

*Victor Emanuel Nature Tours*

# **PRE TRIP LESSER ANTILLES**

*Antigua, Barbuda and Montserrat*

February 12-16, 2014



Leader: David Ascanio

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.**  
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## **Pre-trip to the Lesser Antilles Cruise: Antigua, Barbuda and Montserrat**

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Photo album link:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidascanio/sets/72157644409664954/>

The island nations of Antigua and Barbuda were our first locations for this short and unique pre-trip. An early morning in Antigua surprised us with a Merlin flying over the shopping area. Also, the Zenaida Dove (rare in the Greater Antilles) turned out to be common and, a contiguous wetland was packed with egrets (great and cattle egrets), royal terns and laughing gulls. After a short flight to Barbuda we realized how undeveloped this island was. There was a single paved road, lots of cacti, desert scrub and great birding opportunities. Soon before the local guide started giving a lecture about the island we were stopping the bus to enjoy Antillean Crested Hummingbird foraging at a flowering tree. Also, Green-throated Carib and Pearly-eyed Thrasher were around the same tree. Later, a boat trip allowed views to a nesting colony of Magnificent Frigatebird (some of us returned before reaching to it due to water splashes over our camera gear) and only then we went for our main target: The Barbuda Warbler. Finding this species was not a difficult task since it is fairly common and tolerates human presence (gardens, secondary growth). We saw it a couple of times and had ample opportunities to compare its plumage with similar species such as the Adelaide's Warbler (from Puerto Rico) and St Lucia Warbler (obviously from the island nation of St Lucia!). Barbuda also provided our first sightings of Caribbean Elaenia and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch.

The following day we took a flight to Montserrat. Here the landscape was different to that of Antigua and Barbuda. Right before landing we could appreciate views of Montserrat volcano and upon arrival we drove to our small inn to contact the local guides that would help us to find our second most important target of this pre-tour: the Montserrat Oriole.

Finding the oriole involved a walk in a forest rich in ferns and lush vegetation. Our local guides knew of a couple of sites where the orioles have been seen recently but that involved a steep trail. Above that, the ground was muddy. But, our efforts were not in vain. After about half an hour we came across a pair of orioles but they were difficult to see. We decided to continue the trail and again it wasn't in vain since we saw another pair of it foraging from about eyelevel to midstory. They were moving slowly thus gave us great opportunities to study it. This species was a lifer for everyone (including myself!) and a great birthday gift to me.

Our pre-trip finished with a visit to a large wetland in Antigua, and after lunch we headed to the dock for the embarkation to the beautiful Sea Cloud.

## **THE BIRDLIST**

### **Waterfowl / Anatidae**

Blue-winged Teal. *Anas discors*. 400+ individuals were observed in Antigua. This is a boreal migrant species.

White-cheeked Pintail. *Anas bahamensis*. 500+ individuals were observed in Antigua.

Ruddy Duck. *Oxyura jamaicensis*. 7+ individuals were observed in Antigua.

### **Grebes / Podicipedidae**

Pied-billed Grebe. *Podilymbus podiceps*. About three individuals were seen in Antigua.

### **Tropicbirds / Phaethontidae**

Red-billed Tropicbird. *Phaethon aethereus*. A small nesting colony was visited in Barbuda.

### **Frigatebirds / Fregatidae**

Magnificent Frigatebird. *Fregata magnificens*. A huge nesting colony was observed in Barbuda. Also seen in Antigua and probably as well in Montserrat.

### **Pelicans / Pelecanidae**

Brown Pelican. *Pelecanus occidentalis*. Common. We observed this species every day.

### **Hérons, Egrets and Bitterns / Ardeidae**

Great Blue Heron. *Ardea herodias*. Seen in Antigua.

Great Egret. *Ardea alba*. Antigua. Up to 12 individuals were observed in Antigua.

Snowy Egret. *Egretta thula*. Up to 20 individuals were observed in Antigua.

Little Blue Heron. *Egretta caerulea*. Few were observed in Antigua.

Tricolored Heron. *Egretta tricolor*. Few individuals were seen in Antigua.

Cattle Egret. *Bubulcus ibis*. Equal to the previous waterbirds, few were seen in Antigua.

Green Heron. *Butorides virescens*. One was flushed in Antigua and another one was observed in Montserrat.

Black-crowned Night-Heron. *Nycticorax nycticorax*. One was seen in Antigua.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. *Nyctanassa violacea*. One individual was seen in Antigua.

### **Hawks, Eagles and Kites / Accipitridae**

Broad-winged Hawk. *Buteo platypterus*. This species was common in the Christian valley in Antigua. This is a resident race.

### **Rails, Gallinules and Coots / Rallidae**

Common Gallinule. *Gallinula galeata*. Common in Antigua.

Caribbean Coot. *Fulica caribaea*. Common in Antigua.

### **Stilts and Avocets / Recurvirostridae**

Black-necked Stilt. *Himantopus mexicanus*. Seen in Antigua a couple of times.

### **Sandpipers and Allies / Scolopacidae – all Boreal migrant species**

Spotted Sandpiper. *Actitis macularius*. A single individual was seen twice in Antigua.

Greater Yellowlegs. *Tringa melanoleuca*. 9+ individuals were observed in a wetland in Antigua.

Ruddy Turnstone. *Arenaria interpres*. Antigua. Only one individual was observed.

Short-billed Dowitcher. *Limnodromus griseus*. Antigua. Only one individual was observed.

Wilson's Snipe. *Gallinago delicata*. A single individual was scoped in Antigua at an edge of a mangrove.

### **Gulls, Terns and Skimmers / Laridae**

Greater Black backed Gull. *Larus marinus*. A single individual in apparently second year plumage was seen from the hotel in Antigua. Earlier, Steve reported another individual in adult plumage.

