



St Lucia & Dominica

March 2023

**A Birding Trip
Report by
Ian Merrill**

St Lucia and Dominica: 4th to 18th March 2017

Introduction:

Where

According to the excellent Lynx/Birdlife field guide to the region (Kirwan et.al.), there are c.190 endemic bird species spread across the islands of the West Indies, putting the region firmly on the radar of any keen world birder. For my non-birding wife and I, the island group gained a reputation as one of our favourite travel destinations back in 2013, with a memorable trip to Cuba, which was followed-up by equally enjoyable visits to Puerto Rico, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic.

After the large and endemic-rich islands of the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles clearly offered less scope for long bird lists. A little research soon revealed however that a well-planned visit of suitable duration, to St Lucia and Dominica, could potentially provide two-thirds of the island chain's available endemic bird species. For the purist birder there can be a temptation to attempt a Lesser Antillean 'clean-up' in one fell swoop, however a little research showed that such an undertaking is expensive, logistically challenging and with a very high probability of missing some key birds. Furthermore, such tactics mean that one misses the opportunity to savour many other facets of these individually-unique islands, blessed with a wonderful climate, some breath-taking natural landscapes, huge tracts of pristine habitat and fascinatingly diverse cultures.

Although a couple of relatively recent reports cover trips to St Lucia, they fail to provide explicit detail on even the key sites, whilst my research revealed Dominica to be virtually undocumented in any form of useful format. This report is written to plug this bird-finding void, but should also give a broader feel for the islands, and set out some of the other rich and varied experiences which will greatly enhance a more 'family friendly' trip.

Our itinerary and accommodation locations were planned around the key birding sites, meaning that the first four nights on St Lucia were spent at Balenbouche, with easy access to dry forest birding at Praslin and Anse Chastenet, plus the wet montane forest at the Des Cartier Trail, Belvedere and the Grand Eden Estate. As roads are generally narrow and winding on St Lucia, travel between the north and south can be very time-consuming; for this reason we relocated to the north, at Gros Islet, for our second block of four nights. Gros Islet gives good access to the dry forest at Grand Anse and the Maquis Estate, plus wet forest at Piton Flore.

After flying to Dominica we took up residence in Portsmouth for a six night stay, a location which gives very easy access to the key birding site of Syndicate, with Middleham Falls being only a little over an hour away. Importantly for us, all locations used on both islands were also just a stone's throw from wonderful snorkelling sites, picturesque beaches, charismatic towns and some great eateries.

The combination of the two islands provided Victoria and I with an unforgettable two-weeks of friendly hospitality, laid-back culture, spectacular scenery and scrumptious cuisine. So captivated were we by these welcoming, unspoilt isles that we both agreed that our Caribbean adventure was one of the most pleasurable trips we had ever undertaken. I also saw every available island endemic bird, regional-endemic and targeted race, all with relative ease, meaning that it really was a destination(s) to cover every expectation.

Our complete itinerary, in summary, was as follows:

Day 1 Flight from UK to St Lucia. Accom: [Balenbouche AirBnB](#)

Day 2 Morning at Praslin dry forest and Des Cartier Trail recce. Afternoon snorkelling at Anse Chastenet, evening at Morne Tabac. Accom: [Balenbouche AirBnB](#)

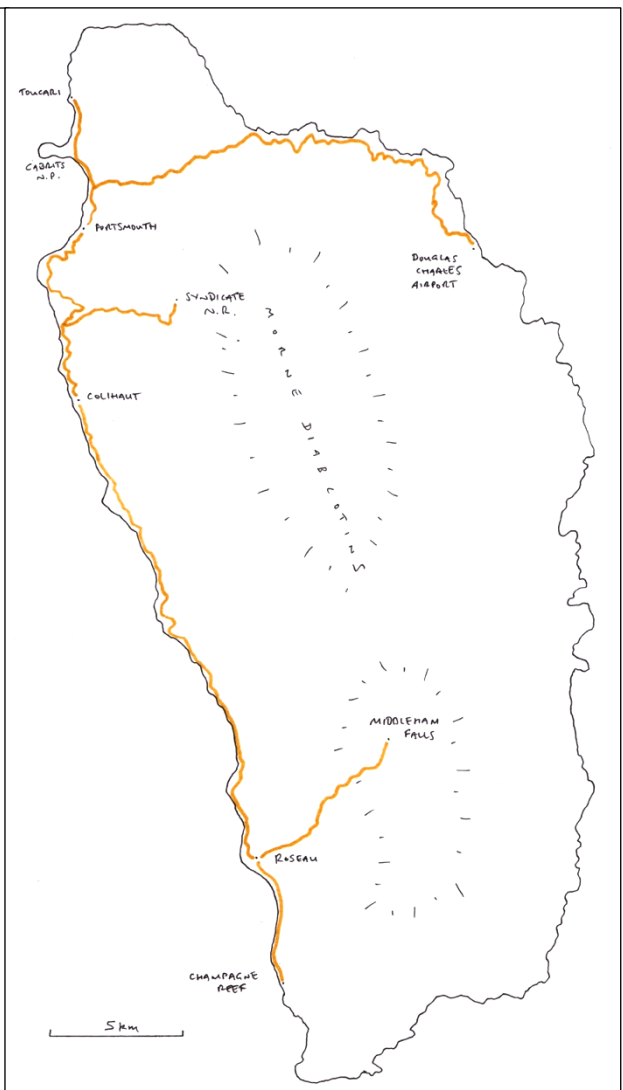
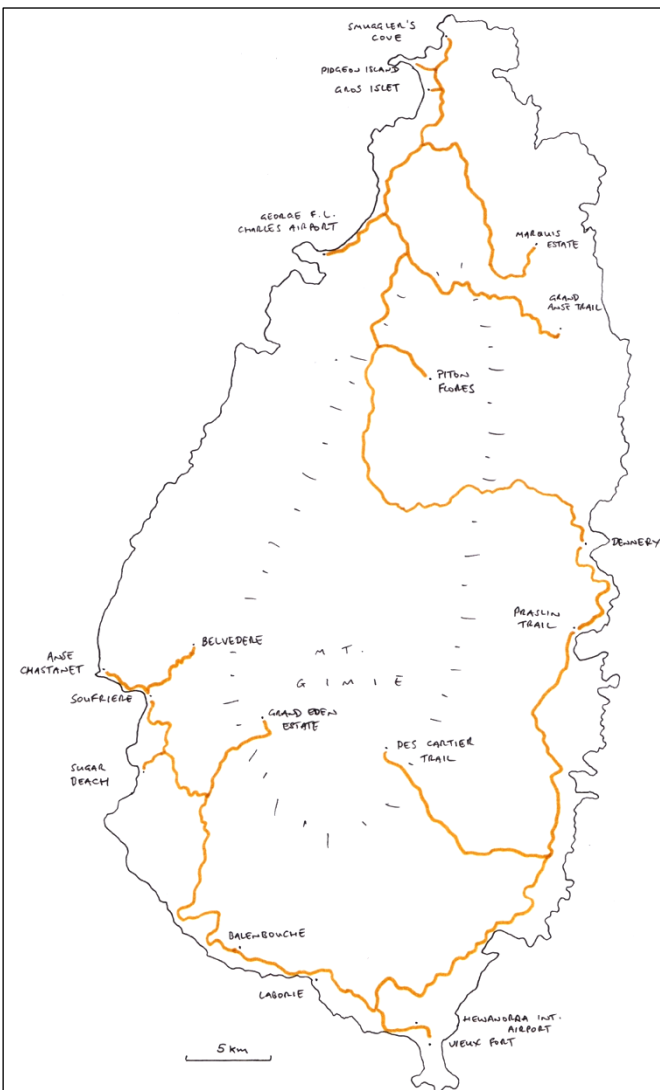
Day 3 Morning at Belvedere. Afternoon snorkelling at Anse Chastenet, then visit Soufriere. Evening in Laborie. Accom: [Balenbouche AirBnB](#)

Day 4 Morning on Des Cartier Trail. Afternoon snorkelling at Sugar Beach. Evening in Laborie, eating at [Mama Tilly's](#). Accom: [Balenbouche AirBnB](#)

- Day 5** Morning at [Grand Eden Estate](#). Drive north to Gros Islet. Accom: [Gros Islet AirBnB](#)
- Day 6** Morning at Grand Anse Trail upper section. Afternoon snorkelling at Smuggler's Cove. Evening at Maquis Estate. Accom: [Gros Islet AirBnB](#)
- Day 7** Morning at Grand Anse Trail lower section. Afternoon snorkelling at Smuggler's Cove. Evening at Gros Islet seafront. Accom: [Gros Islet AirBnB](#)
- Day 8** Morning at Piton Flores. Afternoon snorkelling at Pidgeon Island. Evening at Gros Islet seafront, eating at [Dukes Place](#). Accom: [Gros Islet AirBnB](#)
- Day 9** Morning flight St Lucia to Dominica. Drive west to Portsmouth. Accom: [Portsmouth AirBnB](#)
- Day 10** Morning Syndicate NR and Colihaut Valley. Portsmouth shopping early pm, late pm Syndicate NR. Accom: [Portsmouth AirBnB](#)
- Day 11** Morning Syndicate NR and Portsmouth. Afternoon snorkelling at Cabrits NP. Sunset drinks at [The Almond Deck](#), Toucari Bay, meal at [Madiba Beach Café](#). Accom: [Portsmouth AirBnB](#)
- Day 12** Early local birding then whale watching trip with [Anchorage](#), out of Portsmouth. Late afternoon Cabrits NP. Sunset drinks at [The Almond Deck](#), Toucari Bay. Accom: [Portsmouth AirBnB](#)
- Day 13** Morning Middleham Falls, midday Roseau with snack at [Starline Ital Kitchen](#), afternoon snorkelling at Champagne Reef. Sunset drinks at [The Almond Deck](#), Toucari Bay, meal at [Madiba Beach Café](#). Accom: [Portsmouth AirBnB](#)
- Day 14** Morning Syndicate NR. Afternoon packing. Sunset drinks at [The Almond Deck](#), Toucari Bay, meal at [Madiba Beach Café](#). Accom: [Portsmouth AirBnB](#)
- Day 15** Morning flight Dominica to St Lucia, via Barbados. Taxi from Castries to Vieux Fort. Evening flight to St Lucia to UK, arriving following morning.

St Lucia

Dominica



When

Our undoubted driver behind the timing of this trip was a desire to exchange a cold, damp, late winter in Western Europe for some Caribbean warmth and sunshine! The dry season in St Lucia is December to May, in Dominica it is quoted as February to April, though on the latter island rains can come more regularly throughout; in summary, the late winter months seem to be the prime time to visit.



Soufriere Bay, with a backdrop of Petit Peton, St Lucia

Cover Image: Ripaton Beach, Dominica

How

We took a [British Airways](#) long haul flight from Gatwick direct to St Lucia. It should be noted that international flights use Hewanorra International Airport (UVF), at Vieux Fort on the southernmost tip of the island. Inter-island flights use George F. L. Charles Airport (SLU), located at Castries in the northwest of the island. A taxi between the two airports takes just under ninety minutes, a very important factor to remember when planning logistics!

