

Jamaica

Tropical Treasure Island

2022 Sunday 13th-Monday 21st March (9 days)

Single-centre, small group tour with Stuart Elsom & local guides



The stunning Red-billed Streamertail is one of 28 bird species that are unique to the island we hope to find © Stuart Elsom

Limosa's all-inclusive, 'one-stop' birdwatching tour to Jamaica combines delightful tropical birding beneath the warm Caribbean sun with a 7-night stay at the beautiful Green Castle Estate. Jamaica is a hotbed of avian endemism in the West Indies with no fewer than 28 species of birds which are unique to the island. Remarkably, as many as 20 of these have been found within the grounds of the private estate where we stay. Add a wealth of more widespread Caribbean specialities plus migrant North American warblers and we think you will find our Jamaica birding tour is every bit as tasty as the island's delicious Caribbean cuisine!

Highlights

- A week of wonderful tropical birding and warm winter sunshine on the "Blue Mountain Isle"
- 28 bird species endemic to Jamaica - more than any other Caribbean island
- Jamaican Owl, Jamaican Tody, Red-billed & Black-billed Streamertails, Blue Mountain Vireo
- A host of other, more widespread Caribbean bird specialities and North American migrants
- Our 2022 itinerary includes several new excursions
- One-stop tour based in tropical comfort on the picturesque Green Castle Estate
- All-inclusive price includes a full programme of birding excursions, all with a Limosa guide
- Small group tour with a maximum of 10 participants
- Expertly led by Stuart Elsom and an experienced Jamaican bird guide

What's Included?

- Limosa Tour Leader
- Expert resident Jamaican bird guide
- 7 nights accommodation in Jamaica, staying on the lovely Green Castle Estate
- All main meals with drinking water provided during the day
- Travel by comfortable minibus and Toyota Coaster transfers with experienced local driver
- FULL and comprehensive programme of birding excursions on Jamaica - NONE at extra cost!
- All entry fees, all tour-based tips (including lodge staff, drivers, local guides) and taxes

Outline Itinerary

Day 1

We fly from the UK and transfer directly to the lovely Green Castle Estate on the island's north coast. Night Green Castle

Days 2-7

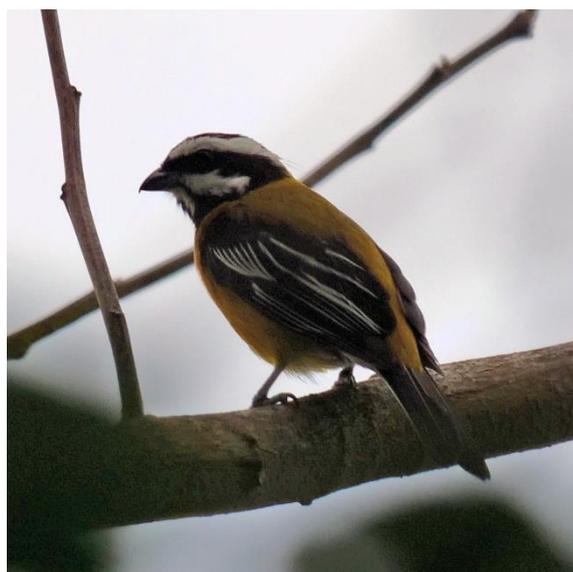
Birdwatching on the extensive Green Castle Estate, with excursions into the Blue Mountains, the John Crow range, Murphy's Hill and the Caribbean coast and all included within our tour price. Green Castle (6 nights)

Day 8

A visit to Rocklands Bird Sanctuary followed by a late afternoon transfer to the airport for our overnight flight home

Day 9

Morning arrival in UK



The Jamaican Spindalis is one of 28 species of bird that are endemic to the island of Jamaica © Stuart Elsom

Tour Overview

Jamaica is a hotbed of avian endemism in the West Indies. Not only does the 'Blue Mountain Isle' offer a superb range of habitats but it is also home to a remarkable 28 endemic birds which is more than any other Caribbean island.

