

**Dominican Republic**  
(Ebano Verde, Valle Nuevo and Santo Domingo Botanical Garden)



*Palmchats – easily lined up in Santo Domingo*

**31 January – 1 February 2009**

**Björn Anderson**

## General

I was working for a couple of days in Santo Domingo and therefore took the opportunity to acquainting myself with some of the island's endemics. With only a weekend to spare, I decided not to go to the southwestern mountains, as it is a five hours drive. Instead I went to Cordillera Central for one day and also spent half a day in Santo Domingo.

## Highlights

Palmchat was of course a highlight, as it was my last of the currently 206 recognized bird families. It is also quite an interesting bird with its social nesting behavior. Other goodies were West Indian Whistling-Duck, Narrow-billed Tody, Hispaniolan Trogon and the stunning Golden Swallow.



*Palmchat nests colonially in huge stick nests in palm-trees*

## Itinerary

### 28-30/1

When I was working in Santo Domingo I stayed at Hotel Embajador, which turned out well, as it is a famous roosting site for hundreds of Hispaniolan Parakeets. On the Friday evening I had the rental car delivered and in rather heavy traffic drove the 80 km to Bonao, where I checked in at Hotel Jacaranda.

### 31/1

I got up early and left Hotel Jacaranda at 6.05. After half an hour I was at the gate for Ebano Verde and ten minutes later the pre-arranged guard appeared and unlocked the gate for me. We drove up to the communication towers, which is about 1 km and 5-10 minutes drive. Some say 4WD is needed, but that is not really true. At the towers there are a couple of noisy diesel generators and one has to take the ridge trail on the back side of the house. This trail leads after 100 meters to a small house and a watch-tower. Shortly after that the trail splits, one leads along the ridge for perhaps a km, maybe longer. The other leads downhill through decent forest, although much of the area is now covered with fern. I walked back and forth along the ridge trail a couple of times in the hope of hearing Eastern Chat-Tanager, but nothing except the Woodpeckers were calling. Later in the morning I walked the trail downhill and added a Narrow-billed Tody and a Trogon amongst other things. By noon, I was back at the tower and left for a 37 km/1 hour drive to Constanza. This road was basically quite ok. After Constanza I drove south towards Valle Nuevo. This road started off reasonably ok, but soon deteriorated seriously. There are no road signs and several times I had to ask for directions and the road was quite bad, once crossing a major stream. The good thing was that there was not so much traffic and it took me to high altitude pine forest. By far the best bird was some Golden Swallows, which was actually the reason for going to Valle Nuevo at first place. Otherwise the pine forest was pretty dead in the afternoon hours. I continued to an ecolodge named and sign-posted Villa Pajon and I also met with the owner who kindly arranged a lunch for me. On the way down I eventually found two Antillean Siskins, but that was essentially it. I then decided to give the Chat-Tanager another go and drove back to Ebano Verde for the last half hour of day-light. Still the only birds that could be heard were the

Woodpeckers. At dusk I continued the last half hour back to Hotel Jacaranda near Bonao, where a nice dinner ended the day.

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I left the Hotel Jacaranda at 6.30 and drove towards Santo Domingo and arrived at the Botanical Garden around 7.30. I was let in, despite the fact that it opens only at 9.00. Shortly after walking down the trail I caught up with a local bird group led by Kate Wallace and Steve. They kindly invited me to join (cheers!) and we walked towards La Canada. No Whistling-Ducks and sadly no Broad-billed Tody, but got the Lizard-Cuckoo and Vervain Hummer easily, plus finally bagging Cape May Warbler (a much wanted bird since I was a boy!). Due to the absence of WIWD, I left the Botanical Garden at 12.30 and drove to the nearby Zoological Park. After carefully checking all the ringed WIWD, I suddenly realized that the real birds were in the nearby lake instead.

