Eagle-Eye Tours

Best of the Lesser Antilles Itinerary

Link: Best of the Lesser Antilles

Tour Overview

The Lesser Antilles form a chain of small intriguing islands of the West Indies, geographically separating the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean Sea. Our birding tour will concentrate on three of the best, Dominica, St. Vincent and St. Lucia; each island has its own unique character and charm, and each has its own special complement of wildlife.

Dominica, discovered by Columbus on a Sunday in 1493 (hence its name), is renowned as the nature island of the Antilles, as it still supports large tracts of native forest covering mountainsides that rise to almost 5000 feet. Here we target the island endemics – the two species of parrots, Red-necked and Imperial, as well as Forest and Red-legged Thrushes, Lesser Antillean Swift, Blue-headed Hummingbird, Lesser Antillean Pewee, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Kalinago Wren (recently split from Southern House Wren and a Dominican endemic), Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Southern Brown Trembler, Lesser Antillean Euphonia (here of the green-backed form), and Plumbeous Warbler. One afternoon we will visit a church in the hope of viewing the local form of a Tyto owl, a race of Barn Owl or possibly of Ashy-faced Owl, or even a separate species.

The small mountainous island of St Vincent lies south of St Lucia and west of Barbados and still retains extensive forests in the interior of the island. We have one full day of birding here, spending the morning searching for Whistling Warbler in the superb Vermont Forest Reserve in the south-central part of the island. In the afternoon we drive north to a prime location for seeing the striking St.Vincent Amazons on their late afternoon flights to roost sites. We also look for two species found only on St Vincent and Grenada – Grenada Flycatcher and Lesser Antillean Tanager, as well as recently split St.Vincent Wren, plus Common Black-Hawk and the odd-looking black morph of the Bananaquit. Along the coast are White-tailed Tropicbirds and Red-footed Boobies.
St. Lucia is an idyllic tourist location, all the more scenic owing to its spectacular conical volcanic peaks rising from the sea (Gros Piton and Petit Piton); it also supports a rich avifauna, including seven endemic species and many Lesser Antillean endemics. In nature reserves, we look for endemics whose name starts with St. Lucia – Amazon, Warbler, Black Finch and Oriole. Further endemics are the St Lucia Wren (split from Southern House Wren) and St Lucia Nightjar (specifically distinct from Rufous Nightjar). Other goodies include Gray Trembler, Ruddy and Bridled Quail-Doves, Spectacled/Bare-eyed Thrush, and the very rare White-breasted Thrasher.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival, St. Vincent



Our “Best of the Lesser Antilles” birding tour starts with a welcome dinner at our lodgings on the beautiful island of St. Vincent. We should encounter our first birds of the tour around our lodgings, perhaps Eared Dove, Eurasian Collared Dove, Common Ground-Dove, the ubiquitous Tropical Mockingbird, Smooth-billed Ani, Carib Grackle and Gray Kingbird, while out in the bay Brown Boobies fish the nearby reef. Overnight on St. Vincent.

Day 2: St. Vincent



The small mountainous island of St Vincent lies south of St Lucia and west of Barbados and still retains extensive forests in the interior of the island. First we drop in on the nearby suburbs of Prospect where we will encounter our first island endemic - the recently split but strikingly different sounding St.Vincent Wren. We spend the remainder of the morning in the foothills of the Vermont Forest Reserve in the south-central part of the island. Here we look for the endemic Whistling Warbler, a difficult species after a population decline caused by recent volcanic eruption and a major hurricane. We also look for two species found only on St Vincent and Grenada - Grenada Flycatcher and Lesser Antillean Tanager, as well as Scaly-naped Pigeon, three species of hummingbirds – Purple-throated and Green-throated Caribs, and the widespread Antillean Crested Hummingbird - and the strange-looking black morph of the Bananaquit (which predominates here and on Grenada). In the afternoon we will drive north to a location that affords good viewing of St.Vincent Amazons as they begin to congregate for the evening roost. Overnight on St. Vincent.

Day 3: Transfer to St. Lucia



In the morning, we catch a flight from St. Vincent to St. Lucia, one of the most scenic islands in the Lesser Antilles, with its spectacular conical volcanic peaks of Gros Piton and Petit Piton rising from the sea. St. Lucia is the richest island for birds, holding seven endemic species and many Lesser Antillean endemics. Overnight near Castries.

Days 4 – 5: St Lucia



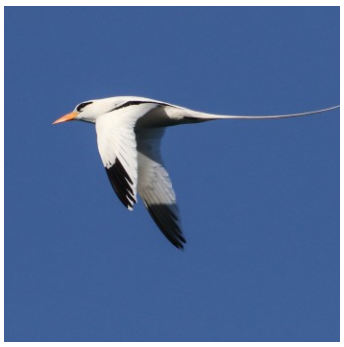
We spend some time on the Des Cartier Forest Trail in south-central St Lucia where we target in particular two island endemics: St. Lucia Amazon and St. Lucia Black Finch; and the regionally endemic Rufous-throated Solitaire (a superb singer). On the same day we will visit the south-east coast of the island for the dry forest at Micoud. Goodies here include Gray Trembler, Scaly-naped Pigeon, St.Lucia Oriole and the very rare St.Lucia Thrasher. Lesser Antillean and Caribbean endemics which we missed on St.Vincent will be searched for on St. Lucia, perhaps Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Spectacled/Bare-eyed Thrush and Black-whiskered Vireo. On our other day we will concentrate our efforts around Bouton Road and Soufriere, in the vicinity of the impressive Gros and Petit Pitons. Birding in this area will present further opportunities for St.Lucia Black Finch and St.Lucia Oriole together with regional endemics such as Lesser Antillean Saltator, the three hummingbird species, and the endemic St. Lucia Wren which is very different from the wrens that we encounter on both St.Vincent and Dominica. We will also target the very distinctive form of the Lesser Antillean Pewee, possibly a future split. At dusk we may search for the St Lucia Nightjar (considered potentially specifically distinct from the Rufous Nightjar of South America). St Lucia once had an additional endemic species, Semper's Warbler, but this ground-foraging warbler is now thought to be extinct, possibly a result of predation by introduced mongooses. Nights near Castries.