For our flight to Dominica we used [InterCaribbean Airways](#). This was actually a change from our original plan to use Air Antilles Express, who first changed their schedule and then cancelled the flight altogether. The changes may have been an unfortunate coincidence, but based on our experience I would recommend [InterCaribbean Airways](#), at least in terms of their reliability.

Under the flight heading, my final piece of advice is to book direct with the provider, not an intermediary. We had booked the original Air Antilles Express flights via Opodo. I have never had to deal with a cancellation via Opodo previously and, five months after my flight was cancelled, I am still chasing Opodo for a refund; avoid them like the plague!

On St Lucia we rented a Suzuki Vitara from [Sixt](#), for which I was asked to produce an International Driving Permit for the first time in my car rental career! Alternatively a local permit can be issued by the rental company, which appears marginally more costly than an IDP. The Suzuki was superb, in excellent condition and invaluable for the rough roads to Des Cartier, Grand Eden, Grand Anse and Marquis Estate. 698 km was covered in eight days on St Lucia.

On Dominica we rented a Toyota RAV4 from [Avis](#), with a UK driving license being accepted. The Toyota was quite a tired old vehicle, but did the job. In hindsight an SUV was not essential on Dominica, but cost a similar price to a saloon and made the potholes and speedbumps regularly negotiated on both islands much less problematic. 481 km was covered in six days on Dominica.

Navigation between sites was done by pre-downloaded [Google Maps](#). Although the distances covered are not great, the impact of the winding narrow roads means that journeys may take longer than expected; you cannot rush around either island. [Maps.me](#), again with pre-downloaded maps, proved to be totally invaluable on this trip and some sites would be all-but-impossible to find without this brilliant app. [Maps.me](#) illustrates the trail systems around Des Cartier, Grand Anse, Syndicate and Middleham with supreme accuracy, making it a key tool to success at these sites.

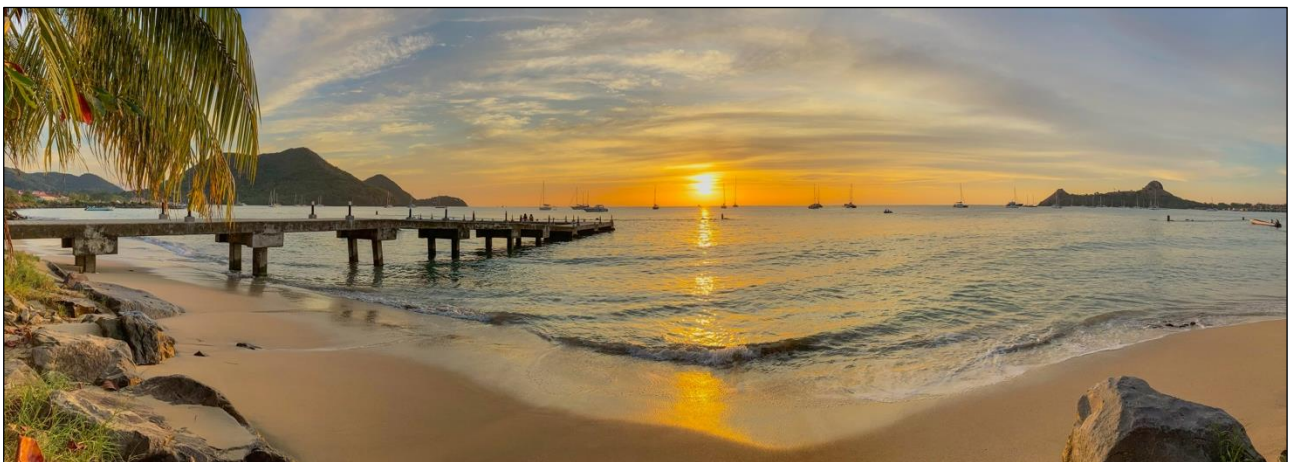
All accommodation was sourced via [AirBnB](#). Our [Balenbouche AirBnB](#) was superb and perfectly placed for all points south, whilst the [Gros Islet AirBnB](#) was equipped to an outstanding level and served all points north. On Dominica, where tourism is much less of a developed industry, we found much less choice available. Our [Portsmouth AirBnB](#) was well placed and perfectly adequate, but lacked some of the frills and locational appeal of its St Lucia equivalents. Eateries were sourced from a mixture of [TripAdvisor](#) and local advice.

Although covered in detail in later, I would like to highlight a couple of 'must do' trips in this section. Firstly, on St Lucia, the tour of the [Grand Eden Estate](#), led by Silvanus, was outstanding. As well as being a fantastic birding site, Silvanus's enthusiasm and knowledge of all-things relating to culture, natural history, agriculture, food and drink made this an experience that has something for everyone. Secondly, on Dominica, the [Anchorage Whale Watching](#) trip out of Portsmouth, led by Andrew and his crew, was simply the most enjoyable of many such cetacean trips I have undertaken over the years.

We often cooked for ourselves, taking advantage of the fresh local produce and especially the seafood, but standout eateries visited on our travels were [Mama Tilly's](#) at Laborie, southern St Lucia, [Dukes Place](#) at Gros Islet in northern St Lucia, and [Madiba Beach Café](#) at Portsmouth, Dominica. And if you only drink one cocktail in front of a Caribbean sunset, make sure it's at [The Almond Deck](#), Toucari Bay, Dominica. All of these venues were very local, rough-and-ready or even downright rustic, but that's what we prefer.

Published bird information was sourced almost exclusively from the invaluable [eBird](#) recording network, supplemented by several [CloudBirders](#) trip reports. No guiding was necessary on St Lucia, although the skills of Silvanus during our morning at the [Grand Eden Estate](#) would actually qualify for very proficient bird guiding should one wish to label him in this way. On Dominica I chose to book the services of Bertrand Baptiste for my first morning (email: drbirdy2@cwdom.dm, Tel: +1 767 2454768). In my experience Bertrand was not the most engaging guide I have used by a long way, but he is very well versed upon the latest whereabouts of Imperial Amazon and made the job of locating this very scarce bird relatively straightforward. He also gave me advice on finding Lesser Antilles Barn Owl and Forest Thrush, which would later prove invaluable.

Finally, in the face of global warming and the known impacts of air travel upon climate change, I would urge anyone undertaking journeys such as the one described in this report to consider carbon offsetting via the excellent scheme hosted by the [World Land Trust](#).

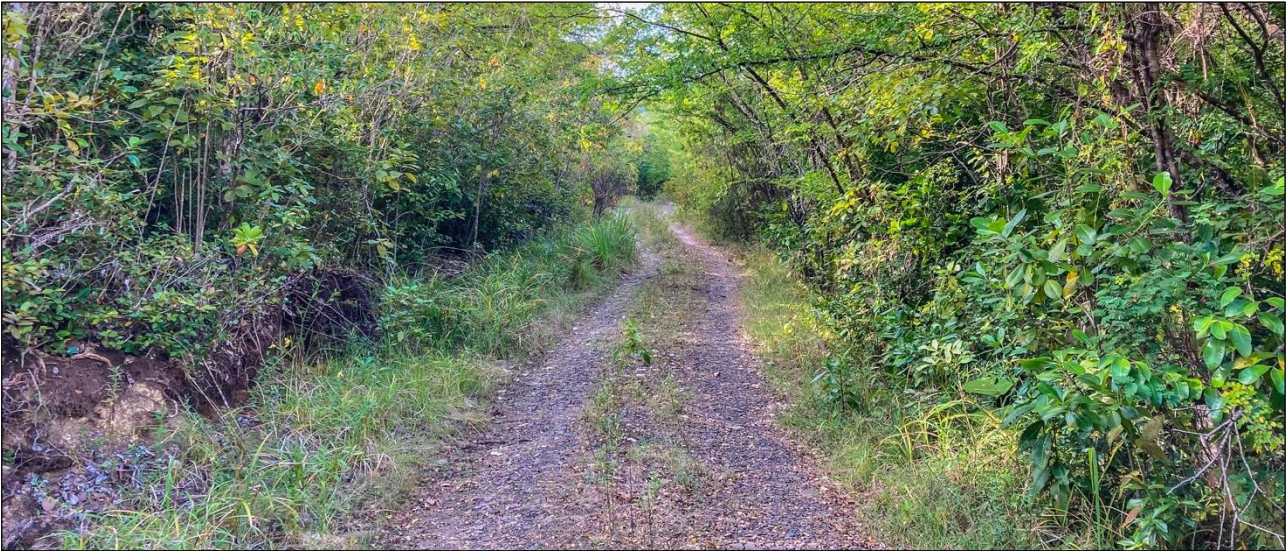


Sunset from Gros Islet Beach, St Lucia

Site Notes – St Lucia (best followed with Maps Dot Me)

Praslin Trail

This fabled St Lucia (White-breasted) Thrasher site commences with a nondescript track leading from the Micoud Highway, just north of Praslin village. The trailhead begins at 13.879736, -60.896967. From the roadside follow the gravel track northwards, away from the road. The jeep track peters out after just a few hundred metres, turning into a narrow forest trail. I only walked a short way beyond the end of the jeep track, seeing a pair of St Lucia (White-breasted) Thrashers at 13.881707, -60.897513.



Lowland dry forest habitat at the Praslin Trail

Des Cartier Trail

An excellent wet forest birding site, the Des Cartier Trail leads through the Quillesse Forest Reserve. To reach the site take the minor road northwest at 13.819481, -60.955074, just north of Blanchard village. At 13.831534, -60.966178 is a minor left turn onto a good gravel track, complete with a 'Des Cartier Trail' sign. Drive up the track and turn right at 13.831915, -60.969911, following a slightly overgrown jeep trail. Park beside the picnic tables and toilet at 13.836974, -60.975881.

The Des Cartier Trail leads north from here, though it would seem that it splits into two parallel routes; we took the one on the left (west). We followed the trail for c2.5 km to the viewpoint over a wide forested valley, which seems to be the key site for seeing St Lucia Amazon well in flight; they are very vocal and were heard/glimpsed all along the trail, but best viewed from this location. The viewpoint is located at 13.839424, -60.981453. We saw a pair of St Lucia Orioles and a group of Lesser Antillean Euphonias at 13.840378, -60.978865.

At the trailhead we were asked to pay a 10 USD per person fee by the Quillesse staff, who had appeared when we returned to the car. Apparently a permit should be obtained in advance, but the convoluted process of visiting a certain office block in Vieux Fort, which was explained by the staff, seems very complex and no on-line payment system is available as yet. As we had no problem paying on the day, this is probably the simplest and most convenient approach.

Belvedere/Bouton Junction/Morne Tabac Parrot Sanctuary

This wet forest birding area lies on the main northerly road climbing out of Soufriere, towards Canaries. Essentially it is all roadside birding and may be interrupted by passing vehicles to some degree. I parked in the layby next to the old, overgrown viewpoint shelter at 13.874625, -61.042763. From here I simply walked north and south along the main road, and also west along the minor road to Mahaut and the Bouton Primary School (hence Bouton Junction in some references); the latter cuts through rather degraded forest, but was

much less trafficked. There is also a small track to a couple of houses and a radio transmitter running opposite the Mahaut turn, but this runs largely through plantation.