Our March visit is timed to give us the best chance of finding them, along with a host of regional Caribbean specialities and wintering North American birds. Our 2022 itinerary includes some additional excursions, taking in the coast for White-tailed Tropicbirds and paying a visit to the famous Rocklands Bird Sanctuary and Murphy's Hill. Add a welcome dose of warm Caribbean sunshine, great food and a generous helping of legendary Jamaican hospitality at the excellent Green Castle Estate where we stay and the allure of a winter break on this bird-rich 'Tropical Treasure Island' is surely irresistible!

Nestling between the foothills of the verdant Blue Mountains National Park and the waters of the Caribbean, the Green Castle Estate offers visiting birdwatchers comfortable lodgings, fine food and relaxed, easy birding in the safe and lush north-eastern corner of this ornithological paradise. Whilst 21 of the island's 28 endemic bird species have been found on the property, our tour also includes a comprehensive programme of trips in search of those occurring elsewhere on the island. From three stunningly iridescent hummingbirds, the viridian-bodied Red-billed and Black-billed Streamertails and the purple-headed Jamaican Mango, to the Jamaican Spindalis and Jamaican Tody.

Our historical lodgings form part of a working mix of environmentally friendly tourism and land use that is sustainable and in harmony with the diverse ecosystems that make Green Castle such a special place and with some excellent birding in the grounds.

A first gentle stroll could involve a Jamaican Mango, Jamaican Vireo or Jamaican Woodpecker and a fantastic range of species can be seen in the



Vervain Hummingbird is only found on Jamaica and Hispaniola © Stuart Elsom

lovely gardens of our guesthouse and all while enjoying a cup of locally grown coffee, freshly squeezed fruit juice or a rum punch!

Walking the hill trails on the estate will reveal more of the island's endemic birds, giving us chances of seeing everything from the outrageous Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo and Jamaican Becard to the wonderfully-named Sad Flycatcher and White-chinned Thrush. As a warm Caribbean breeze brushes over you, there may be the temptation to relax around the swimming pool or stroll the grounds on your own but that is the beauty of spending the whole week here: although we include a full programme of daily birdwatching, you are free to pass on any of the organised walks or excursions and simply choose to relax or do whatever you wish.

To complete our list of Jamaican endemics, we will take day trips from Green Castle into the nearby Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park, as well as paying a visit to Murphy's Hill.

The sparsely populated Blue Mountains are world famous for their coffee but this is also a terrific spot to go birding. Walking the road through marvellous forest at Hardwar Gap, with its abundant mosses, bromeliads and tree ferns, we will look for the furtive Crested Quail-dove which is often the most challenging of the island's endemics to find. As Ring-tailed Pigeons sweep over the forest canopy, we will also be keen to see the peculiar Jamaican Blackbird and to hear the ethereal song of the Rufous-throated Solitaire.

Named after the Turkey Vultures (known locally as "John Crows") that soar across the forested peaks, the John Crows are the easternmost mountains on the island. This limestone area receives quite a bit of rain blown in on the tradewinds and is a verdant and a very scenic place to spend time looking for birds.

Specialities on our day in the mountains could include Black-billed Streamertail (a species found only here), both Yellow-billed and Black-billed Amazons and Jamaican Crow. We will also keep our eyes peeled for the monochrome Arrowhead Warbler.

Returning to Montego Bay at the end of our tour, we will drop by at the Rocklands Bird Sanctuary which is a wonderful opportunity for bird photography and a great place to get up close and personal with a good proportion of the island's endemic birds, including the hummingbirds.

Orangequit, Bananaquit or Jamaican Mango could be amongst your own favourites so join Limosa guide Stuart Elsom for a 'juicy' Caribbean tour where the very names of the island's birds sound as good as they look!

