



View over English Harbour.

## Introduction

My non-birding wife and I visited the small country of Antigua and Barbuda on a 5-night stay in combination with Dominica (separate trip report). Either going on a full day birding trip, or on a family vacation as we did, don't expect a long species list.

Antigua is most famous for having 365 beaches, one for every single day of the year.

Barbuda is famous for its Frigatebird sanctuary with around 5000 breeding pairs and also for the Barbuda Warbler, found no-one else on earth.

After the devastating hurricane Maria in mid-September 2017 some islands were more affected than others among the ones in the Lesser Antilles. For example so was the whole of Barbuda evacuated while Antigua wasn't hit at all. Dominica was hit hard, for example St. Martin, Puerto Rico and Anguilla.

After some research around the status of these islands when comes to hotels/lodges, roads and other infrastructure we decided to give it a go. It was actually a relief to see that so much was repaired and rebuilt on Barbuda after such a short time. Even though there's still a lot to be done.

The whole vacation (Dominica included) was bought as package from the UK based company Motmot Travel. This included return flights from London Gatwick to Antigua and a return flight to Dominica from Antigua, all accommodations, transfers, car rental, the day trip with local guide and the return ferry ticket to Barbuda. In the end the whole trip went very well without any troubles at all.

We can really recommend Motmot Travel and their services.

Visit their web site <https://www.motmottravel.com/> (they have a lot to offer) or email/phone them. [mail@motmottravel.com](mailto:mail@motmottravel.com) / [+44\(0\) 1327 359 622](tel:+4401327359622).

## **Accommodations**

**Catamaran Hotel**, Falmouth Harbour [catclub@candw.ag](mailto:catclub@candw.ag) telephone nr +268 460 1036 was not our choice, recommended by Motmot. The hotel is situated on the south coast at Falmouth Bay, near English Harbour with a view over the sea and the marina.

No real birding spot as this was mostly an urban area, even though we did see some nice but common birds in the surroundings. We found for example White-crowned Pigeon, Caribbean Martin, Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Carib Grackle and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch.

**Hawksbill Resort**, Gray's Farm, Five Islands Village +268 462 0301

<http://rexresorts.com/antigua/hawksbill/>

This was our choice from the beginning. This is a resort with no familiar feeling, more like a place where you just blend in. We choose it mainly because it seemed to be convenient situated to birding areas and placed just by the sea. With a car the location on the island actually doesn't matter though it's so short distances.

From a birding perspective pretty much the same species as at English Harbour, just add 2 species of Carib's ("hummers"). The advantage was the lack of traffic as the road ends at the resort and the last part is beyond a security check. There are also a little more areas with trees in the surroundings and a sea side walks to the next beach.

## **Car rental and driving**

We ordered and prepaid for a medium sized car with the help from Motmot Travel. As we changed accommodation the car rental company had to deliver the car to one place and pick it up at another. That worked out very well.

Driving is on the wrong side (left) of the road and as most of the roads were quite bad with a lot of potholes so the average speed didn't get that high.

Finding the way are at some places a little tricky because the lack of road signs and street names, but with a map and a good co-driver it went just fine.

## **Places visited**

### **Potworks Dam**

This dam is situated on the eastern half of the island just as short drive from English Harbour via Christian Hill and Bethesda. In the north east corner the road passes a stream and it's here one have the best place to scan the dam. The far end is hard to bird without a scope. We couldn't see any obvious roads towards the shore line from the main road. On the other hand – we didn't search that hard either.



Potworks Dam, check the enlarged steel construction in the species list!

### **Shirley Heights National Park**

This national park is not a recognized birding hot spot. It's an old fort with some remaining's from earlier centuries. Situated just south of English Harbour and with amazing views over the marina and the sea. A walk around will certainly produce the more common open area bird species.

Be prepared to pay a small entrance fee.

### **Wallings Nature Reserve**

This reserve is situated along the road between Swetes and Old Road (a village on the south coast). The road is also named Fig Tree Drive.