A couple of kilometres south of the Bouton Junction is the [Morne Tabac Parrot Sanctuary](#), which we visited one evening. Park opposite the house and garden at 13.869571, -61.044336 and the owner, a wonderful old Rasta gentleman called Asa, will likely come out to greet you. The name of the establishment is deceptive as it is actually a small plantation farm which is run with a genuine focus on sustainability and protecting the remaining forest habitat. A fee of a few dollars is payable, but worth it for the views down to the Pitons alone, and St Lucia Amazon seems pretty much guaranteed as they return to roost. The experience was made all-the-more memorable by Asa's engaging and informed discussions on world politics, history and all things Rasta.



Sunset from Morne Tabac, overlooking Soufriere with Gros and Little Pitons on the skyline

Grand Eden Estate

This upcoming site was found quite by chance and is very much worthy of a visit. Head for the village of Fond St Jacques, then the small hamlet of Migny just to the northeast. Beyond Migny the road becomes single track, a mixture of concrete running strips and cobblestones; a high clearance vehicle is recommended. At 13.846043, -61.014894 take the left fork (the right leads to Enbas Saut Waterfalls), to the [Grand Eden Estate](#) entrance at 13.846998, -61.016032.

We were met at the entrance by the co-owner and guide Silvanus, best contacted by WhatsApp +1 758 729 4882. Although this is badged as a cultural/nature tour, which is superb in its own right, the site is a fantastic birding location and Silvanus's knowledge of the local bird calls and habits mean that all of the wet forest endemics can be seen with relative ease. Only St Lucia Amazon seems less reliable here, however Silvanus did stress that the full suite of currently recognised St Lucian endemics can regularly be seen, a fact supported by both my own experience and study of recent eBird records.

Grand Anse Trail

This excellent dry forest site in the northeast is accessed via the small village of Des Barras (called Desbarras on some maps). Driving into town from the west, you will come to a T junction with a bus stop opposite, painted with a turtle mural. Turn left (north) and follow the road, which soon becomes unpaved, to the cricket pitch. Park beside the cricket pitch at 13.997874, -60.907468. The track continues north from here,

then turns east, but begins to descend steeply and very soon becomes undriveable in all but a high clearance 4x4.

The first section of the track is broken by various blocks of plantation farm, but is still quite birdy, with St Lucia House Wren territories all along. The best area for Bridled Quail-dove starts at c2 km, where the trail begins to flatten off and the dry forest is unbroken; listen for birds anywhere after 14.000978, -60.903321. This area also seemed best for St Lucia Black Finch, though records suggest that this species and St Lucia Oriole can be found anywhere along the trail. I walked no further than 14.001874, -60.898001, which is only around half way to the beach.

Marquis Estate

Although there are many reports of St Lucia (Rufous) Nightjar from the Grand Anse Trail, the Maquis Estate seems to be the most reliable option for this species. Take the paved road to Boguis, continuing north on the good gravel track which commences at approximately 14.012955, -60.916503. Continue northeast for another couple of kilometres to the point where a farm track cuts right (south) and park at 14.027194, -60.909966.

Follow the farm track for a few hundred metres, first through plantation and then climbing towards the low, dry woodland cloaking the low hill. At 14.025389, -60.908109 take the track to the right, which cuts into the woodland and listen anywhere along the track. We heard three birds and finally saw one at 14.023679, -60.907931. Interestingly one of the calling birds was quite close to where the car was parked, when we returned, but the plantation habitat here is far from ideal.



The Marquis Estate, where rolling forested hills flank the valley bottom plantation lands

Piton Flore Trail

Providing good wet forest access, and also referred to as The Forestierre Trail in some accounts, this is essentially the loop trail running south east from the southern end of Forestierre village and skirting Piton Flore. There is a good car parking area at 13.969762, -60.952424, from where the trail leads in either direction. I walked clockwise along a well-maintained trail through some great forest, but it is worth noting that there are some significant stepped ascents/descents, depending upon which direction one takes. On my visit a vocal and quite showy group of St Lucia Amazons were feeding above a gully at 13.968528, -60.945959.

Site Notes – Dominica (best followed with Maps Dot Me)

Syndicate Nature Reserve

This single site contains all of the island's endemic bird species and is accessed via a well-signed turning off the main west coast road, just north of Dublanc, at 15.518756, -61.46912. Many birders will want to rush straight up to the Nature Trail to commence their parrot-quest, but there is some great roadside birding along the paved road which runs all the way to the visitors' centre, with the stretch around 15.52264, -61.458267 being particularly productive.

Continue uphill for several kilometres, through more open plantation agriculture, taking a signposted left turn at 15.513505, -61.422402. The Syndicate Visitors' Centre, with parking and toilets, is located at 15.524007, -61.420337. The Centre appears to be manned quite rarely, but if it is you will be asked to pay a fee. We already had a weekly National Park Pass when finally asked, on the third visit, which had been purchased at Cabrits NP. The pass covers Cabrits, Syndicate, Middleham Falls and several other sites, making it good value at 12 USD per person and is obviously supporting conservation too.

From behind the Visitor Centre a short loop trail begins, very well maintained and less than two kilometres in total length. Birding is good throughout, but the key sites are the three viewpoints overlooking the deep forested valley cut by the Picard River. This is where you will see the parrots, in particular Imperial Amazon, which rarely seems to be recorded anywhere else. At the time of our visit the Imperial Amazons were being seen exclusively from the viewpoint at 15.525821, -61.41707.



Outlook from the westernmost viewpoint, Syndicate Nature Trail, over the Picard Valley

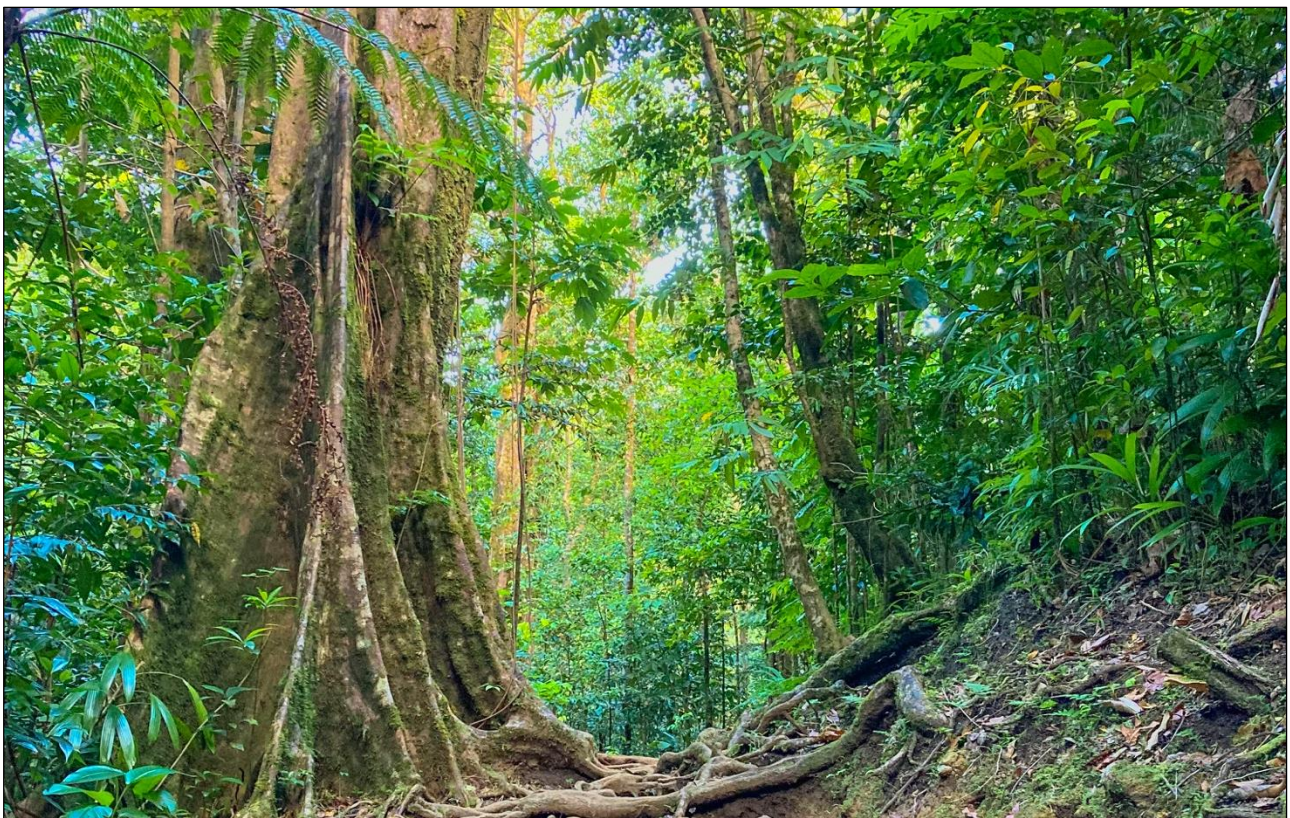
St John & St Lewis Roman Catholic Church, Portsmouth

This was a day roosting site for Lesser Antilles Barn Owl at the time of my trip, therefore one must visit during normal working hours when the admin staff will hopefully be on site. Located on Rodney Street, park on site at 15.5778, -61.456317 and enter the main church building. Just through the large front doors is an office on the left, occupied by the administration lady. I politely asked to view the owl and was taken to a large hall/annex behind and left (north) of the church, at 15.578031, -61.455952. The building is padlocked and the owl cannot be seen without entering, hence staff must be on site (I did try a recording from the dry river bed to the north, late one evening, but to no avail). A donation of 40 ECD was given to the church on departure, an amount suggested by Bertrand; please donate generously if visiting in order to keep up goodwill for the next birders.

Middleham Falls

An excellent all-round wet forest birding location and breathtakingly beautiful site in its own right, we visited this area specifically to track down Forest Thrush. Accessed via the road to Laudat village, inland of and high above Roseau, take the turn to the left (north) at 15.335648, -61.339362. Follow this road to its conclusion at the small parking area, in front of the covered picnic tables and toilet block, at 15.340111, -61.333308. Note that at the time of our visit substantial construction work on a new eco-lodge complex was playing havoc with access and making a huge mess of the road and surrounding forest.

From the car park take the signed Middleham Falls trailhead north, from where it climbs very steeply for around a kilometre, in a series of steps. The track levels off on a plateau at approximately 15.343957, -61.334242, from which point Bertrand advised is good Forest Thrush habitat and is where I found two separate territorial birds, at 15.344877, -61.334106 and 15.346842, -61.333835. At 15.347532, -61.334723 there is a fork in the track, with the left hand branch starting to immediately descend steeply towards the falls. The track becomes much more challenging from here and a decent level of fitness and agility is recommended if you plan to go further. If that is not an issue, the walk and views at the bottom are very highly recommended, with great birding opportunities all the way down. We walked no further along the main track than the junction for the falls.



The pristine wet-forest habitat of Middleham Falls

Daily Diary:**Saturday 4th March**

15.30 arrival at Hewanorra International Airport, in southernmost St Lucia, after an eight-and-a-half hour direct British Airways flight from Gatwick, UK. Straightforward customs clearance, simple ATM visit, and Sixt car rentals are very efficient in supplying a nearly-new Suzuki Vitara. Next we take a ten minute drive to the well-stocked Vieux Fort Massey supermarket for self-catering provisions, then a further fifteen minute drive west, along the winding coast road, to check into our wonderfully secluded [Balenbouche Airbnb](#) accommodation. Supper and an early night follow.

