

Jamaica

7-13 July 2001



Report compiled by
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All photos by
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Introduction and Logistics

As July is the main holiday month in Sweden and factories are more or less closed for some weeks, we decided to go somewhere for birding and our choice was Jamaica and Cuba. We knew that there would be no migrants or wintering birds and birdwatching would probably be rather slow and this turned out to be right. However, both islands boasts 25-30 endemics each plus a number of Caribbean endemics and those birds were our main target. July is definitely not the best time for birding in the Caribbean because the heat and the end of the breeding season with very low songactivity and no other birds than the resident ones to look at.

Participants were:

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All from around Värnamo in Sweden.

We found Jamaica to be more expensive than we thought. The only thing that was cheaper than Sweden was petrol which was about half the price, beer was about the same but food and other things were more expensive.

The roads on Jamaica are really bad with lots of potholes which makes driving rather unpleasant. The whole island is mountainous and consequently the roads are not fast, on the other hand it's a rather small island. We had several reports of lunatic drivers on the roads but we faced no real dangers while driving. We also read in several reports of poor signings and maps and how easy it is to get lost, specially in Kingston. We had no problems with this at all. We got the ESSO-map when we rented the car and that map turned out to be outstandingly good. Even small places and no-places like Burnt Hill and Barbecue Bottom is marked on the map. We also used the Kingston part of the map to navigate through that town to Hardwar Gap with no problems (except for a stupid crossroad).

Jamaica has a reputation of violance and high rates of crime. We had no problems and never felt threatened. At Bath Fountaine there were some rasta people which were a bit annoing but friendly. A lot of bad things happened in Kingston and Spannish town while we were at the west. Many people were killed in gunfights, riots and roadblocks of burning tyres, almost paralcyed the whole area. Fortunately this had cleared when we came back here and we didn't notice anything.

The wheather was mainly hot 30-35°C with only a few showers that did not interfere with birdwatching. At Hardwar Gap the wheather was more pleasant and the birdactivity was also better throughout the day.

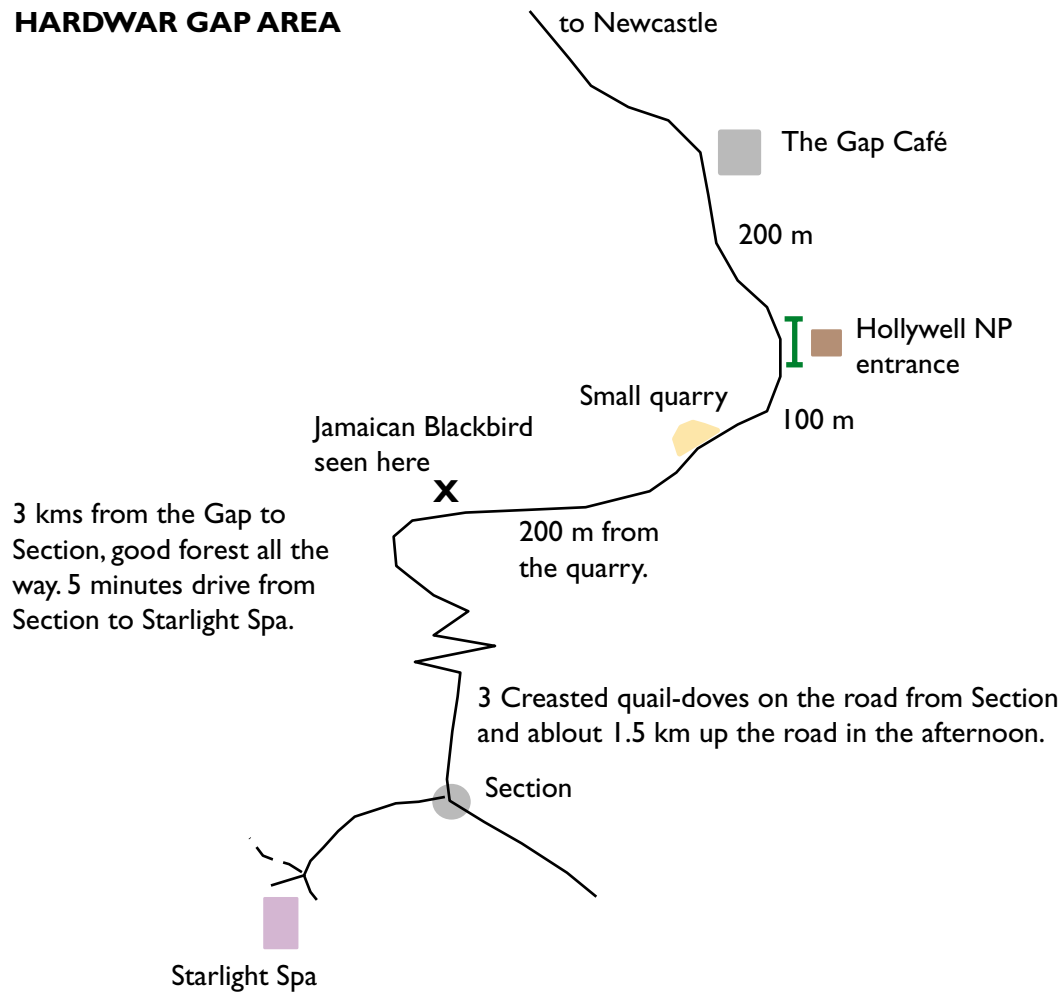
The currency is Jamaican dollars and the exchangerate was 45 JD for one US dollar. We found it more convinient to change to Jamaican dollars as all prices were in that currency. At hotels US dollars were more useful. At the hotels it was always room for some (about 10%) negotiations about the price. At the end of our stay we went to the National Commercial Bank in Kingston and took out 3-400 USD each on our VISA and Mastercards and that was no problem.