Walling's area is mentioned in some trip reports from the early 2000 century as THE place on Antigua to catch up with Bridled Quail-dove.

The whole area is today a nature reserve and well signed along the main road. A little bit further down the road is a more touristic part with a zip line. We couldn't hear any loud shouts or screams from happy "zip liners" when walking the trails in the nature reserve.

And YES, there are Bridled Quail-doves in the forest, we saw one bird foraging just beside the trail up to Signal Hill and we heard a another one calling.

A small fee will be collected at the entrance and registration area.

### **Mc Kinnon Salt Pond**

These pond(s) are situated on the west coast just north of the main town St. John's.

This rather big area of salt ponds is not so easily overlooked due to the mangrove stands along the edges. There are a few places where visibility is OK. At our visit the weather wasn't the best, light rain/drizzle.

The water level was quite high so there were no mudflats or an obvious shoreline for roosting waders.

There are also few pull overs to get the car out of the road. The best way to overlook the area is to park the car at the southern end and take a walk as the road follows the pond.

### **Barbuda**

We went here for a full day. At the ferry dock we were met by our guide Calvin who took care of us and drove us around in his old charming pickup truck. Within 10 minutes after setting our feet on Barbuda we had seen and heard Barbuda Warbler. Mission accomplished.

Barbuda must also be one of the best places to see West Indian Whistling-duck.



A typical habitat for Barbuda Warbler. Less than 100 meters away to the right is the sea.

There are a few ponds along the main road from the ferry to Codrington, of which the best one during our day was not visible from the main road. It's a short walk through thorny bushes on Donkey trails!



West Indian Whistling-duck

## Birding

A visit this time of the year means that one is out of migration time for American passerines and waders. Breeding species like for example Least Tern is absent as they turn up April/May for the breeding season.

We also noted quite high water levels in the dams and ponds and therefore no muddy areas or shorelines for waders. If this is normal or not during the winter months I don't know.

The few trip reports I found on Cloudbirders and Surfbirds were quite old (except for a load of cruise/island-hopping ones) and they often covered the summer months.

## Litterature

As field guide the Helm guide Birds of West Indies, Raffale, H et al was used.

I downloaded some bird sounds from Zeno-Canto to use as a library.

Some useful, but rather old, trip reports were found at Cloudbirders and Surfbirds.

## Day by day

**1 Feb** we should just take a short 50-minute flight from our home airport to Stockholm/Arlanda BUT because of snow chaos in Stockholm our flight was cancelled and we had a boring +5 hours taxi ride to our Arlanda hotel. Arrived well after midnight but as we had a midday flight to London same day it was not so stressful.

**2 Feb** flight from Arlanda to London/Gatwick and an overnight stay here as well.

**3 Feb** morning flight to Antigua, where we arrived in the early afternoon. Long wait to get through the immigration because of several international flights arriving in a short time, so the que was quite long. Found our prepaid transfer and went to our hotel. In the afternoon we had a walk in the surroundings and also found a nice seaside restaurant.

**4 Feb** our rental car turned up in time right after breakfast. Took a short walk and bought some supplies in a nearby shop. Then we had a drive towards Potsworks Dam, Shirley Heights and a little of sightseeing on the east side of the island.

**5 Feb** after breakfast we checked out from Catamaran and drove towards our next accommodation, Hawksbill Resort. We decided to take the coast road from Old Road via Crab Hill and Bolans out on the Five Island peninsula. Along the way we stopped at Wallings Nature Reserve and took the hike up on Signal Hill. We arrived to the resort just in time

for lunch. We just had a lazy afternoon at the hotel grounds the rest of the day.

**6 Feb** after breakfast we drove to the Mc Kinnon Pond in light drizzle. Birded for an hour or so and then we did some sightseeing on the west and north part of Antigua. In the afternoon we took a long walk back along the entrance road.

**7 Feb** a full day on Barbuda Island. The ferry departure already 06.00 and it took around 90 minutes to reach Barbuda. We were met by our guide Calvin Gore, the only local birder, and after a day on the island with Calvin we can really recommend his services.