Sunday 5th March

05.00 alarm, then I make a forty minute drive east, largely following the coast and passing alternately through colourful villages and blocks of secondary scrub. My destination is a particularly intact block of dry coastal forest adjoining the Micoud Highway, just to the north of Praslin. A very rewarding two hours is spent on the short trail cutting into the low, dense woodland, rapidly getting a feel for the more common Lesser Antillean birds and a couple of St Lucian Endemics. A dapper pair of showy St Lucia (White-breasted) Thrashers take the podium spot amongst an impressive inaugural roll-call which includes St Lucia Black Finch, Grey Trembler, St Lucia Warbler, Lesser Antillean Saltator and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch; finding that the long-desired Trembler actually trembles is a true moment to savour!



St Lucia (White-breasted) Thrasher, Praslin Trail

Satnav and notes are then followed for another twenty minute drive, cutting inland and steeply climbing in elevation, to the beginning of the Des Cartier Trail, latterly on some rather rough roads. This is just a recce for now, and I soon realise that I could have driven for another two kilometres to the forest proper, however my hike through rapidly warming agricultural plantation delivers more new birds in the form of Purple-throated Carib and a lucky flyover St Lucia Amazon. Curiosity pacified, a forty-minute drive drops me back at Balenbouche, where Vic has filled her morning with an explorational run. A hearty brunch and some late morning relaxation follow.

Early afternoon sees us heading north west, on a fifty-minute drive to our inaugural snorkelling destination of the trip, Anse Chastenet. Our route gives us the first close-up views of the towering green pyramidal spires of Petit and Gros Pitons, the most well-known St Lucian landmarks. After passing through the charismatic town of Soufriere, we take the steep, winding and very rough track to Anse Chastenet, justifying the selection of a high-clearance SUV for the second time in the day.

Our trip to Anse Chastenet actually has dual purposes, as I hope to contact a local bird guide regarding Bridled Quail-dove possibilities, as well as enjoying some fish-watching. After some calling around by the helpful dive centre staff I get to speak to Meno, the guide who has helped other birders find the tricky dove at Anse Mamin in the past. It transpires that Meno now only has Sundays free from his full-time dive-centre role, by which date we will be relocated to the north of the island; future dove-chasers be warned!

The snorkelling is excellent however, with the public beach accessed via a private resort, a logistical quirk which we are to regularly encounter throughout our time away. Showered and changed, we head upslope for the final section of an action-packed first day, driving northwards and steeply ascending into wet forest habitat, to an area labelled as Belvedere on the map. [Morne Tabac Parrot Sanctuary](#) is our destination, actually a small plantation farm which is run with a genuine focus on sustainability and protecting the remaining forest habitat. The property owner, a very knowledgeable Rasta called Asa, is a warmly engaging gentleman, who entertains and enlightens us as the sun sinks behind a fantastic Peton vista far below. The birding is equally rewarding, with St Lucia Peewee, Warbler and Parrot all recorded, along with Lesser Antillean Swifts and Scaly-breasted Thrasher.

Final act of the day is a forty-minute drive back to Balenbouche for a home-cooked dinner and a relatively early night.

Monday 6th March

An early alarm and forty-minute drive back up to the Bouton Junction, Belvedere, starts my day, re-tracing the route taken on the previous evening. The weather has deteriorated, with intermittent showers, actually the only adverse Caribbean weather experienced until the day of our departure from Dominica. The next four hours spent walking the roadsides and occasionally sheltering from the rain produces a good selection of birds, but not the desired St Lucia Oriole, the one scarce endemic which invariably seems to cause visiting birders a few sleepless nights. The birding highlight list includes St Lucia Amazon, Warbler, Black Finch and Peewee, Ruddy Quail-dove, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch, Saltator and Flycatcher, Purple and Green-throated Caribs and the only Caribbean Martins of the whole trip.



Lesser Antillean Bullfinch, Bouton Junction

My time at the roadside also takes in a shout from a passing 4WD, "Come to the Grand Eden Estate if you want to see the endemic birds". Interesting. The journey back to Balenbouche includes a stop at a Soufriere bakery and a veg stall, to ensure that brunch is as fresh as possible. During my absence Vic has been out sketching and our reunion meal includes the frying of plantain, a culinary first for us!

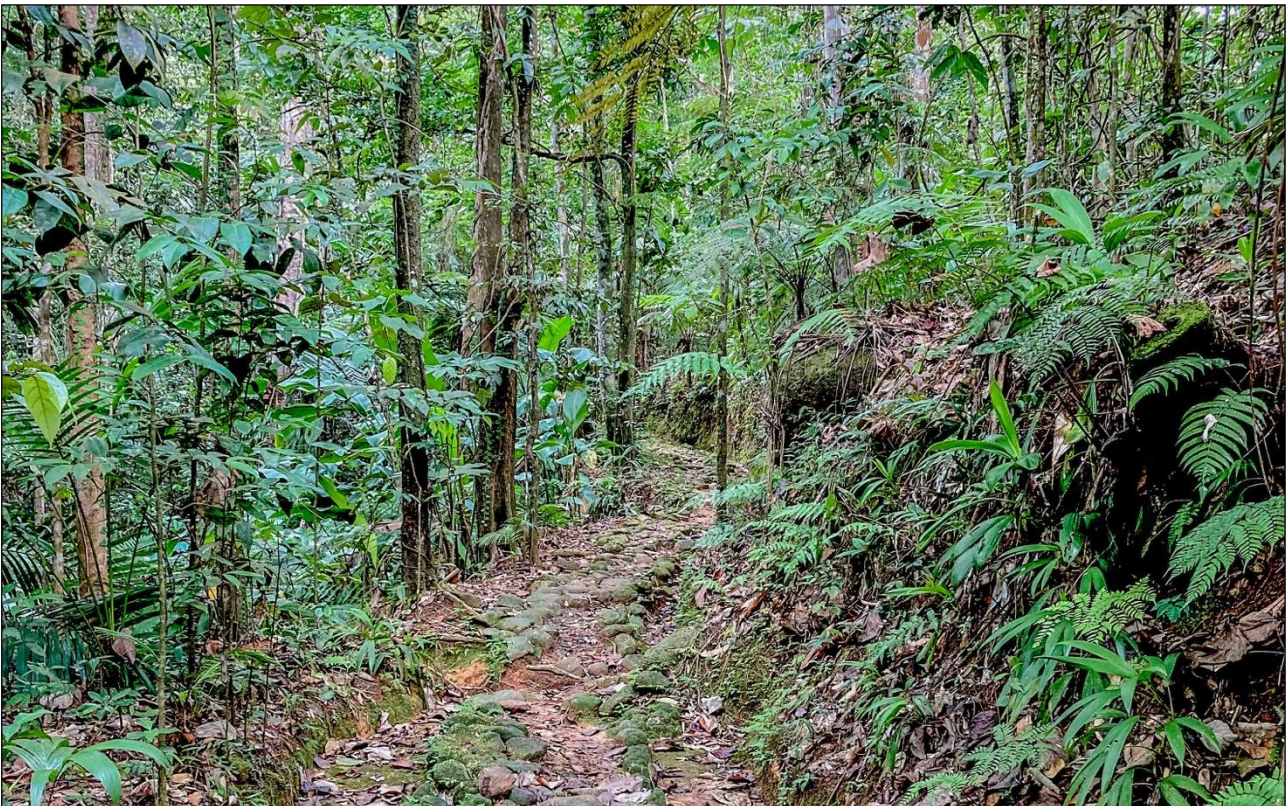
After some mid-day siesta-time it's back to Anse Chastenet, where we are now familiar with the locker location, reef access and shower facilities of this well-served snorkelling site. Following Mangrove Cuckoo, Scaly-breasted Thrasher and some Zenaida Dove photography in the resort's shaded car park, we spend some time walking the streets of Soufriere, which sports an interesting selection of architectural styles including some aesthetically quirky gems.

After returning to Balenbouche for a quick spruce-up, we drive east for just ten minutes to the charming little coastal village of Laborie. It's decidedly shabby and unkempt, but has a friendly atmosphere and a wonderful palm-fringed beach from which to watch the sun set behind bobbing fishing boats. After several Peton beers and glasses of rum punch, enjoyed with a friendly Canadian couple, we head for Mama Tilley's Bar, which is something of a local eating institution. Sadly we are not the only folk to have had the same idea, and as it's a tiny restaurant we decide to delay our dining for another night.

Back at our digs some home cuisine is quickly rustled-up and, more interestingly, I start my research of the [Grand Eden Estate](#), flagged by the passing motorist early in the day. eBird reveals that the site genuinely does have the credentials to back the birdy claim, TripAdvisor reinforces its credibility and I commence WhatsApp dialogue with Silvanus, with whom it transpires I made my chance encounter at the Bouton Junction.

Tuesday 7th March

Early start and on the road in gathering light, this time with Victoria in tow. A forty-minute drive delivers us to the Des Cartier Trail car park, this time driven in full, though it is apparent that anything less than a high-ish clearance SUV would struggle with the last Kilometre-or-so. For the next three hours we slowly walk the excellently maintained, relatively flat, forest trail. The huge trees, ferns, mosses, bromeliads, orchids and fungi which populate the damp hillsides are a constantly changing source of amazement and inspiration for Vic's sketchpad. And the birding is comparably superb!



Lush wet-forest habitat of the Des Cartier Trail

In the course of our c2.5 Km return walk to the 'Parrot Viewpoint' we notch up eleven St Lucia Amazons, whose raucous calls are constantly audible in and above the treetops. Mangrove Cuckoo, Rufous-throated

Solitaire, St Lucia Warbler and Peewee, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Scaly-breasted and Pearly-eyed Thrashers, Grey Tumbler, Purple-throated Carib, Caribbean Elaenia and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch are all recorded. From the viewpoint, with affords access to vistas over an incredible forested valley, we get our best flight views of St Lucia Amazon of the trip, but it is a couple of birds seen on the walk out which head the bill. No less than seven Lesser Antillean Euphonias are noted in the canopy, primarily around mistletoe, but the highlight are a spanking pair of St Lucia Orioles, watched feeding in the high boughs for a good five minutes. What a morning!

Back at the car park, one of the Quillesse Forest Reserve staff explain that a 10 USD per person fee is required, which we gladly pay, to support the protection of the wonderful wild place. Then we return for a well-earned brunch, consumed on our sunny balcony overlooking the Balenbouche gardens.

The afternoon agenda takes us northwest again, with today's snorkelling venue being the exclusive Sugar Beach. This is public beach access at another level, as we are required to park up then walk steeply down, through the immaculate grounds of the £1000/night resort. At the end of our hike is an incredibly picturesque beach, nestled between the towering green spikes of the Gros and Petit Petons. The snorkelling is excellent, and all absolutely free, though the five-star luxury surroundings make us feel very much out of our comfort zone!