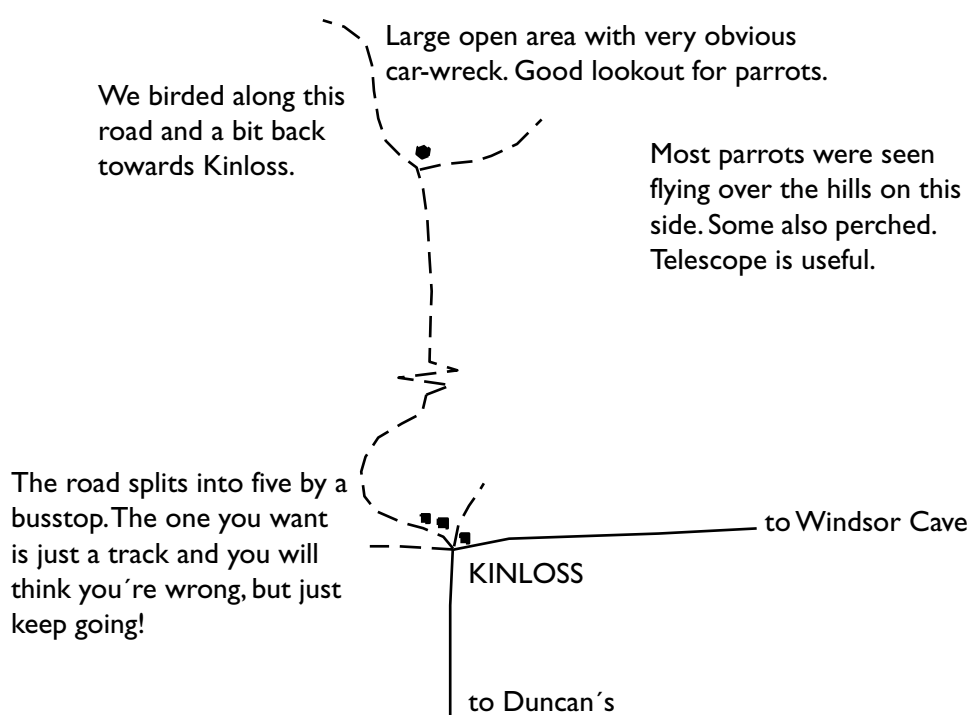
Rufous-throated Solitaire, one of the more beautiful birds of Jamaica. Easily seen at Hardwar Gap were perhaps this is the most common bird.

*"Driving on the left side
is the right side.
Driving on the right
side is suicide"*

HARDWAR GAP AREA



BARBECUE BOTTOM ROAD



Itinerary

6 July. We arrived late in the evening at Kingston and rented a not prebooked car from Island Rent-a-car. The car was a Daewoo Lanos and was just about enough for four people with luggage and only one telescope. We drove to Morant Bay and checked in at Morant Villas (50 USD double room, no breakfast).

7 July. Up early and some initial birding from the balcony. We then sat off towards Bath Fontaine which we found without problem. No problems to find Black-billed streamertail either plus some other good birds. We then headed towards Happy Grove on the east coast to try for White-tailed tropicbird but found just an empty rock. We continued driving up the east and northeast coast and made a stop at the Mockingbird Inn for some birding before turning left at Buffy Bay towards Hardwar Gap. After about 20 kms we were told that the road was broken due to a cascade and we had no other option but to turn around and spent most of the afternoon driving along the north coast to Discovery Bay where we checked in at the Accomodationer (40 USD for a double room with packaged breakfast).