**Contact details to Calvin:** email: [gorecalvin@274gmail.com](mailto:gorecalvin@274gmail.com)

Telephone: +001 268 7211972

On the ferry ride back to Antigua we had a nice show of a Humpback Whale.



Calvin Gore birding!

**8 Feb** Travelling day with transfer to the airport and an afternoon flight to Dominica, therefore we just had a lazy day at the resort.

## Species list

**West Indian Whistling Duck** (*Dendrocygna arborea*)

1 pair Potworks Dam 4/2, 1 male Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2 and 15 in a

pond (not visible from the main road) south of Codrington), Barbuda 7/2.



A pair of West Indian Whistling-duck at Potworks Dam, roosting on the huge steel construction.

**Blue-winged Teal** (*Spatula discors*)

Around 70 Potworks Dam 4/2, 25 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2 and 1 pair in the pond south of Codrington, Barbuda 7/2.

**White-cheeked Pintail** (*Anas bahamensis*)

4 seen Potworks Dam 4/2, 10 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2 and 30 in the pond south of Codrington, Barbuda 7/2.

**Ring-necked Duck** (*Anas collaris*)

1 eclipse male in the pond south of Codrington, Barbuda 7/2.

**Lesser Scaup** (*Aythya affinis*)

35 Potworks Dam 4/2.

**Ruddy Duck** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

25 Potworks Dam 4/2, 45 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2 and 3 in the pond south of Codrington, Barbuda 7/2.





White-cheeked Pintails

**Helmeted Guineafowl** (*Numida meleagris*) (Introduced)  
7 flushed at the pond south of Codrington, Barbuda 7/2.

**Pied-billed Grebe** (*Podilymbus podiceps*)  
25 Potworks Dam 4/2 and 10 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2.

**Black-crowned Night Heron** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)  
1 adult Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2.

**Yellow-crowned Night Heron** (*Nyctanassa violacea*)  
1 adult English Harbor 4/2.

**Western Cattle Egret** (*Bubulcus ibis*)  
A fairly common roadside bird. Nowhere numerous, mainly in small flocks of 2-10 birds.

**Great Blue Heron** (*Ardea herodias*)  
2 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 4/2.

**Great Egret** (*Ardea alba*)  
1-4 English Harbor 3-5/2, 40 Potworks Dam 4/2 and 50 around Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2, most of them in a nearby sewage ditch.

**Tricolored Heron** (*Egretta tricolor*)  
3 Potworks Dam 4/2.

**Little Blue Heron** (*Egretta caerulea*)

1 young bird English Harbor 3/2 and 1 adult there 5/2 and 1 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2.

**Snowy Egret** (*Egretta thula*)

7 Potworks Dam 4/2, 5 in a sewage ditch near Mc Kinnon Salt Pond and 1 Hawksbill Resort 6/2.

**Western Reef Heron** (*Egretta gularis*)

1 dark morph seen English Harbor 4-5/2.

**Brown Pelican** (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Fairly common, never numerous, but always visible along the coast, except around Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2, where at least 25 were seen. Also 30 seen, in small flocks of 2-9, passing Hawksbill Resort in the morning 6/2.

**Magnificent Frigatebird** (*Fregata magnificens*)

Common.

*A 5000 pair colony can be seen by taking a boat trip to the sanctuary on Barbuda.*



Magnificent Frigatebird

**Brown Booby** (*Sula leucogaster*)

1 seen flying by in the afternoon at Hawksbill Resort 5/2.

**Western Osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*)

2 Potworks Dam 4/2, 1 English Harbor 5/2, 1 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2 and 1 Hawksbill Resort 8/2.

**Broad-winged Hawk** (*Buteo platypterus*)

1 Potworks Dam 4/2, 1 roadside bird north of St. Johns and 1 at Hawksbill Resort 6/2 and 1 Barbuda 7/2.

**Common Gallinule** (*Gallinula galeata*)

3 Potworks Dam 4/2, 5 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2 and 10 in the pond south Codrington, Barbuda 7/2.