Returning to base in good time, we spruce up and make our way back to Laborie, this time getting to [Mama Tilley's Bar](#) in plenty of time to select a table and chat to the great lady who founded the village's most famous eatery. The authentic local cuisine, prepared on a barbeque fashioned from half an oil drum, is absolutely scrumptious and bursting with Caribbean flavours. Dining over, and back at Balenbouche, we make the final arrangements for a morning rendezvous at the [Grand Eden Estate](#).



Laborie Beach at sunset

Wednesday 8th March

Quick breakfast then on the road for a forty-minute drive, first northwest and then cutting inland on progressively smaller roads. Beyond the foothill village of Migny the road becomes single track, at times very rough, until we reach the rustic sign announcing our arrival at the [Grand Eden Estate](#).

It's a beautiful spot, set on the border of some huge tracts of primary montane forest and a well-tended plantation, with superb views down to the Petons and Caribbean Sea beyond. The vistas also extend inland to a backdrop of St Lucia's highest peak, the 950m Mount Gimie. The smiling face of Silvanus appears at the allocated 07.00 for swift introductions and the start of a totally enthralling five-hour tour.

Our walk covers both forest and agricultural environments, in an engaging and enthusiastically delivered journey through cultural history, medicinal plants, the natural world and farming practices. Coconuts, guavas, grapefruit, raspberries and carrots are all freshly picked and consumed on the journey, which concludes with roasting our own cashews and sampling some antique spiced rum. It is amazing!

As for the birding, Silvanus really does know his stuff, in particular the calls. We see and photograph St Lucia Warbler, Oriole, Black Finch and Peewee, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch, Euphonia, Saltator and Flycatcher, Purple and Green-throated Caribs, Pearly-eyed and Scaly-breasted Thrashers, plus Grey Tumbler. Bidding fond farewells to Silvanus and his small team of organic farmers-cum-nature guides, we wish them well in their brilliant venture; Victoria and I agree that our time at the [Grand Eden Estate](#) is amongst our favourite experiences of the trip and we would recommend all that follow us should consider giving them their support too.



Grey Tumbler, Lesser Antillean Euphonia, St Lucia Oriole and St Lucia Warbler, Grand Eden Estate

Returning to Balenbouche it's time for a hearty brunch, packing of bags and another warm farewell, this time to our magnificent host, Gloria. It's time to head north, following the eastern route which takes us winding up the coastline, past Praslin and the attractive bay-side town of Dennery. From here the road ascends, winding its way through forested hills, before dropping down to the populous northwest coast.

It is quite a shock to be confronted by sprawling conurbations, tourist hotels, cruise ships and traffic jams, after our time in the tranquil south! We follow the traffic queues to our new digs, via a quick grocery restock, then check into our fantastically equipped [Gros Islet AirBnB](#) as the sun is setting (Gros Islet is pronounced 'Grozelay' by the locals). It's time for Bounty rum, Peton beers and a relaxing evening meal, after a big day of travel by St Lucian standards!

Thursday 9th March

It's always exciting to find oneself in a new area, with new habitat to explore, and I'm out early for the forty-minute drive southeast, back over the green central divide and then descending to the dry coastal forest in the northeast corner of the island. My destination is the hamlet of Des Barras and, in particular, the track beyond which leads to the Grand Anse Beach.

Parking beside the cricket pitch and heading north on the steeply descending track, it is immediately apparent just how birdy this site is; it is also apparent that it is far too rough to attempt in any way other than on foot. The dry forest is interspersed with blocks of cultivation, but birds abound. St Lucia's distinctive *mesoleucus* race of House Wren, a likely future split, is one of the first birds heard and proves to be common here. Over the next three hours this great site gives up St Lucia Warbler and Peewee, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Bullfinch and Saltator, Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Grey Trembler and Mangrove Cuckoo.



St Lucia House Wren and St Lucia Peewee, Grand Anse Trail

On my descent I bump into a [St Lucia Birding](#) tour guide who tells me that my remaining target of Bridled Quail-dove is best searched for on the lower reaches of the track, and therefore my morning ends with time spent in this area. I am pleased to locate two calling Bridled Quail-doves, but time and luck run out on these typically challenging birds; one for another day!

After a sweaty ascent and interesting chat with a couple of friendly local charcoal-burners, the satnav is set for the Gros Islet fishmongers. Retracing my route to the bustling village, it is apparent that Google Maps are

out-of-date and there's not a fishmonger in sight! At this point a random plea for help to a chatty group of local ladies leads to a chance encounter which will define our trip. Kathy, or Enoe to her friends, jumps into the car and guides me to a fantastic fish market hidden on Gros Islet's backstreets. I have a great experience picking out my tuna and watching the fishmonger skilfully prepare it, but also bond with a most incredibly warm and open lady who has lived a life which leaves me humbled and in awe of her resolve; we part company vowing to meet up later and to introduce her to Victoria.

Back at the digs Vic shows me the morning fruits of her sketchbook run, as a hearty brunch is prepared, to be consumed on a veranda overlooking a distant yacht-dotted turquoise ocean. It's also apparent that our suburban garden is quite a birding site in its own right, attracting Green-throated Carib, Grey Trembler, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and Saltator, Spectacled Thrush, Scaly-breasted Thrasher and Mangrove Cuckoo during our stay.



Scaly-breasted Thrasher and Mangrove Cuckoo, Gros Islet

The afternoon's snorkelling venue is Smugglers Cove, just a ten minute drive away, another public beach accessed via a plush private resort. And it turns out to be our favourite snorkelling venue of the whole trip, sporting a variety of fish unsurpassed at any other site. The stand-out highlight of the afternoon is our sighting of a large Caribbean Octopus, studied at length, as it moves over reef and sand to give a mesmerising display of colour metamorphosis, swapping hues to blend perfectly with its background.

Post snorkelling, we rapidly swap gear to make a forty-minute evening drive, back over the central divide, to the low forest of the Marquis Estate. It's a scenic route, with roads slowly deteriorating all the way to our birding site, but it is driveable all the way. Tonight is allocated to St Lucia Nightjar, currently an isolated race of Rufous Nightjar, but a likely future split from its mainland Neotropical counterparts.

Walking away from the road and ascending the low hills gives a great view over the cultivated valley and surrounding wooded hillocks, in the shallow evening sunlight. St Lucia Peewee, Warbler and House Wren, Green-throated Carib and Scaly-breasted Thrasher entertain us as the light fails, then the waiting begins. It's already worryingly dark before relief comes in the form of a distant 'chuck-will's-widow' type call, but it really takes some effort and patience to coax our calling bird into making a couple of brief spotlight appearances.

Bird secured, we beat a retreat to Gros Islet as fast as the dark, winding roads will permit, for a relaxing evening in our rather luxurious chalet, where the freshly procured tuna, served with fried plantain, rice and fresh tomatoes, is simply magnificent (though I say so myself!).

Friday 10th March

An extra early start sees me back at the Grand Anse Trailhead before the sun has cleared the horizon. This is the morning of the quail-dove assault and the first two Kilometres are completed in head-down route march mode, to the point where yesterday's elusive bird is still uttering its distinctive low-pitched cooing from the same area of dense forest. And once again it fails to be drawn to the speaker and once again six-foot of ungainly birder crashing through dense dry scrub sends it packing, before I am remotely close.

Moving on down the track, another couple of calling birds are located and the cat-and-mouse saga begins again. It takes thirty-minutes of dove-stealth before a flutter of wings delivers a heavy bird to the forest floor, for a brief walk, then an ascent to an open branch unfeasibly close to my forest-floor seat. The gorgeous Bridled Quail-dove is in the bag, a huge St Lucian bonus bird! My slow walk back to the car notches up St Lucia House Wren, Warbler, Peewee and Black Finch, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and Saltator, Mangrove Cuckoo, Grey Trembler and Scaly-breasted Thrasher, then it's breakfast time!



Bridled Quail-dove, St Lucia Black Finch and Lesser Antillean Saltator, Grand Anse Trail

After our late morning Gros Islet brunch we head back to Smugglers Cove for another great afternoon of fish-gazing, then return to the digs in time for a brush-up and a wander down to the seafront for sunset drinks in a very special setting. Calling round for Enoe, we find we have sadly missed her on this occasion, but we'll be back. Friday nights in Gros Islet have something of a wild party reputation, and the streets are lined with pop-up bars, food stalls and loud reggae music pumped into the warm air. After a drink or two we elect to dodge the crowds and dine on the remainder of our fine tuna, back at the digs, and catch an early night.

Saturday 11th March

My choice of birthday birding location is the rarely visited Piton Flore area, just a thirty minute drive from Gros Islet and a welcome return to the cool verdant upland forests after two days on sweaty lowland trails. I have little information on the site but am pleased to find a decent car parking area at the end of a radio mast access trail. From here a very well maintained loop nature trail walk begins, taking a route of steep descents and climbs, through some magnificent forest.

The calls of St Lucia Amazon are a constant audio backdrop, whilst at lower level both Caribs and both Thrashers entertain, along with a brief treetop sighting of my only Short-tailed Swifts seen on the trip. Mid-way around the loop I hit lucky with the most prolonged and close-range views of St Lucia Amazon I've had, even securing some very welcome perched photos from the group of eight-or-more birds.



A view to the lowlands from the Piton Flore Trail and St Lucia Amazon seen at this site

Returning for a Gros Islet birthday brunch, the snorkelling location of Pidgeon Island is chosen for the afternoon, a site just a stone's-throw from our digs. As a national park an entry fee is required, but the snorkelling is good and there are even showers on site.

After a late afternoon brush-up it's time to stroll again to the Gros Islet seafront for drinks in the setting sun and to meet a very special lady. This time we successfully rendezvous with Enoe, to spend the whole evening in fascinating conversation with one of the most resourceful and resilient people we have ever met, recounting the truly humbling story of her upbringing, move to Canada and a new life in a totally foreign

land. Along the way we are introduced to friends and family, and consume a wonderful barbequed fish supper at [Dukes Place](#). All too soon it's time to bid our very fond farewells, but we vow to keep in touch.

Sunday 12th March

It's time to change islands! Our St Lucia experience has exceeded all expectations in every way, but now it's time to pack bags, take the thirty minute drive to Castries Airport and hand back the Suzuki. Check-in at the tiny airport is seamless and we head over the road to the extended 'departure lounge', which takes the form of an open-air café overlooking the Caribbean Sea!

At 12.15 our thirty-seat InterCaribbean turboprop flight lifts off, for the forty-five minute flight to Dominica. All goes smoothly, and the decidedly tatty old aircraft delivers us to the tiny Douglas-Charles Airport and a correspondingly tatty Avis Toyota Rav 4. Following the northern route around to the west coast, we find roads to be even more narrow and winding than on St Lucia, as we weave our way through a rather lush and certainly more humid environment.

A roadside rounders game and ice cream stop delay our journey, before we check in late-afternoon at our [Portsmouth AirBnB](#) home for the next six nights. The apartment is definitely several levels below the 'star rating' of our digs in St Lucia, however we soon discover that Dominica lacks the level of development and tourism-influencing of the former island; not always a bad thing?

The goods range in the local supermarkets is found to be similarly restricted, when we venture back out to stock up, but we do drop upon a wonderful beach-side fishmonger and have the pleasure of witnessing fish being bucketed ashore from the fishing boat. We pick our own tuna, which is prepared on an open slab, certainly the freshest fish we will ever procure!