Stuart led a private tour to Green Castle in 2019 and our March 2022 tour will be the fourth Limosa visit.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

FLY TO JAMAICA, TRANSFER TO GREEN CASTLE ESTATE

Our birdwatching tour begins with a non-stop flight to Jamaica. On arrival, we will travel by air-conditioned Coaster bus to the Green Castle Estate where we will be welcomed with a refreshing cold towel and glasses of fresh local fruit juice, followed by our first delicious dinner.
Night Green Castle

DAY 2

BIRDING GREEN CASTLE ESTATE

After a day of travelling, we plan to take it reasonably easy today and will spend the day exploring the estate on foot.

We will take our time getting to know some of the commoner island endemics such as Jamaican Woodpecker, the tiny Jamaican Tody, Jamaican Oriole, Orangequit, Sad Flycatcher, Jamaican Vireo, Jamaican Euphonia and White-chinned Thrush.

We will also devote part of the day to tracking down a few of the scarcer endemics such as Yellow-shouldered Grassquit and the 'reptilian' Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo.

Jamaican endemic subspecies (there are a further nineteen of these!) of Olive-throated Parakeet, Loggerhead Kingbird and Vervain Hummingbird might also be found and they are often just outside the guesthouse.

The star bird of the day, however, could well be the Red-billed Streamertail, whose elaborate tail plumes make a fascinating hum as they fly.

Though we might perhaps walk for three or four miles over the course of the day (some of it on hilly terrain), as with life everywhere in the Caribbean, the pace is easy and relaxed with frequent stops for birding as we go. *Night Green Castle*

DAY 3

BLUE MOUNTAINS AND HARDWAR GAP

After our orientation day around the estate, we will make an early start up to Hardwar Gap in the famous Blue Mountains. As we depart in the half-light, we have a chance of spotting American Barn Owl. Compared with those elsewhere, the birds on Jamaica have very white wings.

There are three key endemic birds to find in the Blue Mountains National Park, with two of them, Crested Quail-dove and Jamaican Blackbird, being rather secretive, so we may have to spend some time looking for these. The third speciality, the somewhat understated Blue Mountain Vireo, is generally more showy.

Rising to around 1300 metres (4200ft), the Blue Mountains are home to many of Jamaica's avian treasures. Species to watch for as we walk the road that passes through the moss, bromeliad and fern-laden cloud forest at Hardwar Gap include Ring-tailed Pigeon, Jamaican and Greater Antillean Elaenias, Rufous-tailed Flycatcher, Jamaican Pewee, Jamaican Vireo, the humbug-like Arrowhead Warbler, the stripe-headed Jamaican Spindalis and the impressive Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo.

The haunting call of Rufous-throated Solitaire should be another of the morning's highlights as it resonates through the forests and what better way to round off the day than with a cup of Blue Mountain coffee whilst actually in the Blue Mountains during a quick visit to a coffee plantation. *Night Green Castle*

DAY 4

BIRDING GREEN CASTLE ESTATE

Spread over 1600 acres and with more than 20 miles of trails, there is plenty to keep us occupied as we explore more of the Green Castle Estate today.

In addition to the island's resident birds, we should also find some wintering North American migrants such as Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler and the stunning Prairie Warbler. We could well see Greater Antillean Grackles or Yellow-faced Grassquits by the hotel dining room or the splendidly named Stolid Flycatcher.

Whilst we may find a Jamaican Elaenia sitting unobtrusively on a snag, the ceaseless activity of the Jamaican Mango will more than make up for that! The retiring Mangrove Cuckoo could also come our way and sharp eyes might even pick out the sought-after Crested Quail-dove.