**American Coot** (*Fulica americana*)

5 Potworks Dam 4/2 and 10 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2.

*The former Caribbean Coot is lumped with the American one.*

**Black-necked Stilt** (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

15 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2.

**Ruddy Turnstone** (*Arenaria interpres*)

10 at the ferry jetty Barbuda 7/2.



Ruddy Turnstones

**Spotted Sandpiper** (*Actitis macularius*)

1 English Harbor 4/2, 2 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2 and 2 Barbuda 7/2.

**Solitary Sandpiper** (*Tringa solitaria*)

1 in a small pond close to Hawksbill Resort 6/2.

**Greater Yellowlegs** (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

2 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond and 1 near Hawksbill Resort 6/2 and 1 Barbuda 7/2.

**Royal Tern** (*Thalasseus maximus*)

Seen in small numbers along the coast. Highest seen number was 10 at English Harbor 4/2 and at the small ferry jetty Barbuda 7/2.



Royal Tern

**Cabot's Tern** (*Thalasseus acutiflavus*)

1 seen together with a few Royal Terns at a small inlet near Mc Kinnons Salt Pond 6/2.

**White-crowned Pigeon** (*Patagioenas leucocephala*)

Fairly common.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Fairly common, mainly in towns and villages.

**Common Ground-Dove** (*Columbina passerina*)

Fairly common to locally common. On Barbuda very common.

**Bridled Quail-Dove** (*Geotrygon mystacea*)

1 seen and another one heard calling Wallings N.R 5/2.

*The one we saw was close to the trail and just after trail mark "Signal Hill 1". Slowly walking away from us while feeding.*

**Zenaida Dove** (*Zenaida aurita*)

Common.

**Green-throated Carib** (*Eulampis holosericeus*)

1 seen Hawksbill Resort 8/2.

**Antillean Crested Hummingbird** (*Orthorhyncus cristatus*)

Fairly common.

**Belted Kingfisher** (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

1 male English Harbor 5/2, 1 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond 6/2 and 1 at the pond south of Codrington, Barbuda 7/2.

**American Kestrel** (*Falco sparverius*)

1 Mc Kinnon Salt Pond and Hawksbill Resort 6/2 also 1 Barbuda 7/2.

**Caribbean Elaenia** (*Elaenia martinica*)

Fairly common, easily detected by the call.

**Gray Kingbird** (*Tyrannus dominicensis*)

A very common species, always there on the wires along the roads.

**Lesser Antillean Flycatcher** (*Myiarchus oberi*)

2 seen Barbuda 7/2.

**Caribbean Martin** (*Progne dominicensis*)

Only seen in English Harbor, 1-5 birds there 3-5/2.

**Barn Swallow** (*Hirundo rustica*)

1 young bird seen at Mc Kinnon Salt Pond.

**Carib Grackle** (*Quiscalus lugubris*)

Common.

**American Redstart** (*Setophaga ruticilla*)

2 males Wallings N.R 5/2.

**Mangrove Warbler** (*Setophaga petechia*)

Common.

**Barbuda Warbler** (*Setophaga subita*)

Fairly common on the west side of the island, most often near water.



Barbuda Warbler

**Bananaquit** (*Coereba flaveola*)

Annoyingly common.

*The whole Caribbean group? is singing more like a Black-faced Grassquit and have a short, red stripe at the lower mandible.*

**Black-faced Grassquit** (*Tiaris bicolor*)

Common, except Barbuda where very common.

**Lesser Antillean Bullfinch** (*Loxigilla noctis*)

Common.

## Mammals

The only mammals we recorded was the introduced mongoose

**Indian** or **Small Asian Mongoose** (*Herpestes javanicus*)

Seen with up to 10 at Hawksbill Resort 6-8/2, also seen on several other locations.

*Forbidden by law on Barbuda Calvin told us.*

**Humpback Whale** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

1 from the ferry from Barbuda to Antigua 7/2.

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