The greatest asset of our [Portsmouth AirBnB](#) is the large balcony which overlooks a fantastic ocean vista, stretching between Secret Bay and Cabritts NP. Here we drink rum punch and Carib beers as the frigatebirds soar past a sinking sun, planning out the next few days, before the freshest tuna supper ever served.

Monday 13th March

Today I have a prearranged 07.00 rendezvous with Bertrand Baptiste, widely acknowledged ornithological guru of Dominica. Leaving his car in Portsmouth I chauffeur Bertrand thirty minutes south to Syndicate Nature Reserve, a protected plot of wet montane forest accessed via a steep uphill drive through a mosaic of plantation crops.



Dominica House Wren, Syndicate Nature Reserve

In a little over two hours on the trails, though mainly at the 'Parrot Valley' overlook, we notch up Plumbeous Warbler, Blue-headed Hummingbird, Green and Purple-throated Caribs, Brown Trembler, Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Dominica House Wren, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and Swift, all in a wonderful primary forest environment. The biggest 'anxiety bird' in Dominica is Imperial Amazon, locally known as the Sisserou, and although the smaller endemic parrot, Red-necked Amazon (or Jaco), is not uncommon, seeing a Sisserou is certainly more of a challenge.

We share the overlook with Gabriel Naudet, a young French birder and Guadalupe-based conservation professional, who is on site for a similar *Amazona* vigil. After an hour we start to hear the distinctive metallic trumpeting calls of the Sisserou echoing up the valley, but it takes a further hour before a pair of the dark, hulking parrots are finally watched flying over the greenery, with characteristically slow wingbeats.



Imperial Amazon (image courtesy of Gabriel Naudet), Red-necked Amazon and Blue-headed Hummingbird, Syndicate Nature Reserve

Seeing what is potentially the toughest bird of the whole trip comes as a huge relief, as this very rare species sometimes takes days to track down. Cutting our losses we head for the Colihaut Valley, where a final hour in the riverine forest produces Plumbeous Warbler, Brown Thrasher, Dominica House Wren, Red-legged Thrush and the locally scarce Lesser Antillean Peewee, the latter being a very different bird from its St Lucian relative.

Back in Portsmouth, Bertrand is thanked for both his help on the morning and advice for the coming days, then brunch is taken with Vic, on our balcony. Tales of a sketchbook run are exchanged with parrot accounts,

then we head into town to procure fresh produce from the local market and an injection of ECD from the ATM.

Vic is keen to visit the cool upland forest, so after a mid-afternoon siesta we both return to Syndicate NR to walk the nature trail loop and marvel at the forest vistas stretching right up to Morne Diablotins. At 1447m this is the highest peak in Dominica, second highest in the Lesser Antilles chain and, according to Bertrand, the real stronghold of the Sisserou. The forest is quiet, with just Jacos and Dominica House Wrens preforming, though a Sisserou is again heard calling from deep in the valley.

Descending with the sun, we enjoy sunset celebratory drinks on our balcony and the second instalment of our Portsmouth tuna, this time with fresh veg accompaniment.

Tuesday 14th March

Keen to get to grips with Dominican birds on my own, and secure some better images, my first port of call is an early visit to some good mixed habitat on the Syndicate access road. A birdy hour-and-a-half on the roadside produces Brown Trembler, Plumbeous Warbler, Dominica House Wren, Red-legged Thrush, Red-necked Amazon, Green and Purple-throated Caribs, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and Saltator.

Next it's back up to the Syndicate Nature Trail, for many more Jacos, Blue-headed Hummingbird, Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Dominica House Wren, Plumbeous Warbler and Lesser Antillean Swift. It's great to also have a proper catch-up with fellow birder Gabriel, still on site in his Sisserou photographic quest.



Plumbeous Warbler, Brown Trembler and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch, Syndicate Nature Reserve

Making my way back to Portsmouth I have just bread and an owl on my shopping list. In order of personal priority, the first stop is at the imposing St John & St Lewis Roman Catholic Church, where I follow instructions conveyed the previous day by Bertrand. Respectfully knocking on the door of the church administration lady, I ask if it's possible to "see the owl". She eyes me up sternly then takes me into the main church for an audience with the minister. The minister gives me a much warmer welcome and asks, "Is this your first time?". I assume he means in Dominica, but can't resist saying, "Yes Father, I need the owl!".

After a cheerful exchange the lady ushers me around the back and to a huge function building, which she unlocks. I'm told that "the owl is somewhere in the roof" and am asked to snap the padlock when I've finished. Venturing inside, I am bowled over to see an absolutely gorgeous Lesser Antilles Barn-owl gazing down at me from an exposed roof beam. What a bonus!

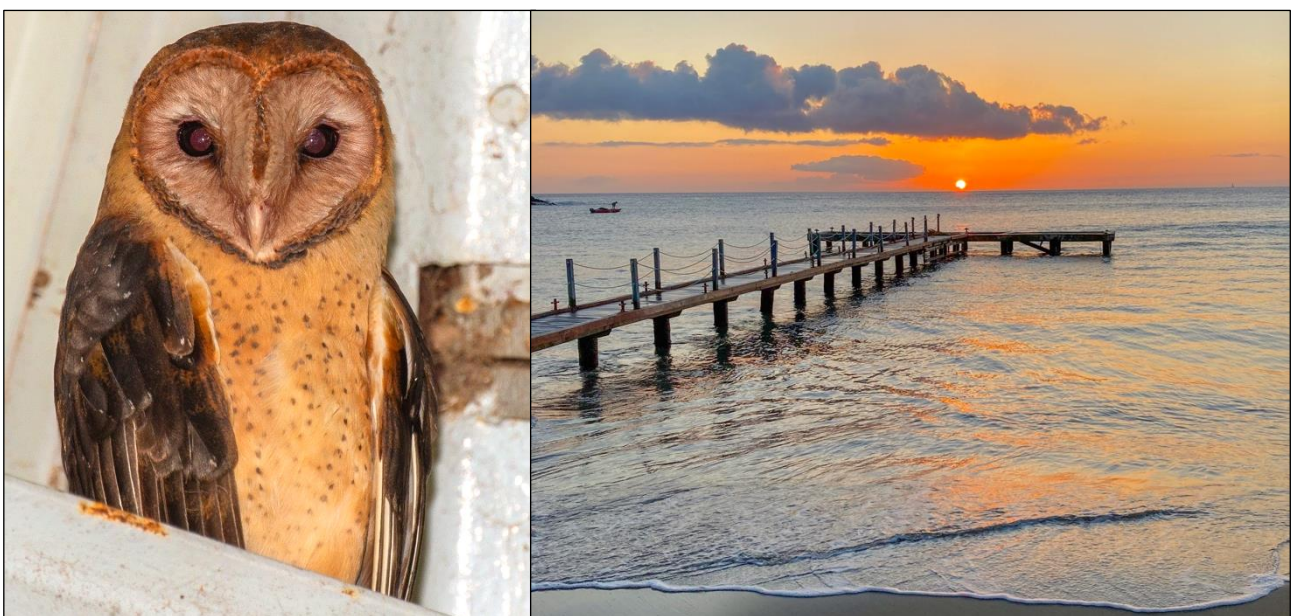
I make a donation to the church, as suggested by Bertrand, then set off in search of the local bakery. It takes a couple of circuits of the backstreets to locate the tiny wooden building and I smile to myself as I think that it is actually easier to find a very rare owl than a loaf of fresh bread in Portsmouth!

After a substantial brunch back at the digs with Vic, featuring the freshest of bread and pastries, a short siesta is in order before our first Dominican snorkelling experience. It's just a ten minute drive to Cabrits NP, where we eventually figure out the access formalities and pay a 12 USD p/p fee for a weekly National Park Pass; this is great value as it also covers Syndicate NR and Middleham Falls.

The large boulders on the beachfront make access treacherous in the particularly heavy swell, but once immersed it's another great snorkelling location in which to lose one's self for a few hours amongst the colourful fish and coral formations. With the sun sinking towards the western horizon we head north, for just a few Kilometres, to Toucari Bay.

Even this short drive removes us from the more touristy northern suburbs of Portsmouth, to an idyllic bay, where we chance on [The Almond Deck](#); the friendly local clientele found here and the superb cocktails make it our hostelry-of-choice for the remainder of the trip. Watching the Caribbean sun set with a glass of cold Carib and a Malibu Sunrise really has to be one of the defining memories of this trip.

Travelling back to the south, we are soon at the locally recommended [Madiba Beach Café](#). Here the barbequed seafood, served beside beach and a bay full of gently swaying yacht masthead lights, is the perfect conclusion to another very memorable day.



Lesser Antilles Barn-owl, Portsmouth and the sunset view from The Almond Deck, Toucari Bay

Wednesday 15th March

Today we go to sea! A quick bout of early birding around Portsmouth and the Indian River bags a few decent images of some more common species, then it's back to the digs for a light breakfast. At 09.00 we report to the Indian River quay, from where we are ferried out to the impressive 'Passion' catamaran, run by [Anchorage Whale Watching](#).

Andrew and his crew are knowledgeable, professional and engaging, but also very personable and relaxed. Combined with such a well-equipped vessel this makes for the perfect combination and, already somewhat seasoned to whale watching trips, we both agree that this is our best ever. For the next four-and-a-half hours we are treated to intimate views of an exhilarating super-pod of 200+ Pantropical Spotted Dolphins and the serene sight of three Sperm Whales, surfacing between deep feeding dives. Birds are typically scant in the tropical seas, but c50 Brown Boobies and a singleton of their Red-footed cousin, plus a distant White-tailed Tropicbird, add variety to the expected Magnificent Frigatebird encounters.



Pantropical Spotted Dolphins, Sperm Whales, Red-footed (front-left) and Brown Boobies

To locate our Sperm Whale goal we have to travel south almost to Mahaut, meaning that it's early afternoon before we return to the Portsmouth quayside. After a quick shopping stop in town we return to the digs for a coconut scone, our new-found bakery gem, cuppa and siesta.

Late pm we make the short drive to Cabritts NP, to explore Fort Shirley and its dry forest surrounds on foot. The restored buildings and views across the bay are impressive, but birding is very slow, with just Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and Mangrove Warbler being of note. As the Caribbean sun begins to dip, the obvious destination is Toucari Bay and [The Almond Deck](#), where we toast the end of another unforgettable Caribbean day.

All that remains is a home-cooked supper and an early night, in preparation for a pre-dawn start the following day.

Thursday 16th March

An 04.15 alarm and hasty breakfast precedes a one-and-a-quarter hour drive south, mostly on winding coast roads, to deliver us to the Middleham Falls trail head, and access to the verdant montane forest above Roseau. Leaving Vic to catch up on a little lost sleep, I set off on the steep climb as the new day starts to gather, soon building up quite a panting sweat.

Reaching the top of the escarpment and catching my breath, it is immediately apparent that this is superb forest habitat and very birdy. Red-necked Parrots call overhead almost constantly and Dominican House Wrens are rarely silent along the trail, with a supporting cast of Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Peewee and Bullfinch, Brown Trembler and Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Blue-headed Hummingbird and Purple-throated Carib. The number one target here is the *dominicensis* race of Forest Thrush, a very scarce bird on Dominica these days. Bertrand has advised to concentrate on the damp gullies and listen for the contact calls, tactics which I now deploy on the twisting trail.