8 July. Early start and about a one hour drive to the Barbecue Bottom road. A rough drive the last kilometres on a road that is just drivable. The morning was spent along the road with the parrots being the highlight. When it became too hot we drove back and made short stops near and at Windsor Cave before heading for Montego Bay and checked in at the Belvedere (45 USD for a double room without breakfast). In the afternoon a visit to the Rocklands and made arrangement with Fritz for the next day. We also joined the feeding party with streamertails and grassquits and other birds in the garden. On the way back to Montego Bay we made a short stop by some pools near the main road for some wetland birds.

9 July. Met Fritz at Rocklands at 6.30 for a long walk in the hills and forest. We saw most of the birds we needed including a Potoo on its daytime roost. Also Lizard-cuckoo and Arrow-headed warbler among others. We spent the midday checking out of the hotel and found after some time another place to stay which was far better than staying inside Montego Bay. The place is called Seebreeze and is in fact a private villa which has some rooms for rent and is situated just 2.3 kms from the turnoff towards Rocklands. The rest of the afternoon was spent driving west along the coast looking for shorebirds. In late afternoon we were back at Rocklands for a try for Jamaican owl. At dusk we went with Fritz along the trail and waited for darkness and played the tape a couple of times. We heard a weak sound from the owl but only one proper hoot. All of sudden we heard some leaves shaking very close and we lit our big flashlight right in the eyes of a Jamaican owl just five metres away!

10 July. Some birding in the gardens around Seebreeze before departing for the south. By midday we reached Elim pools and decided to give it a try, if not for the birds so at least to find the way for the afternoon. Didn't see the whistlingducks so we went to Santa Cruz where we checked in at Donbar Guest House (1800 JD (\approx 40 USD) for a room with two double beds). After a midday nap we went back to Elim pools and immediately found West Indian whistling duck and no less than 59 of them at about 17.00.

11 July. Early start towards Burnt Hill to try for Ring-tailed pigeon which we hadn't seen and wasn't sure if we would get at Hardwar Gap. Near Troy in the mountains two pigeons

came flying and they turned out to be Ringtails. We stopped here and saw another four birds and heard two Blue mountain vireos singing. We then headed south towards the Portland and by midmorning we stepped out of the car by a big gate that blocked the road out to the lighthouse so we started to walk and found a singing male Bahama mockingbird after about one kilometer.

The rest of the day was spent driving towards Hardwar Gap through Kingston without getting lost. Many reports we had mentioned this as a major problem and also to find the road up the hill, but we had no problems at all. We just followed the ESSO-map. We found that the Gap Café now offers Bed & Breakfast but they were full at the moment so they suggested that we continue to Section and turn right to the Starlight Spa. A place we had never heard of as most reports we had had stayed at the Green Hills Guest House but that didn't exist any more. The Starlight was a wonderful place overlooking the John Crow mountain and the first bird we saw was Ring-tailed pigeon. They turned out to be rather common here. We were the only guests here and paid 50 USD for a double room without breakfast. A price we thought would be much more expensive. In the afternoon we walked from Section up the hill and saw a lot of birds. On the way back three Crested quail-doves were walking on the road in front of us and we had excellent views. Dinner at the hotel.

12 July. Only one bird remained, the Blackbird which is the toughest of them all. We spent the whole morning along the road on both sides of the Gap and saw a lot of birds but no blackbird. After lunch at the Gap Café and a little lay-inn, we walked the road in the afternoon again almost giving up for the day when Roger finally to our utmost relief spotted a Jamaican Blackbird not far from the Gap on the north side and everybody got a good look at it before it disappeared.

13 July. We took it easy this morning, knowing that it was nothing left to see on Jamaica. We sat off towards Kingston and got some money from the bank and went to the airport to try and rebook our tickets for Cuba. We were lucky to get seats on a plane the same evening to Cuba and had five extra days to spend there. The rest of the afternoon was just waiting for the flight.

Places we stayed at:

Morant Bay. Morant Villas 25 USD for a double room with twin beds.

Discovery Bay. The Accommodationer 40 USD for a double room with twin beds and packaged breakfast.

Montego Bay. The Belvedere 45 USD for a double room.

Montego Bay. Seabreeze Inn 80 USD for two rooms, one with a double bed and one with separate beds. A nice place to stay at. Only 2.3 kilometers to the turnoff towards Rocklands and one doesn't have to drive through Montego Bay. Nice birding in the gardens.

e-mail: djarr9999@aol.com.