Laughing Gull. *Leucophaeus atricilla*. Very few were seen in Antigua.

Royal Tern. *Thalasseus maximus*. 20+ were observed in Antigua. Also, a couple was seen the last morning in Antigua.

### **Pigeons and Doves / Columbidae**

Rock Pigeon (I). *Columba livia*. Antigua.

Scaly-naped Pigeon. *Patagioenas squamosa*. One individual was observed by Sally and other participants in Montserrat.

White-crowned Pigeon. *Patagioenas leucocephala*. Common in Antigua and Barbuda. Threatened elsewhere due to illegal hunting.

Eurasian Collared-Dove (I). *Streptopelia decaocto*. Common in Antigua and Barbuda.

Zenaida Dove. *Zenaida aurita*. This species is uncommon in the Greater Antilles. In contrast, it was very common in Antigua and fairly common in Montserrat.

Common Ground-Dove. *Columbina passerina*. Seen every day.

### **Cuckoos / Cuculidae**

Mangrove Cuckoo. *Coccyzus minor*. One individual was observed at the cloud forest of Montserrat.

### **Hummingbirds / Trochilidae**

Purple-throated Carib. *Eulampis jugularis*. This beautiful gem of the Caribbean was observed in Montserrat. They were usually found at forest edge.

Green-throated Carib. *Eulampis holosericeus*. This species was common in Barbuda and less common in Montserrat.

Antillean Crested Hummingbird. *Orthorhyncus cristatus*. Our first of many sightings was in Barbuda. It was seen every day and we never got tires of it!

### **Falcons and Caracaras / Falconidae**

American Kestrel. *Falco sparverius*. We enjoyed views of individuals in Barbuda, Antigua and Montserrat.

Merlin. *Falco columbarius*. A single individual was observed hunting a common ground-dove in Antigua. This is a boreal migrant species.

Peregrine Falcon. *Falco peregrinus*. This boreal migrant was observed in Montserrat and Antigua. This is a boreal migrant species.

### **Tyrant Flycatchers / Tyrannidae**

Caribbean Elaenia. *Elaenia martinica*. Elaenias are similar one to each other and they are usually best told by voice. In most of the Lesser Antilles this is the only one found. We observed it almost at every day.

Gray Kingbird. *Tyrannus dominicensis*. This is a common species in the Lesser Antilles. Seen daily.

### **Swallows /Hirundinidae**

Caribbean Martin. *Progne dominicensis*. The migratory route of this interesting species is not well understood. We know it wanders throughout the Caribbean region but there are some records inland Suriname, Guyana and Venezuela. We saw a distant individual in Antigua and later, five other in Montserrat.

### **Thrushes and Allies / Turdidae**

Forest Thrush. *Turdus lherminieri*. This is a very reclusive bird that remains well inside forest. It may approach to the forest edge at dawn and become less shy during the breeding season. We played with a pair moving from the ground to midstory of the forest. Some of you saw a glimpse while other of you got to see it well up to three times!

### **Mockingbirds and Thrashers / Mimidae**

Scaly-breasted Thrasher. *Allenia fusca*. One individual was observed in Antigua foraging at a Guanabana fruit.

Pearly-eyed Thrasher. *Margarops fuscatus*. This species was seen first in Barbuda and later in Montserrat.

Brown Trembler. *Cinclocerthia ruficauda*. A pair was observed in Montserrat.

### **New World Warblers / Parulidae**

Yellow Warbler. *Setophaga petechia*. A single individual was observed in Antigua.

Prairie Warbler. *Setophaga discolor*. A pair was observed in Antigua. A boreal migrant species.

Barbuda Warbler (E). *Setophaga subita*. Endemic to Barbuda. The only endemic bird of Barbuda is a common one, but still pretty unknown. To start, apparently there's no published record of a breeding pair and the nest is unknown. It is closely related with the Adelaide's Warbler (Puerto Rico) and St. Lucia Warbler (ST. Lucia). Although there's no apparent threat to the species and seems to tolerate human presence, there are concerns of the future if tourism infrastructure grows in the island. One of the pairs we saw was inside a garden with secondary growth and scrubby vegetation. The other pair was found inside Red Mangrove.

### **Genus Incertae Sedis / Genus Incertae Sedis**

Bananaquit. *Coereba flaveola*. Bananaquits are always a fascination to me. There are so many adaptations to its given habitat that one seriously doubts about all the subspecies being part of the same species. The subspecies we saw had a pronounced gape, deeply decurved bill (probably an adaptation to feed on deep tubular flowers) and white eyebrow. The subspecies found in Antigua was *bartolomica*.

### **Buntings, Sparrows and Allies / Emberizidae**

Black-faced Grassquit. *Tiaris bicolor*. Seen daily. This is one of the Caribbean specialties of the tour.

Lesser Antillean Bullfinch. *Loxigilla noctis*. This is a common visitor to human populated areas. It was seen at all islands and was particularly numerous in Montserrat and Antigua.

### **Troupials and Allies / Icteridae**

Carib Grackle. *Quiscalus lugubris*. This grackle was common in Barbuda and Antigua.

Montserrat Oriole (E). *Icterus oberi*. Endemic to Montserrat. This species was, along with the Forest Thrush, the most difficult bird of the tour and what a way we saw it! We enjoyed views of two separate pairs. It is currently threatened due to the spells of Sufriere volcano back in 1995 that destroyed a good area of distribution. The population is nowadays stable but the future of this unique bird will depend in three aspects: human expansion, exotic predators and future spells of the volcano.

### **Old World Sparrows / Passeridae**

House Sparrow (I). *Passer domesticus*. This introduced species was seen in Antigua.