

The Dominican Republic - “mother of all lands”



Island Summary:

The Dominican Republic offers truly spectacular birding. Its landscapes are not only the most extreme in the region - with the tallest mountains, the largest lakes, and the longest rivers - but its habitats are also the most diverse - ranging from moist montane forest, to sun-baked desert. It is also the only Caribbean island with a deep and extensive interior, and it is the combination of all of these aspects that have resulted in it being home to at least 31 single-island endemics - the largest number in the entire Caribbean. Although Hispaniola (of which the Dominican Republic covers approximately two thirds) is the second largest island in the Caribbean, the majority of the birding is actually concentrated within a relatively compact area, meaning that no fewer than thirty-one species found nowhere else on the planet (including a some such as the Palmchat which remain enigmas to ornithologists), can potentially be sighted without the need for long drives on a daily basis, or internal flights.



Ridgway's Hawk; La Selle Thrush; Palmchat (photo © Bob Lewis)

Highlights:

A quiet oasis in the otherwise bustling capital city of Santo Domingo offers a fabulous introduction to the island's avifauna, where encounters with endemic **Hispaniolan Woodpecker**, **Black-crowned Palm-Tanager**, **Hispaniolan Mango**, and **Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo** are likely, along with the bizarre, and utterly unique endemic **Palmchat** - which constructs gargantuan communal nests in palm trees. The city is also home to an easily accessible **Hispaniolan Parakeet** roost, where excellent views of this colourful endemic are pretty much guaranteed.

Make a stop at one of the most productive wetlands on the island, where vast salt pans, sand dunes, interdunal swales and mangroves intertwine to provide near-perfect habitat for shorebirds, seabirds and over-wintering warblers including Blackpoll and Prairie Warblers, Northern Waterthrush, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Boobies, and a variety of other species of wader, waterfowl and heron.



Hispaniolan Woodpecker and Hispaniolan Trogon

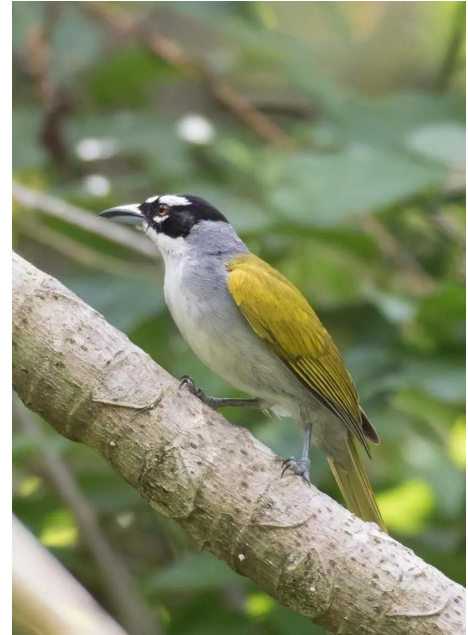
Visit the shores of the largest lake in the insular Caribbean, home to the endemic **Hispaniolan Palm Crow**, **White-necked Crow** (Hispaniola's other endemic crow), **Hispaniolan Parrot**, the globally-scarce Plain Pigeon, Greater Antillean Bullfinch (*affinis*) and Greater Antillean Grackle (*niger*). Explore the protected cloud forests of the imposing Sierra de Bahoruco, home to endemics **Eastern Chat-Tanager**, **Hispaniolan Trogon**, **White-fronted Quail-Dove**, **Hispaniolan Spindalis**, **Antillean Siskin**, **Hispaniolan Pewee**, **Golden Swallow**, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Rufous-throated Solitaire (*montanus*), and endemic **Hispaniolan Euphonia**. Here, too, the Bicknell's Thrush can be found over-wintering.

Meander through a narrow strip of riparian habitat where targets include both endemic species of today (**Broad-billed** and **Narrow-billed**), as well as **Bay-breasted Cuckoo**, **Antillean Piculet**, **Flat-billed Vireo**, and **Hispaniolan Oriole**.

Venture into the heart of elfin forest, for encounters with endemics **La Selle Thrush**, **White-winged Warbler**, **Western Chat-Tanager**, **Hispaniolan Emerald** and **Green-tailed Warbler**, and the insular form of Loggerhead (Hispaniolan) Kingbird. While here, listen out for nocturnal endemics **Hispaniolan Nightjar**, and **Least Pauraque** returning to roost. Night-birding under the light of your headtorch can herald such species as endemics **Least Pauraque** and **Ashy-faced Owl**, the insular subspecies of Burrowing Owl (Hispaniolan), Northern Potoo, and Chuck-will's-widow.

Explore high-elevation pine forests for the gregarious endemic **Hispaniolan Crossbill** and the endemic subspecies of Pine Warbler (*chrysoluca*).

Visit one of the last strongholds of the endemic and critically endangered **Ridgway's Hawk**, now confined to a relatively small protected area in the northeast of the island. Despite the best efforts of conservationists it may not be long before this precious species is lost forever.



Hispaniolan Emerald; Black-crowned Palm Tanager (photo © Bob Lewis)

Other things to do in the Dominican Republic:

- Explore the oldest European city in the New World, and the capital city of the Dominican Republic: the Colonial Zone in Santo Domingo.
- Hike the numerous trails that wind through the country's gorgeous forests and mountains.
- Board a whale-watching cruise and be treated to up-close views of ocean-dwelling mammals, including the majestic Humpback Whale.
- Take a dip in one of the natural freshwater pools, lagoons, waterfalls, cenotes (or open-water cave systems) dotted across this vast island.
- Immerse yourself in the local culture and learn how to cook authentic Dominican dishes over a wood-burning fire - the traditional way!
- Visit a vineyard to indulge in a spot of Caribbean wine tasting!
- Board a private speedboat and take a short trip across sparkling turquoise waters to the internationally-renowned Saona Island to snorkel its pristine coral reefs.