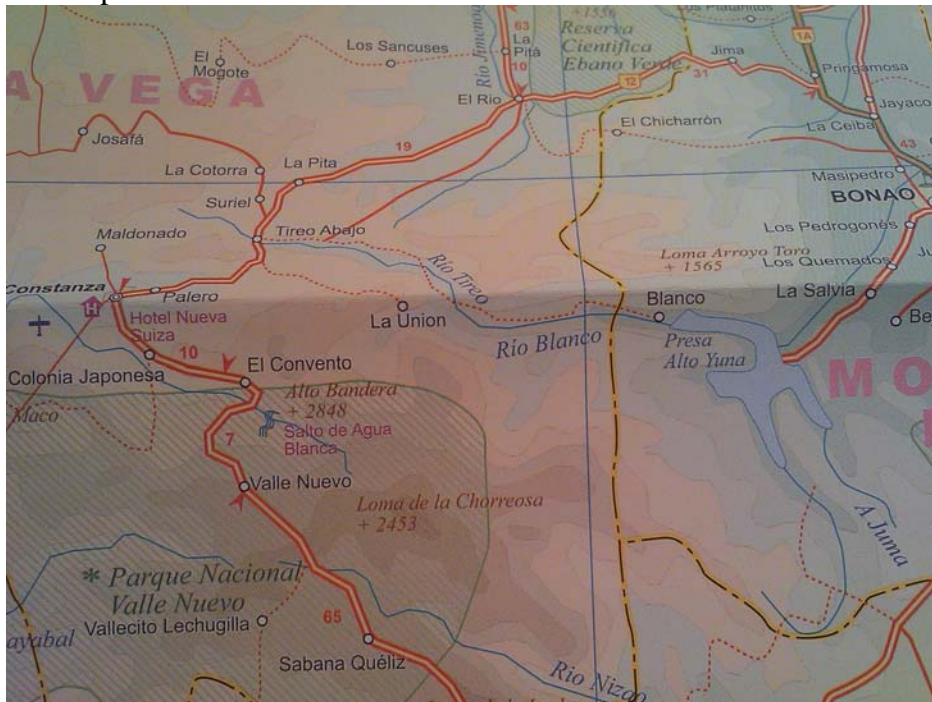
I opted for an earlier flight back to Panama and therefore drove towards the airport. Signs for the airport varied from non-existent (mostly) or extremely confusing (the rest). Eventually I made it and dropped the rental car, only to learn that the earlier flight was full and I had to wait for the 18.00 one.

## **Weather**

Mostly sunny and warm, and in fact I did not even bring anything thicker than a shirt.

## **Logistics**

I rented a Suzuki 4WD car for 100 USD a day and with a map it was quite easy to get around. When navigating the smaller roads around Valle Nuevo or in Santo Domingo, it was extremely useful to know a bit of Spanish in order to ask for directions.



Map showing Eban Verde at the top and Valle Nuevo bottom left.

## **Site descriptions**

### Eban Verde

Eban Verde Scientific Reserve is a known place for Eastern Chat-Tanager. I dipped, and later learned that they are not really getting into song until March. The reserve is private land and there is a gate that has to be opened. From the gate it is about a km to drive up to some communication towers and the guard station. Behind the guard station there is a trail that leads along the ridge before it forks into one smaller trail continues along the ridge and the major trail leads down in the valley. The forest is quite good. One good place to stay is Hotel Jacaranda, which is a rest-stop hotel along Autopista Duarte (highway No 1). It is



located on the west side of the road, ca 4 km north of the exit to Bonao and is easy to find. I paid 40 USD and booked in advance at +1 809 525 5590.

### Valle Nuevo

I chanced upon driving south from Constanza in the middle of Cordillera Central. From Ebano Verde it is 37 km to Constanza on a good, but winding road. From Constanza the road deteriorates quickly and becomes a very rough dirt track, sometimes not even that. 4WD is strongly recommended and probably necessary. I worked myself uphill in the direction of Valle Nuevo. Many times I had to ask the locals about directions, as nothing was apparent nor sign-posted. The track took me uphill through good-looking pine forest. As I was only there during the afternoon hours, I cannot say for sure how good the area is for birding. Twice I came across Golden Swallows, which was my main target bird. At some places there are signs for Villa Pajon, a newly established ecolodge a total of 17 km from Constanza. This is where I went before turning back. Note that there is nowhere to find food along this mountain road, nor at Villa Pajon. I was kindly invited for lunch though.

### Santo Domingo Botanical Garden

This is a place well worth visiting if one has a few hours to kill. The best area seems to be along the La Canada, which is the stream with ponds at the far end from the entrance. Along this stream there is relatively good forest as well. The gate is supposed to open at 9.00, but I was there at 7.30 and had no problem convincing the guard that I was desperate about starting birding. West Indian Whistling-Duck are sometimes seen along La Canada.