I'm on my second return walk along the trail when a distinctive high-pitched 'chack' is heard, a little playback offered and an intricately-marked thrush alights on a mossy bough, deep in a shady recess. It melts away as quickly as it came, but I have my prize. With a spring in my step and keen to rendezvous with Vic, I'm nearing the top of escarpment slope when the same call is heard. Playback is again tendered, and this time an absolutely gorgeous Forest Thrush alights on an open branch above my head!



Forest Thrush, Middleham Falls

An easy contender for 'bird-of-the-trip' and the final piece of my twin-island birding jigsaw, the timing is impeccable as Vic appears on the track before the thrush has departed from view. Keen to see the fabled Middleham Falls, we take the signposted fork and commence a steep and occasionally precarious descent towards the sound of a falling cascade of water. Amid tantalising glimpses of the lush green gully far below,

we are entertained by more Red-necked Amazons and echoing chimes of Rufous-throated Solitaires, two of which are coaxed to the trackside

Reaching the very foot of Middleham Falls we find ourselves in a lush green bowl, whose sides and base are crowded with a carpet of mosses, ferns and epiphytes, thriving under a constant shower of fine mist. It is a truly wonderful place, well worthy of the effort to reach, and enjoyed all by ourselves. And it soon becomes apparent that an early start is required to savour such an experience, as we smugly pass over a hundred noisy and ill-equipped cruise boat day-trippers coming in the other direction on our return hike!



Rufous-throated Solitaire and Lesser Antillean Pewee, Middleham Falls

Back at the car we enjoy a packed picnic breakfast, then park up in a shady spot to catch up on a little sleep. Descending to the bustling island capital of Roseau, the sight of a moored cruise ship, towering multiple stories above the low-rise buildings greets us; it's quite a revelation, we've never seen a boat on anything like this scale ever before! A very kind local gentleman directs us to a parking place on the busy streets and we take a wander, soaking in the unique architecture of this vibrant town. [Starline Ital Café](#) is a great chance find, giving a respite from the melee, and suitably refreshed we set off further south.

Champagne Reef is today's snorkelling destination, just fifteen minutes drive south of the town, where a fee of 2 USD per person is gladly forfeited in aid of turtle conservation. It's a lovely snorkelling site, provided a longer swim out isn't an issue, with some great fish sightings and the best coral formations yet. Uniquely, it also hosts some fascinating gaseous upwellings and it is from these glistening streams of bubbles that the site takes its name.

With a little more daylight on our hands than we anticipated we decide to head all the way back to Portsmouth, and arrive just in time for sunset cocktails at [The Almond Deck](#), followed by another fine meal at [Madiba Beach Café](#); heaven!



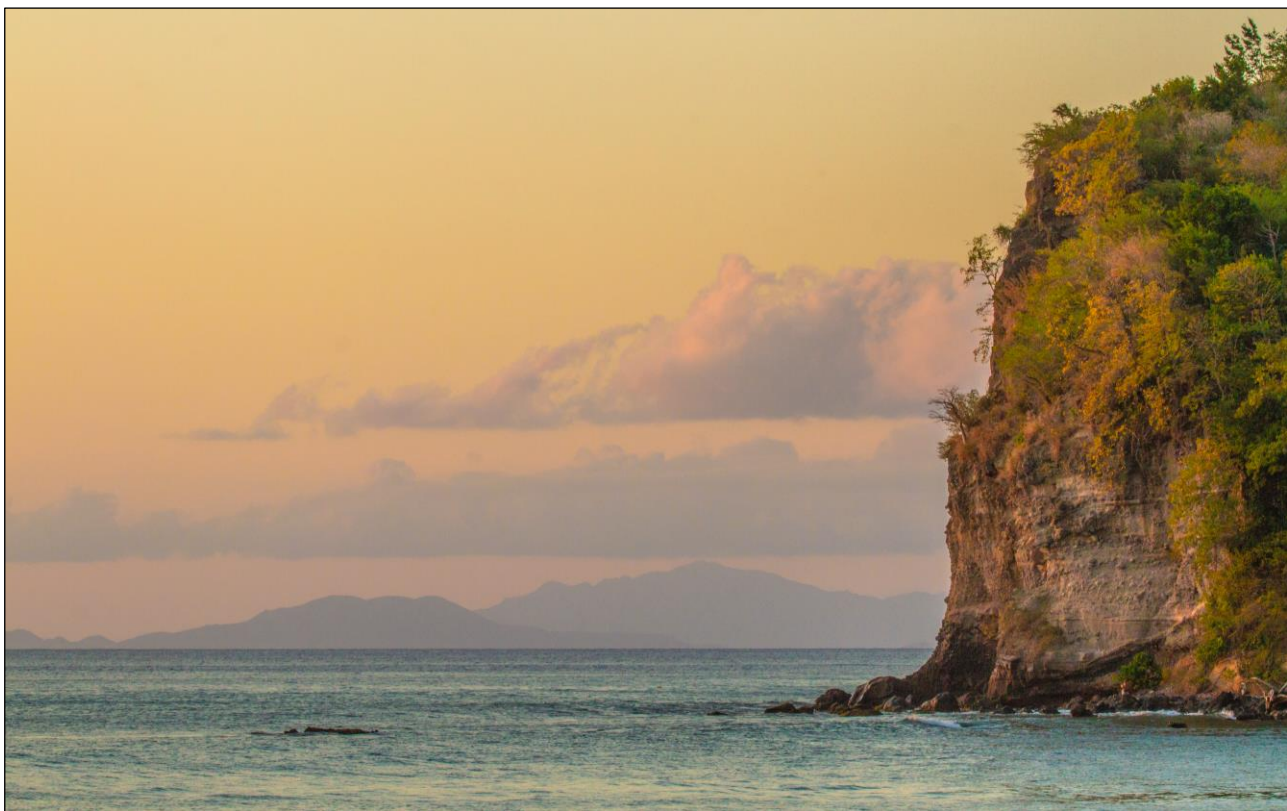
Roseau, sitting in the shadow of a visiting cruise ship

Friday 17th March

As my birding mission is well and truly accomplished we make something of a sedate start to the day, beginning with a short post-breakfast drive back towards Syndicate. Walking some of the lower stretches of the access road, through more open forest, the bird list includes Mangrove Cuckoo, Dominican House Wren, Plumbeous Warbler, Lesser Antillean Saltator, Purple-throated Carib and Red-necked Amazon.

The next three hours are spent wandering the Syndicate Trail and also along a stretch of the Waitukubuli Trail, marvelling at plants, invertebrates, birds and landscapes. What is destined to be the final notebook bird list of the trip includes another round of similar birds, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and Swift, Red-necked Amazon, Plumbeous Warbler, Dominica House Wren, Scaly-breasted Thrasher and Blue-headed Hummingbird.

Returning to Portsmouth, we top up on required cash, petrol and some choice items from the bakery, before heading back to the digs for an afternoon of relaxation and bag packing. Our sad farewell evening in Dominica then follows the now tried-and-trusted formula of cocktails at the [The Almond Deck](#) for sundown, followed by our final Caribbean seafood cuisine at [Madiba Beach Café](#). This beautiful island really has done us proud.



The view north from The Almond Deck, Toucari Bay, with the island of Martinique on the horizon

Saturday 18th March

Our early check-out from the apartment is in torrential rain, the first of the entire trip! The steady drive back to Douglas-Charles Airport takes around an hour, still through intermittent downpours, with a surprise sighting of four Red-necked Amazons over the lowland plantations en route. Depositing our hire car and joining the check-in queue, we are rather concerned to be informed of a two-hour flight delay, which will effectively mean we can't make our connecting flight in Barbados.

A rather fraught hour ensues, as the InterCaribbean staff endeavour to 'find alternatives'; if we miss the Barbados connection we'll most likely miss our BA flight home! As it transpires our turboprop aircraft leaves the Dominican tarmac around an hour later than scheduled and, in the fullness of time, we find out that it's actually the same aircraft that carries us onwards to St Lucia; clearly communication is not a strongpoint in the InterCaribbean camp!

Barbados from the air looks flat, dry and overpopulated, very much in contrast to our last two island destinations. Following the 'connecting flights' sign through the small terminal area of Grantley Adams Airport, I spot a small dull bird grubbing around in the landscaped area between the two sets of departure gates. Surely not? I can't be this lucky? But I really am blessed, and there hops a Barbados Bullfinch, the only endemic on the island and the only bird I see there! It's a good candidate for the dullest bird in the West Indies, with no sexual dimorphism and both sexes resembling a female Lesser Antillean Bullfinch, but it's my twentieth new bird of this amazing trip and it means I need never return to this beach-tourism honeypot!



Barbados Bullfinch, Grantley Adams Airport

We have a grand total of forty-five minutes on the ground in Barbados, before being whisked back to Castries. At the airport we are greeted by the smiling face of Dunstan, driver of our pre-booked taxi back down to Hewanorra International Airport on the southern tip of St Lucia. Dunstan is an instantly likeable fellow who entertains us throughout our journey south, which includes a stop for food, loos and a scenic photo or two, where we grab a takeaway fish bun from [Nikki's Bar and Grill](#), at Dennyery.

All that remains are warm farewells to Dunstan, check-in and an overnight flight back to Gatwick in the UK. It really has been an immensely enjoyable and hugely successful trip, to one of the most picturesque and welcoming corners of our planet. We have made some great friends along the way, often via chance encounters, and the birding has been phenomenal. As we cruise back, high over the Atlantic, I am already plotting which West Indian islands will be next on the agenda.

Notes on Key Target Species and Local Specialities in St Lucia (SLE = St Lucia endemic, LAE = Lesser Antillean, CE = Caribbean endemic, as per IOC taxonomy at time of writing):

St Lucia (Rufous) Nightjar *Antrostomus rufus otiosus*

One seen and two others heard at the Marquis Estate on the evening of 09/03/23, in dry forest at 14.023679, -60.907931 (see above for site directions). Note that no calls were heard until 16.48, by which time it was quite dark. It took some effort to coax a bird into giving a couple of brief spotlight views and photography proved impossible.

The *otiosus* race of Rufous Nightjar is geographically remote from its South American congeners and a very likely future split (the closest population is on Trinidad). A bird of dry lowland forests, it is essentially restricted to the northeast of St Lucia. Although it can be seen at Grand Anse, I focussed on the Marquis Estate as better information was available regarding this site and access seemed more straightforward for nightbirding.

Lesser Antillean Swift LAE *Chaetura martinica*

Only seen above the upland forest in the Belvedere/Bouton Junction/Morne Tabac Parrot Sanctuary area, with c10 seen on both 05 and 06/03/23. A Lesser Antillean endemic, with a distribution ranging from Guadalupe in the north down to St Vincent in the south.

Short-tailed Swift *Chaetura brachyura praevelox*

Five above the Piton Flores Trail on 11/03/23 were the only record. Described as an uncommon resident on St Lucia, this widespread Neotropical species is represented by a subspecies endemic to the Lesser Antilles and Tobago.