Days 6 – 8: Dominica endemics and Caribbean near-endemics



In the morning, we catch a flight to Dominica (Domineeka!) - the “nature island” - discovered by Columbus in 1493 on a Sunday, hence its name. Dominica is among the most important of the Lesser Antilles, as it still preserves large expanses of luxuriant native forest in mountain and rain forest scenery and the island is renowned for its rich land and marine fauna. During our stay here, we explore most of the island, and we have time for relaxing and taking things easy. On one or more days, depending on our rate of success, we head to the Northern Forest Reserve, on the flanks of Morne Diablotin, at 1450m (4750ft) the island’s highest peak and the highest mountain in the Lesser Antilles. Our targets here are the two endemic parrots: the widespread, gaudy Red-necked Amazon and the critically endangered Imperial Amazon, the latter the largest of the genus Amazona. We leave our lodgings early, to reach the look-out in time to watch the parrots leave their overnight roost and fly to foraging areas in the lowlands. We should obtain excellent views of Red-necked Parrots as they fly overhead or sit perched at the tops of trees catching the early morning sun. Imperial Parrots are much scarcer and we will spend considerable time watching and waiting for the species to appear as we give ourselves plenty of time to find this highly sought-after endemic. We explore rain forests in the Northern Forest Reserve and perhaps also at Cabrits National Park, searching for such goodies as Forest Thrush, a difficult to find range-restricted species, plus many other Lesser Antillean endemics such as Lesser Antillean Swift, Blue-headed Hummingbird (only found here and on Martinique), Lesser Antillean Pewee, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Kalinago Wren (the third of the very distinctive species recently split from the Southern House Wren), Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Brown Trembler, Lesser Antillean Saltator and Plumbeous Warbler (only found here and on Guadeloupe). On top of the Dominican and the Lesser Antilles endemics are a group of Caribbean endemics which include Caribbean Elaenia, Red-legged Thrush (Dominica is the only island of the Lesser Antilles where this fine thrush is found, possibly a recent introduction), Pearly-eyed Thrasher, Black-faced Grassquit, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and Lesser Antillean Euphonia. Overhead we might be fortunate to find cruising Black Swifts, recently arrived from wintering grounds in South America. Other species include Broad-winged Hawk, Green-throated and Purple-throated Caribs, Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Mangrove Cuckoo, Black-whiskered Vireo, Mangrove Yellow Warbler and Caribbean Martin. Along the coast we look for White-tailed Tropicbird, Magnificent Frigatebird, Royal Tern and Brown Booby. Nights in Roseau.

Day 9: Departure from Dominica



Our delightful Best of the Lesser Antilles birding tour ends today. We will arrange for a transfer to the international airport in the morning, but you are welcome to leave at another time, but you will be responsible for paying for transportation if you do not travel with the group.

What to Expect

Overview

The Best of the Lesser Antilles is a moderately paced tour. Our daily itinerary varies somewhat according to weather and habitat, but the general pattern will be to leave our hotel early with a packed breakfast. We concentrate on “edge” birding until the light is good enough to enter forest trails. Much of the birding will be from quiet roads and wide trails, although the main forest trails on St.Vincent and at Des Cartier (St.Lucia) are narrower and a little steeper. We generally find a restaurant for lunch, except in Dominica where we will return to the hotel for lunch followed by a siesta – time to relax and enjoy our accommodations. Then we will go out for an afternoon visit to another birding hot-spot.

Food

Packed breakfasts will be arranged for early starts. Lunch is usually enjoyed at local restaurants or as a picnic in the field. Dinner is usually at the hotel. Each evening after dinner we compile the day’s checklist, review the day’s activities, birds, reptiles and other observations, and plan the next day’s activities.

Accommodation

All of our accommodations are clean and comfortable and selected for their proximity to birding sites.

Walking

Walks across the three islands are generally easy to moderate, with longer or steeper options if seeking specific bird species. Guides adapt routes to minimize steep climbs where possible and maintain a comfortable pace. The longest walk is Des Cartiers Trail, approximately 3 km (2 miles), where we walk a relatively flat section with a few steps. Some trails can be muddy if there has been significant rainfall.

Driving

Driving will be limited to either small or moderate stretches although traffic along the coast can prolong the journeys somewhat. Our vehicles will be more than adequate to accommodate the group.

Climate

It will almost certainly rain, so a light rain-jacket and waterproof hat would come in useful. Waterproof footwear is an advantage and a small umbrella is also very useful. Mosquitoes and other biting insects should not be a problem on this tour, but it is advisable to bring insect repellant. It will be warm in the mornings and hot in mid-afternoon (siesta time), sometimes humid, and pleasantly warm at higher altitudes.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes
• All meals and soft drinks
• All accommodations
• Internal flights from St. Vincent to St. Lucia and St. Lucia to Dominica
• One guide with 4 - 8 pax, two guides with 9 - 12 pax plus local guides
• Park entry fees
• Gratuities to local guides
• Transport from the St. Vincent airport to our lodgings on the first night
• Transport from the Dominica hotel to the airport on the last day (~$100 if you need transport at a different time)
• Ground transportation

Tour Price Does Not Include
• Flights to and from start/end location
• Alcoholic beverages
• Items of a personal nature
• Travel Insurance