After dinner, there will be an excursion 'spotlighting' for night birds on the estate. The endemic Jamaican Owl, American Barn Owl and Northern Potoo (the latter yet another endemic Jamaican subspecies) are all possible. *Night Green Castle*

DAY 5

FOOTHILLS OF THE JOHN CROW MOUNTAINS AND ECCLESDOWN ROAD

We head out very early to Ecclesdown Road which cuts through the lush John Crow Mountains at the far eastern end of the island. Well-known in birding circles as the sole site in Jamaica where all but one of the island's endemic birds have been recorded, it is important to be there first thing. Black-billed Streamertail is the key endemic and this is a bird whose tiny world range is restricted solely to these rugged mountains.

Exposed to the Trade Winds, the John Crow forests are the wettest in Jamaica and early mornings offer the best chance to find key specialities including Yellow-billed and Black-billed Amazons, as well as Jamaican Blackbird and Jamaican Crow with its remarkable gurgling voice and jabbering outbursts.

Ecclesdown Road is also an excellent location for some of the other endemics we may not have seen yet. We will walk this quiet road on foot, hoping for eye-level views of many species before taking lunch at Boston Bay, the world-famous home of Jamaican jerk.

If time allows, we will make stops on our return drive back along the coast, watching for waders on the shoreline and Magnificent Frigatebirds and Royal Terns over the sea. *Night Green Castle*

DAY 6

MURPHY’S HILL AND GREEN CASTLE ESTATE

We will head out early (with a packed breakfast) to Murphy’s Hill which will give us a further opportunity to look for some of the specialities we may not have seen so far.

There are opportunities to explore both wetland and wooded habitats and both Jamaican Crow and Plain Pigeon are possible as well as a selection of waterfowl, herons and shorebirds.

With an early start planned for today, after lunching at Green Castle, we will take time out this afternoon to relax at the lodge, perhaps have a siesta or enjoy the estate’s swimming pool. There are, of course, the extensive ground to continue exploring and there will be an afternoon guided walk for those who wish to participate.
Night Green Castle



Orangequit, Jamaica © Stuart Elsom

DAY 7

WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRDS AND THE GREEN CASTLE RESERVOIR

Taking a packed breakfast with us this morning, we set off early to visit the low, craggy coastline of volcanic cliffs at nearby Robin's Bay.

In March, White-tailed Tropicbirds should be returning to their nesting sites and we have an opportunity to look for these superb birds here. Early mornings at the start of the breeding season, these elegant birds perform their dancing courtship flights over the sea. We paid an impromptu visit to the site on our March 2018 tour - with great success - and having now added this excursion to our regular itinerary, we shall be keeping our fingers crossed that they put on another good show for us this year! As a bonus, Cave Swallows (here of the local Caribbean form) are often to be seen wheeling about the low cliffs.

After spending time with the tropicbirds, we will check out the nearby beaches for waders and terns. Brown Pelicans may be fishing offshore and Brown Noddy is also occasionally present.

After lunch back at Green Castle, we have an opportunity to bird areas of the estate we may have missed on other days. The estate reservoir is one such spot and regularly attracts waterbirds such as Black-necked Stilt and Northern Jacana, as well as the 'must see' Stolid Flycatcher.

Again, our itinerary affords those that wish to do their own thing the opportunity to do so, be that relaxing after lunch, strolling around the grounds or to taking photographs of the wildlife. For those seeking to look for more birds with the group, there will be a walk with the guides in the grounds.
Night Green Castle

DAY 8**ROCKLANDS BIRD SANCTUARY AND FLY TO UK**

We bid a reluctant farewell to the Green Castle Estate and travel back west to Montego Bay. As our flight doesn't depart Jamaica until early evening, we have time to enjoy some birding along the way.

As we travel along the north coast, we will stop for lunch at a beachside restaurant, where we may be able to watch Magnificent Frigatebirds harassing other seabirds, whilst Brown Pelicans and Royal Terns feed offshore. In March, Greater Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Plover and Least Sandpiper could also be present along the shore.

Our principal birding destination is the famous Rocklands Bird Sanctuary. For many years, birds at this location have been attracted to well-stocked feeders and a visit presents fantastic opportunities for bird photography as well as to get up close and personal with a good proportion of Jamaica's endemic birds, especially its hummingbirds.