Santa Cruz. Donbar Guest House 1800 JD for a room with two double beds.

Hardwar Gap. Starlight chalet&health spa 50 USD for a nice double room. A perfect place to stay at with a nice view and close to good habitat.

e-mail: chalet@cwjamaica.com Website: www.jamaicamarketplace.com/starlight

Least Grebe

20 Montego Bay

Pied-billed Grebe

50+ Elim Pools.

Brown Pelican

Singles along the coasts. 5 seen in total.

Magnificent Frigatebird

Singles along the coasts. 30 seen in total.

Least Bittern

5 at Elim Pools.

Great Egret

200+ at Elim Pools. Singles along the coasts and wetlands.

Great Blue Heron

3 along the coast west of Montego Bay.

Snowy Egret

Singles near water. Common at Elim Pools and Portland.

Cattle Egret

Common and widespread.

Little Blue Heron

Fairly common.

Tricoloured Heron

2 Montego Bay, 20 Elim Pools, 5 at Portland.

Green-backed Heron

Fairly common near water, at least 50 Elim Pools.

Yellow-Crowned Night-Heron

5 Montego Bay, 3 Elim Pools.

Black-Crowned Night-Heron

50 Elim Pools.

Limpkin

2 Elim Pools.

Glossy Ibis

100 Elim Pools, 5 Portland

West Indian Whistling Duck

59 Elim Pools seen from 17.00. It had been raining in the afternoon and maybe that was the reason for the birds to come out rather early. At our visit at noon we didn't see any.

Blue-winged Teal

7 Elim Pools

Turkey Vulture

Common and widespread



Part of the 59 West Indian Whistling-ducks at Elim Pools.

Red-tailed Hawk

1 Bath Fountaine, 3 Barbecue Bottom Rd-Windsor cave, 1 Rocklands, 2 Hardwar Gap.

American Kestrel

Common and widespread. 5-10 seen daily.

American Coot

About 100 Coots were seen at Elim Pools of both species. A rough estimation that 75% were Americans and 25% Carribeans.

Caribbean Coot

See above.

American Purple Gallinule

4 seen at Elim Pools.

Common Moorhen

100 Elim Pools, 1 Montego Bay.

Northern Jacana

10 Elim Pools

Grey Plover

1 Sandy Bay, west of Montego Bay.



American Purple Gallinule at Elim Pools.

Wilson's Plover

2 Sandy Bay, west of Montego Bay, 4 Portland.

Killdeer

10 Montego Bay, 1 Elim Pools, 5 Portland.

Black-necked Stilt

50 Montego Bay, 100 Elim Pools, 25 Portland.

Laughing Gull

1 juv Montego Bay.

Royal Tern

2 Morant Bay, 25 west of Montego Bay.

Caspian Tern

1 Elim Pools.

Least Tern

2 Montego Bay, 3 Portland.

White-Crowned Pigeon

Common and widespread. Only 1 seen at Hardwar Gap though.

Ring-tailed Pigeon

6 near Troy, 25+ at Hardwar Gap and easily seen.

White-winged Dove

Common.

Zenaida Dove

5-10 daily.

Mourning Dove

2 Barbecue Bottom Rd, 4 Rocklands.

Common Ground Dove

Common but only 2 seen at Hardwar Gap.

Caribbean Dove

3 Rocklands feedingstation, 1 near Troy, 1 at Portland.

Crested Quail-dove

Excellent views of 3 on the road from Section and about 1 kilometre towards the Gap. The birds were seen from 17.00 while we were walking on the road.

Ruddy Quail-dove

About 10 at Rocklands, several of them seen well, 1 at Seebreeze, 1 heard Hardwar Gap.

Jamaican Parakeet

100+ Barbecue Bottom Rd, 50 seen daily elsewhere in the western part, not recorded at Hardwar Gap.

Green-rumped Parrotlet

7 Barbecue Bottom Rd, 10 at the Seebreeze Inn.

Yellow-billed Parrot

15 Barbecue Bottom Rd.

Black-billed Parrot

6 Barbecue Bottom Rd. Telescope is useful for identifying the parrots.

Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo

3 Barbecue Bottom Rd. 1 Hardwar Gap.

Jamaican Lizard-cuckoo

2 seen at Rocklands.

Mangrove Cuckoo

1 heard at Rocklands, 1 seen + 1 heard Elim Pools.

Smooth-billed Ani

Common

Jamaican Owl

Gripping views of one spotlighted at Rocklands at about 19.00. Another was heard.

