

Los Haitises, Dominican Republic

11-12 September 2009



Ashy-faced Owls

Björn Anderson

General

This is a report from a short trip to Los Haitises National Park in eastern Dominican Republic. The purpose of the trip was to find the extremely rare Ridgway's Hawk, as well as the endemic Ashy-faced Owl. Luck was with me and I ended up having super views of both these target birds. Having been only briefly to DR before, I also enjoyed picking up four more lifers along the way. All in all a good way to spend a Saturday.



Ridgway's Hawks (two individuals)

Itinerary

11/9

I met up with Kate Wallace at my hotel in Santo Domingo on the Friday afternoon and we took off along the autopista to the east of Santo Domingo. After a while we turned north on a slightly worse road and eventually we reach Sabana de la Mar. From here it was a shorter drive to the hotel at the edge of Los Haitises National Park. The Paraiso hotel was a very pleasant surprise. True lodge-feeling right at the edge of the forest and I ticked off White-necked Crow even before I got out of the car. The hotel is owned by Tony, who is an architect, and this was quickly seen. The lodge was stunningly beautifully built in stones and wood and the rooms were all individually constructed. We had a nice dinner and then it was time to join Juan for an Owl session. We drove back along the entrance road to near the river near Sabana de la Mar. Here Juan imitated Ashy-faced Owl and eventually we got an answer. However, it took us quite a while to nail it down after an initial fly-over. Perseverance paid off and eventually we had close up views of what turned out to be two birds together. Happy with this success we returned to the hotel where I went geckoing together with a couple of herpetologists. After having showed me the world's smallest gecko (about 2 cm), we were invited to Tony's nearby house where we scored on the largest gecko in the Americas. Before accidentally loosing its tail somewhere between Tony's stove and fridge, it was roughly 25 cm. My newly achieved gecko knowledge was happily celebrated by some architected drinks offered by Tony (thanks!!).

12/9

We were up at 6.20 for a walk around the garden and a quick breakfast before Juan arrived at 7.00. With the target bird Ridgway's Hawk in mind, we took off along a track just behind the hotel. The trail lead us up through the limestone karst landscape and about an hours walk later we were at a territory of the Hawk. The breeding season is during the spring, but I was hoping that the pair would anyway hang around their favorite valley. Juan had seen the birds recently, so I estimated the chances as rather good. However, it took us a nervous two hours checking three different valleys, before I eventually found one bird perched in a Cecropia tree. With a bit of maneuvering, we managed to get very close and eventually its mate joined the party as well. Good stuff and mission completed. In addition we took pleasure in Antillean Piculet, the recently split Hispaniolan Oriole and Broad-billed Tody. Before noon we were back at the hotel and had lunch before taking of towards the airport, 2.5 hours away.

Weather

The weather was essentially sunny and hot, but during the drive we encountered a few drops of rain.



Black Widow consuming its prey

Logistics

I arranged the excursion through Kate Wallace who runs Tody Tours, www.todytours.com. Kate knows all the necessary people in the area and has extensive knowledge about Dominican Republic and can be thoroughly recommended.



Juan, knowing where the Hawks hang around...



...happy lady that has the Hawk on her yard list

Site descriptions

Los Haitises National Park is northeast of the capital Santo Domingo. It can be reached within 3 hours drive on relatively good roads. Even though the roads are bad in parts, they could definitely be negotiated with a 2WD. The park is huge and consists partly (or mainly?) of limestone karst landscape covered with scrub-like forest, sometimes taller. For a birder it is well-known as the last and only stronghold of the extremely threatened Ridgway's Hawk. The current population is less than 200 pairs and seriously threatened by hunting (farmers think they prey on chicken) and severe habitat loss (the forest is gradually being chopped down).



Typical landscape at the edge of Los Haitises National Park

Birds

Western Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*
Commonly seen in pastures.

Green Heron, *Butorides virescens*
Two at Los Haitises National Park.

Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura*
Common.

Ridgway's Hawk, *Buteo ridgwayi*
One pair seen nicely in their limestone valley an hours walk from the hotel. Yip!

American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*
Several seen in Santo Domingo and en route.

Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*
One at Los Haitises National Park.

Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferous*
One at Los Haitises National Park.

White-crowned Pigeon, *Patagioenas leucocephala*
One seen well at Los Haitises National Park, where several unidentified *Patagioenas* pigeons were seen.

Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*
Many at Los Haitises National Park.

White-winged Dove, *Zenaida asiatica*
Several at Los Haitises National Park.

Common Ground-Dove, *Columbina passerine*
Common.

Smooth-billed Ani, *Crotophaga ani*
Several at Los Haitises National Park.

Ashy-faced Owl, *Tyto glaucops*
Two birds together were finally nailed down and performed brilliantly near the river between Sabana de la Mar and Los Haitises National Park. Wow!!

Antillean Palm-Swift, *Tachornis phoenicobia*
Common in Santo Domingo and smaller numbers at Los Haitises National Park.

Antillean Mango, *Anthracothorax dominicus*
A few at Los Haitises National Park.

Broad-billed Tody, *Todus subulatus*
A total of four seen well at Los Haitises National Park. Always a favorite family!



Broad-billed Todies

Antillean Piculet, *Nesocittes micromegas*
A total of four heard and eventually one seen hopping up and down a tree trunk showing its yellow cap.

Hispaniolan Woodpecker, *Melanerpes striatus*
One of the more common birds at Los Haitises National Park (next to Palmchat).

Gray Kingbird, *Tyrannus dominicensis*
Several at Los Haitises National Park.

Cave Swallow, *Petrochelidon fulva*
Many at Los Haitises National Park.

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*

Several at Los Haitises National Park.
Palmchat, *Dulus dominicus*
Ubiquitous.
Northern Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos*
Many at Los Haitises National Park.
White-necked Crow, *Corvus leucognaphalus*
About five pairs at Los Haitises National Park, e.g. one at the hotel that was stealing sugar, spoons, and just about anything that it could lift. Often showing its white-based neck-feathers.
Black-whiskered Vireo, *Vireo altiloquus*
A few seen and heard at Los Haitises National Park.
American Redstart, *Setophaga ruticilla*
Two at Los Haitises National Park.
Prothonotary Warbler, *Protonotaria citrea*
One at Los Haitises National Park.
Northern Waterthrush, *Seiurus noveboracensis*
One at Los Haitises National Park.
Louisiana Waterthrush, *Seiurus motacilla*
One at Los Haitises National Park at the very same spot as previous bird.
Bananaquit, *Coereba flaveola*
Several at Los Haitises National Park.
Black-crowned Palm-Tanager, *Phaenicophilus palmarum*
A few at Los Haitises National Park.
Greater Antillean Oriole, *Icterus dominicensis*
Two at Los Haitises National Park.



Top left is the world's smallest gecko, bottom is the largest in the Americas