Species such as White-crowned Pigeon, Caribbean Dove, Jamaican Woodpecker, Bananaquit, Orangequit and Jamaican Oriole are often more confiding here than elsewhere on the island, making this a fitting finale to our stay on the 'tropical treasure island' of Jamaica.

If time permits, we will make a final stop for a short visit to the area around the Bogue Water Treatment Plant, which is on the way to Montego Bay Airport. In March, the mangroves and lagoons can hold an array of herons, egrets, waders and ducks with the scarce West Indian Whistling Duck and both Northern Jacana and Purple Gallinule among the possibilities.

Our birding over, we travel the short distance to Montego Bay airport and check-in for our overnight flight home.

DAY 9**ARRIVE IN UK**

Morning arrival in the UK, where our spring birdwatching tour to Jamaica concludes.

Trip Information

Group Size Max of 8 participants and 2 guides (one of which will be provided by the Estate)

Birds 100-110 species

Accommodation 7 nights in comfortable guesthouse accommodation at Green Castle, set on a safe, private estate of 1650 acres in the northeast corner of Jamaica. All rooms have private facilities and are equipped with a ceiling fan.

Our advertised tour price is based on the Estate's 'standard cottage rooms', which are located just across the lawn from the main estate house.

The estate itself is hilly, with the main house enjoying beautiful views over land that slopes gently down to the Caribbean shore and up into the verdant Blue Mountains.

There is a swimming pool and tennis court and wifi is available in the Estate House living area.

Meals All main meals are included in the tour price, commencing with dinner on arrival at Green Castle on Day 1 and concluding with lunch in Jamaica prior to departure on Day 8.

The estate house has a large freshwater dispenser for bottle filling and complimentary tea and coffee are available 24hrs a day.

Jamaican cuisine is excellent, with delicious and tasty meals. Local dishes you might like to try include *ackee* (vegetable scrambled eggs), *callaloo* (vegetable cooked like spinach), green bananas, fried *Johnnycakes* (cornmeal flatbread) and the famous Jamaican jerk chicken.

If coffee is your thing, Jamaica is considered to produce some of the very best!

Walking There are over 20 miles of well maintained trails to explore on the Green Castle Estate that provide safe and easy access to a range of habitats: from extensive tracts of pristine forest to grasslands and agricultural fields, mangrove swamp, coastline and a good-sized freshwater reservoir.

To enjoy this tour to the full, you should be reasonably fit and mobile as each day we are likely to cover between three and five miles on foot.

Much of the island is hilly or mountainous, so expect walks to be up and down on mainly gentle slopes, with a few steeper sections at a couple of sites.

Some participants like to bring a walking pole or collapsible stool. This is not a strenuous or difficult tour, however, as the pace is gentle with frequent stops to watch birds and all excursions and walks are optional.

Please note that **early starts** are necessary on days when we travel to the Blue Mountains, John Crows, Murphy's Hill and also to look for the White-tailed Tropicbirds.

As one would expect, rainforest trails can be loose or uneven underfoot in places, also muddy at times so sturdy waterproof walking shoes or lightweight boots with good grip are definitely recommended.

Weather Subtropical, pleasantly warm to hot, dry and sunny. In March, temperatures in the capital Kingston range from 22-29C (73-84F). It is usually a little cooler in the hills, where it can feel chilly first thing with lows of around 13C (55F). We visit during the dry season (but rain or the odd shower may still occur, particularly in the John Crow Mountains) and our stay is well outside of the hurricane season (which runs June-November). It can be humid at times, especially at lower elevations.

Flights Due to the pandemic, it is proving extremely difficult to predict future flight prices and schedules, especially when a trip is scheduled for beyond the period when flights can be booked. As a result, we have taken the decision to price our holidays as excluding all international flights.