Antillean Nighthawk

1 heard Morant Bay, 1 heard Rocklands, 5 seen Elim Pools, 4 seen at the Starlight Spa.

Jamaican Potoo

1 was seen at daytime roost at Rocklands, another was heard in the evening.



Gripping view of a Jamaican Owl below Rocklands feeding station. This was an older juvenile as it has some downy feathers on its head.



Fritz found us a Jamaican Potoo on its daytime roost while walking a rather long trail at Rocklands.

Black Swift

5 between Buffy Bay and Hardwar, 10-15 Hardwar Gap.

White-collared Swift

5 Bath Fountaine, 1 Hardwar Gap.

Antillean Palm Swift

Common

Jamaican Mango

Singles seen in many places. Most conveniently seen at Rocklands feeding station on your finger!

Red-billed Streamertail

More common than Mango, specially at Hardwar Gap where 50+ were seen.

Black-billed Streamertail

6-7 Bath-Bath Fountaine. The birds could be seen anywhere along the road up to the restaurant.

Vervain Hummingbird

About 20 seen in total, easiest at the Starlight Spa and in the gardens between Hardwar Gap and Section.

Jamaican Tody

About 20 seen in total in most places we visited. Rather tame and often approachable to 2-3 metres.

Jamaican Woodpecker

Common

Jamaican Elaenia

1 at Windsor Cave, 1 at Starlight Spa.

Greater Antillean Elaenia

About 10 seen at Hardwar Gap.

Jamaican Pewee

3 at Hardwar Gap plus 2 family parties there.

Sad Flycatcher

About 10 at Hardwar Gap, singles elsewhere.

Rufous-tailed Flycatcher

2 Rocklands, 2 Hardwar Gap.

Stolid Flycatcher

1 Rocklands.

Grey Kingbird

Common.

Loggerhead Kingbird

Fairly common in more wooded situations than Grey.

Jamaican Becard

2 Barbecue Bottom Rd, 5 Rocklands, 1 Hardwar Gap.



Jamaican Mango (top) and Red-billed Streamertail at Rocklands feeding station.



Jamaican Tody. The bird stays mainly in the thickets of bushes and scrub but is fairly easy to see and often allows you to within a few metres.

Cave Swallow

Common

Carribean Martin

2 Rocklands, 3 between Montego Bay and Elim Pools.

Jamaican Crow

10 Barbecue Bottom Rd, 10 Rocklands, 2 Montego Bay.

Rufous-throated Solitaire

1 Rocklands. Most common bird at Hardwar Gap and easily seen.

White-eyed Thrush

15 seen at Hardwar Gap.

White-chinned Thrush

Fairly common throughout.

Northern Mockingbird

Common

Bahama Mockingbird

1 singing male at Portland.

Starling

5 around Montego Bay-Seebreeze.

Jamaican Vireo

Singles at Barbecue Bottom Rd, Rocklands and Elim Pools. About 10 at Hardwar Gap.

Blue Mountain Vireo

1 at Bath Fountaine, 2 heard singing near Troy, about 10 seen Hardwar Gap including one family.

Black-whiskered Vireo

Fairly common.

Arrowheaded Warbler

1 Barbecue Bottom, 2 Rocklands, about 10 Hardwar Gap.

Yellow warbler

A family party at Elim Pools.

Bananaquit

Common

Jamaican Euphonia

Singles in most places. 14 seen in total.

Jamaican Stripe-headed Tanager

Common at Hardwar Gap, singles elsewhere.



Jamaican Pewee. We only saw it at Hardwar Gap where we had at least two family parties.



Loggerhead Kingbird. Not as common as Grey kingbird but easily seen in more forested situations.



Blue Mountain Vireo. Best seen at hardwar Gap where we had a family and some singles.

Saffron Finch

1 in the Gardens near Seebreeze.

Yellow-faced Grassquit

Common

Black-faced Grassquit

Common

Yellow-shouldered Grassquit

1 Bath Fountaine, 2 Barbecue Bottom Rd, 2 Hardwar Gap.

Greater Antillean Bullfinch

Fairly common, specially at Hardwar Gap.

Orangequit

50 at Hardwar Gap, only 3 more outside that area.

Jamaican Blackbird

1 seen near the Gap after a long search.

Greater Antillean Grackle

Common

Jamaican Oriole

Singles seen in all places. 1 bird was feeding a Shiny Cowbird at elim Pools!



White-chinned Thrush. The most conspicuous fieldmark is the white spot on the wing



Jamaican Oriole.



Rufous-throated Solitaire



Yellow-faced Grassquit and Black-faced were both common.