### Santo Domingo Zoological Park

The zoo is about 15 minutes drive from the Botanical Garden. The only reason to visit, is to see the West Indian Whistling-Ducks that often come in to one of the lakes near the Flamingo pond. Note that the zoo also has its own WIWD in the Flamingo pond, but these are all ringed and clipped, and are not shy at all. I saw six wild WIWD in the lake nearby.

## **Birds**

Least Grebe, *Tachybaptus dominicus dominicus*

Five at the Botanical Garden.

Snowy Egret, *Egretta thula brewsteri*

Three at the Botanical Garden.

Western Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis ibis*

Several between Ebano Verde and Constanza.

Green Heron, *Butorides virescens virescens*

Five at the Botanical Garden.



*Green Heron doing its morning exercise*

West Indian Whistling-Duck, *Dendrocygna arborea*

Six at the Santo Domingo Zoological Park. These are free-flying birds that often come to the natural lake.



*West Indian Whistling-Ducks*

American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius dominicensis*

Two between Ebano Verde and Constanza.

Purple Gallinule, *Porphyrio martinica*

Two at the Botanical Garden.

Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus cerceris*

One at the Botanical Garden.

Solitary Sandpiper, *Tringa solitaria* ssp

Three at the Botanical Garden.

Plain Pigeon, *Patagioenas inornata inornata*

One flyby at Ebano Verde in the evening.

Common Ground-Dove, *Columbina passerine insularis*

Two at the Botanical Garden.

Hispaniolan Parakeet, *Aratinga chloroptera chloroptera*

Every night there are an estimated 2-300 birds that roost in the trees just outside Hotel Embajador in Santo Domingo. Fortunately that was the hotel I was staying at, so in the evenings and early mornings I could enjoy this cacophonous spectacle. Several were also seen at the Botanical Garden.

Mangrove Cuckoo, *Coccyzus minor*

One at the Botanical Garden.



*Mangrove Cuckoo - this time far away from any mangroves*

Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo, *Saurothera longirostris longirostris*

About ten sightings at the Botanical Garden.



*Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo – always tricky to get the entire length of the bird in one frame*

Smooth-billed Ani, *Crotophaga ani*

Five between Ebano Verde and Constanza, and five at the Botanical Garden.

White-collared Swift, *Streptoprocne zonaris pallidifrons*

About 50 in one flock below Ebano Verde in the morning.

Antillean Palm-Swift, *Tachornis phoenicobia phoenicobia*

A few at Hotel Embajador in Santo Domingo, one near Constanza, two at Valle Nuevo and very common at the Botanical Garden.

Antillean Mango, *Anthracothorax dominicus dominicus*

3-4 at the Botanical Garden.



*Antillean Mango*

Hispaniolan Emerald, *Chlorostilbon swainsonii*

Five at Ebano Verde and five at Valle Nuevo.

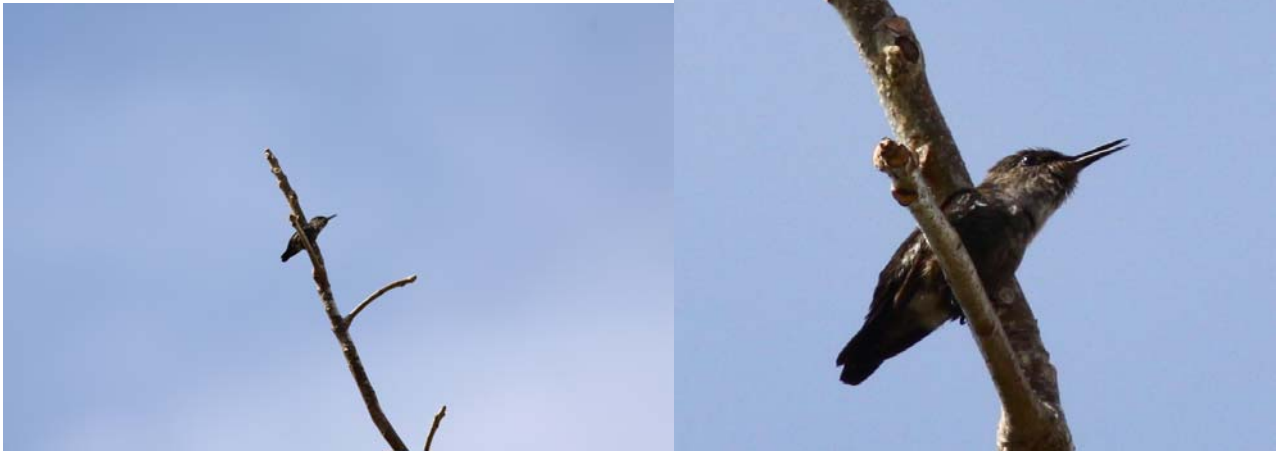


*Hispaniolan Emerald*



Vervain Hummingbird, *Mellisuga minima vieilloti*

About ten at the Botanical Garden. Easily heard when delivering its loud song, often from the very top of the pointing palm-leaf. Said to be the second smallest bird in the world.



