is!) of the mountains is also commemorated in the local name of this strange root-parasite, scientifically *Scybalium jamaicense*, a member of the *Balanophoraceae*. Jamaican Woodpeckers noisily comment on our progress as Arrowhead Warblers flit through the boughs. Then our eyes suddenly focus on something brilliant perched on a low bough. The Jamaican Tody is a small bird, but a stunningly coloured one, the reds and greens clear and bright. Once found they are often confiding and allow close approach for photography. Almost as bright is the anole lizard, *Anolis garmani*, and of a similar hue is the impressively large and common Malachite butterfly. Terrestrial orchids with sprays of yellow flowers decorate the track edge where we'll find some fine butterflies such as the Antillean Mapwing and the endemic swallowtail *Papilio thersites*. Large fruiting trees attract White-eyed Thrushes, Jamaican Euphonia, Orangequit, and Jamaican Spindalis.

The strangely-named settlement of Section, to the north of Hardwar Gap, is the most productive and well-known area for birds in the Blue Mountains. Here the upland forest is draped with many lichens and bromeliads, ferns and orchids (none in flower). Tree Ferns are prominent and varied, with some eighteen species in the area, whilst the alien ginger *Hedygium gardnerianum* dominates roadsides. The Antilles is home to some spectacular cuckoos, and here we'll be introduced to two of them, the Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo and the even more impressive Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo. Begonias flower alongside the path with the gentian *Lisianthus latifolius* which has attractive tubular yellow flowers. *Piper aduncum* and the climbing bamboo *Chusquea abietifolia* scramble over *Conostegias*, *Mecraniums*, *Merianas* and *Miconias*, all members of the *Melastomataceae*. This is one of the best places to see the elusive and unobtrusive Jamaican Blackbird, an icterid that forages in bromeliads and along mossy trunks.

Days 9 - 11

Jamaica – Hellshire Hills & Morgan's Harbour

We drive along the coast towards Kingston, passing small harbours thronging with Brown Pelicans, Royal Terns and Laughing Gulls. The distinctive silhouettes of Magnificent Frigatebirds are ever above us, and Short-billed Anis abundant along the roads. Inland of Kingston lie the Hellshire Hills, an arid peninsula of dry cactus scrub. Jamaican Mangos visit the flowering cacti. The striking bright green dragonfly *Erythemis vesiculosa* is quite common and there are many butterflies, notably the vivid *Anaea portia*, striking on the upperside, with cryptic undersides

that blend very well with the branches on which they settle. We'll look for the scarce regional endemic Bahama Mockingbird before moving on to Morgan's Harbour in Port Royal. In a famous scene in Dr. No, James Bond is attacked by a tarantula in one of the rooms at this hotel. The book contains many scenes of Jamaica, the views of Port Royal, the road between there and the airport, and Morgan's Harbour, as they were fifty years ago. There is of course the birding connection, that Ian Fleming took the name James Bond from the author of 'Birds of the West Indies'.

We'll depart on the return flight to London during the evening of Day 11.

Day 12

Arrive UK/Europe

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