To keep the process as simple as possible for our clients, however, we are now working closely with an agent from Travel Counsellors who will be able to advise you on which flights we are recommending for each holiday and he will be able to book these for you.

Ground Transport Birdwatching excursions will be by minibus, with airport transfers by Toyota Coaster allowing ample room for our bags.

Insects There is no malaria risk on this tour, although mosquitoes are present in a few locations, so a little repellent is advisable. Overall, the birding here is relatively nuisance-free and (unusually for the tropics) Jamaica has no poisonous snakes.

Photos Good to excellent opportunities, especially on our visit to Rocklands and in the open areas of the Estate grounds. Wildlife photography is generally more difficult in the forest due to low light levels.

Tour Cost

2022 (9 days):

Land only cost: £3295*¹

Deposit: £500

Single Supp: £450*²

Cost includes

- Limosa Tour Leader
- Expert English-speaking Jamaican bird guide
- 7 nights accommodation in Jamaica
- All main meals (with drinking water provided)
- Minibus transport
- Airport transfers by Coaster bus
- Full and comprehensive programme of birding excursions on Jamaica - none at extra cost!
- All permits, entry fees, tour-based tips (hotel staff, drivers and local guides) and taxes
- Limosa checklist of birds

Cost excludes

International flights, insurance, airport meals, snacks, drinks & other items of a personal nature.

IMPORTANT! *If comparing Jamaica tour prices, please note that the Limosa tour cost is inclusive of an expert Limosa guide with you throughout the trip, transfers, all tipping, and a FULL and comprehensive programme of birding excursions on the island with NONE payable locally at extra cost.*

*¹ ROOMS AND UPGRADES

Our advertised tour price is based on the Estate's 'standard cottage rooms' which are located just across the lawn from the main estate house.

There are also five 'superior' rooms in the main estate house, which are larger with an ocean view.

*If you would be interested in **upgrading your booking** to one of these larger, premium quality rooms then we can enquire about availability at the time of your booking. Should the rooms be available, these will cost an additional £375 for the room.*

*² SINGLE ROOM SUPPLEMENT

No single room supplement is charged on three smaller rooms (Barn Owl, Dove Cottage and Vireo). If you are a single traveller and would prefer to stay in one of these rooms, subject to availability, please ask at the time of booking.

About Your Guides

Stu Elsom lives in Cambridgeshire and his lifelong interest in birds and wildlife has taken him to over 50 countries on six continents. Stu divides his time between leading bird tours (which he has been doing for many years) and working as a professional ecologist. The latter involves undertaking surveys of a wide range of protected habitats and species.

Stu's tour leading has taken him to many parts of the world, although lately he has specialised in the birds of the New World, focussing on North and South America and the Caribbean Islands where he has led many tours in recent years.

Stu is also an accomplished wildlife photographer and some of his images have been shortlisted in international bird photography competitions.

Local Guides Throughout our stay in Jamaica, our group also has the exclusive assistance of one or more of Green Castle's registered expert bird guides.

How to Enquire

Due to the considerable uncertainty created by the pandemic, Limosa Holidays are not currently accepting bookings for any trips, however, you are welcome to contact us either by email or phone to register your interest in any of our holidays.

Whilst some tour companies may be willing to take a deposit from you and say a trip is a “confirmed departure”, our approach is going to be to wait a little longer as we consider this both honest and realistic.

Once we are confident that the trip can run, we will be in touch to confirm your place and ask for a deposit.

We do encourage you to register your interest as we are expecting considerable demand, once the consensus is that it is safe to travel again.

Any Questions

Please do not hesitate to contact us by email or phone. Our office is generally open from 09:30-17:30 but you are welcome to contact us outside these times too. We are happy to take calls in the evening and at weekends but if no one is available the call will go to our answerphone.

Thank you for your interest in our tours. We do hope that you will be able to join us once the pandemic is over and we look forward to hearing from you.