*Vervain Hummingbird – needs some cropping in Photoshop to make it justice*

Hispaniolan Trogon, *Priotelus roseigaster*

One seen and another heard at Ebano Verde.

Narrow-billed Tody, *Todus angustirostris*

One at Ebano Verde and one at Valle Nuevo.



*Narrow-billed Tody – one of the two endemic emeralds*

Hispaniolan Woodpecker, *Melanerpes striatus*

One at Hotel Embajador, very common at Ebano Verde and common at the Botanical Garden.

Greater Antillean Elaenia, *Elaenia fallax cherriei*

A few at Ebano Verde and about ten at Valle Nuevo.

Hispaniolan Pewee, *Contopus hispaniolensis hispaniolensis*

Three at Ebano Verde and two at Valle Nuevo.

Golden Swallow, *Tachycineta euchrysea sclateri*

Five at Valle Nuevo (four at five km before Villa Pajan and one above Villa Pajan) and one at Ebano Verde in the evening. This must be one of the most stunning swallows. The back in sunlight is a combination of gold and emerald!



*Golden Swallow – or golden wow!*

Palmchat, *Dulus dominicus*

About ten at Hotel Embajador in Santo Domingo. This endemic family completed my list of world bird families.



*Palmchat – not so much chattish about it really*

Northern Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos orpheus*  
Ten at the Botanical Garden.



*Northern Mockingbird – always a great songster*

Red-legged Thrush, *Turdus plumbeus ardosiaceus*  
One at the Botanical Garden.

Black-whiskered Vireo, *Vireo altiloquus altiloquus*  
Ten at the Botanical Garden.



*Black-whiskered Vireo*

Antillean Siskin, *Carduelis dominicensis*

Two in pine trees at lower elevations at Valle Nuevo.

Northern Parula, *Parula americana*

One at the Botanical Garden.



Cape May Warbler, *Dendroica tigrina*

One male at the Botanical Garden. A long awaited North American warbler that finally made it.

Black-throated Blue Warbler, *Dendroica caerulescens* ssp

Two at Ebano Verde and two at Valle Nuevo.

Prarie Warbler, *Dendroica discolor* ssp

One at Valle Nuevo and two at the Botanical Garden.

Black-and-white Warbler, *Mniotilta varia*

Two at the Botanical Garden.

American Redstart, *Setophaga ruticilla*

One at Ebano Verde and one at the Botanical Garden.

Ovenbird, *Seiurus auricapilla auricapilla*

One at the Botanical Garden.

Louisiana Waterthrush, *Seiurus motacilla*

Two at the Botanical Garden.

Green-tailed Warbler, *Microligea palustris palustris*

Three at Ebano Verde and two at Valle Nuevo.

Bananaquit, *Coereba flaveola bananivora*

Many at Ebano Verde and at the Botanical Garden.

Black-crowned Palm-Tanager, *Phaenicophilus palmarum*

Two at Ebano Verde and three at Valle Nuevo.



*Black-crowned Palm-Tanager – mimicking an Australian honeyeater*

Hispaniolan Spindalis, *Spindalis dominicensis*

Many at both Ebano Verde and Valle Nuevo.



*Hispaniolan Spindalis – short for Hispaniolan Stripe-headed Tanager ;-)*

Black-faced Grassquit, *Tiaris bicolor marchii*

Two at Hotel Embajador in Santo Domingo.

Greater Antillean Bullfinch, *Loxigilla violacea affinis*

One male at Ebano Verde.

Rufous-collared Sparrow, *Zonotrichia capensis antillarum*

About ten at higher elevations at Valle Nuevo.

Greater Antillean Grackle, *Quiscalus niger niger*

About ten at the Botanical Garden.



*Greater Antillean Grackle*