Green-throated Carib LAE *Eulampis holosericeus holosericeus*

Seen in both wet and dry forest habitat, but generally at lower altitudes than Purple-throated Carib, including secondary growth and even gardens. Noted on seven days of the trip, but only in ones or twos, at a variety of sites including Praslin, Bouton Junction, Grand Eden Estate, Marquis Estate, Gros Islet and Piton Flore. Essentially a Lesser Antillean endemic, this species ranges from Puerto Rico in the north to Grenada in the south.

Purple-throated Carib LAE *Eulampis jugularis*

Restricted to wet forest habitat, this species was quite abundant at some sites, with up to twenty per day noted. Seen on five days of the trip, at Des Cartier Trail, Bouton Junction, Grand Eden and Piton Flore. This species is a true Lesser Antillean endemic, ranging from Anguilla in the north to St Vincent in the south.

Antillean Crested Hummingbird LAE *Orthorhyncus cristatus exilis*

Seen daily in all habitats, with up to fifty birds recorded on some days, when attracted to flowering trees in large numbers. Like Green-throated Carib, almost a Lesser Antillean endemic, though venturing into Puerto Rico in the northwest, then running south to Grenada.

Mangrove Cuckoo *Coccyzus minor*

Surprisingly widespread and heard on six days of the trip, in both wet and dry forest habitat. The best views were in our Gros Islet AirBnB grounds!

Scaly-naped Pigeon CE *Patagioenas squamosa*

Ubiquitous in any forest habitat and seen daily, usually in small numbers and with a maximum daily count of twenty. Caribbean endemic.

Ruddy Quail-Dove *Geotrygon montana martinica*

Single seen at Bouton Junction on 06/03/23.

Bridled Quail-Dove LAE *Geotrygon mystacea*

A only recorded on the Grand Anse Trail, with two heard on 09/03/23. On 10/03/23 one was seen very well at 14.000506, -60.901136 and two other birds seen in flight were likely this species. Two others heard on this date. The best area for the dove is on the lower reaches of the trail, from a point c2km beyond the cricket pitch; listen for birds anywhere after 14.000978, -60.903321.

The Grand Anse Trail is probably the best site for this dry forest species (see above for site access details), but others have used a guide to see it at Anse Mamin. The guide in question, named Meno, now has almost full time employment meaning that it is much more tricky to book his services. His number is +1 758 7129674.

Essentially a Lesser Antillean endemic, ranging as far northwest as Isla de Vieques, off Puerto Rico, south to St Lucia. Very sparsely distributed throughout its range, Bridled Quail-Dove is certainly easier to find on some of the more northerly Lesser Antillean islands. With some determined effort in the right area of Grand Anse, however, I suspect that this impressive bird should be quite reliable.

Zenaida Dove CE *Zenaida aurita aurita*

A common species, especially in the lowlands, with up to thirty per day noted. This attractive dove is effectively a Caribbean endemic, just spilling into the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico.



Zenaida Dove, Anse Chastanet and Broad-winged Hawk, Balenbouche

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens rothschildi*

A regular sight anywhere along the coast, this species never fails for impress. Maximum of eighteen seen in a single day.

Brown Booby *Sula dactylatra dactylatra*

Singles seen offshore on three dates.

Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus rivierei*

The resident race was seen most days in all habitats, maximum count of six in one day.

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius caribaeorum*

The representative race was recorded on three days.

Merlin *Falco columbarius columbarius*

Wintering birds recorded at Praslin and Bouton Junction, both very brief flyovers.

St. Lucia Amazon E *Amazona versicolor*

One seen and several more heard at Des Cartier on 05/03/23 and two seen and c10 heard at Morne Tabac on the evening of the same day. Three seen and several more heard at Bouton Junction on 06/03/23. Eleven seen and more heard on the Des Cartier Trail on 07/03/23. Heard only at Grand Eden on 08/03/23. Nine seen at Piton Flore on 11/03/23. The Des Cartier Trail viewpoint gave the best flight observations but the only worthwhile images were secured at Piton Flore. St Lucian endemic.

Caribbean Elaenia CE *Elaenia martinica martinica*

Seen and more often heard daily in good numbers. Maximum count was fifteen in one day. Caribbean endemic, with a rather odd distribution essentially covering the Lesser Antilles and Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico.

St Lucia (Lesser Antillean) Pewee LAE *Contopus latirostris latirostris*

Pair seen at Morne Tabac on 05/03/23, pair at Bouton Junction on 06/03/23, pair on Des Cartier Trail on 07/03/23, one at Grand Eden on 08/03/23, one at Grand Anse Trail and pair at Marquis Estate on 09/03/23, and one on Grand Anse Trail on 10/03/23. Found in both wet and dry forest but always in small numbers.

A Lesser Antillean endemic in current taxonomy, ranging from Puerto Rico to St Lucia. Going forward, the likely convention seems to be a three-way split into Puerto Rican Pewee, Lesser Antillean Pewee (occurring on Guadalupe, Dominica and Martinique) and St Lucia Peewee. The attractive warm cinnamon underparts of the nominate race certainly set St Lucian birds apart from other races.

Grey Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis vorax*

Common throughout the island.

Lesser Antillean Flycatcher LAE *Myiarchus oberi sanctaeluciae*

Surprisingly sparse in its distribution, the endemic race of this species was recorded as follows. One at Bouton Junction on 06/03/23, one on Des Cartier Trail on 07/03/23, pair at Grand Eden on 08/03/23, three at Grand Anse Trail on 09/03/23. A true Lesser Antillean endemic, ranging from Barbuda in the north to St Lucia in the south. Endemic race on St Lucia.



Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Grand Eden and St Lucia Peewee, Grand Anse Trail

Black-whiskered Vireo *Vireo altiloquus barbadensis*

Seen and more often heard daily with up to ten per day being recorded.

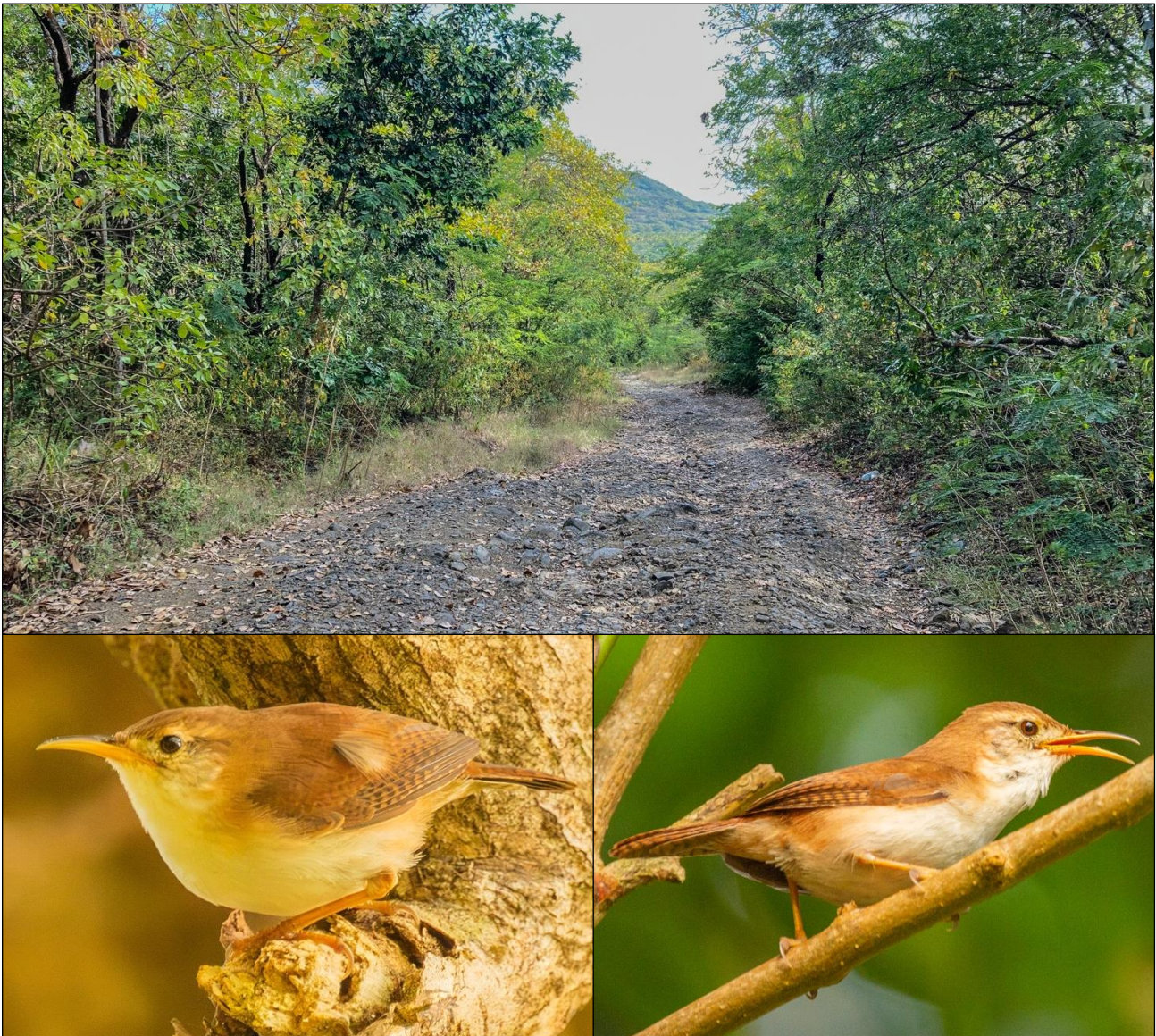
Caribbean Martin CE *Progne dominicensis*

Just one record of three birds, high over Bouton Junction on 06/03/23. I had hoped to see more of these attractive hirundines, though the early date of the visit meant that these summer migrants were only just returning to their breeding grounds. Caribbean endemic.

St Lucia House Wren *Troglodytes aedon mesoleucus*

The very distinctive endemic race is a dry forest bird on St Lucia and although occasional birds are recorded elsewhere, the northeast of the island is *the* place to see it. c10 heard and several seen on the Grand Anse Trail on 09/03/23 and one seen at the Marquis Estate the same day. c6 heard on the Grand Anse Trail on 10/03/23.

House Wren taxonomy is clearly complex and evolving, with the four extant races occurring in the Lesser Antilles being forest birds which vary considerably in appearance across islands. Dominica, St Lucia, St Vincent and Grenada now support endemic races, with those formerly on Guadalupe and Martinique considered extinct. It has been variously suggested that they are best grouped together as Antillean House Wren, or as island endemic species in their own right.



Dry forest habitat alongside the Grand Anse Trail, key site for St Lucia House Wren

Tropical Mockingbird *Mimus gilvus antillarum*

Either seen or heard on most days of the trip, but only in small numbers and often around human habitation.

St Lucia (White-breasted) Thrasher LAE *Ramphocinclus brachyurus sanctaeluciae*

One pair seen on the Praslin Trail on 05/03/23 was the only record of the trip. This dry forest species is occasionally recorded at other sites, such as Grand Anse, however the Praslin Trail is the site where most birders add it to their lists (see above for site access details).

A Lesser Antillean endemic, restricted to St Lucia and Martinique, with sparse and local distributions on both islands. Each island supports its own endemic race and a split has been suggested, into St Lucia Thrasher and White-breasted Thrasher, the latter becoming a Martinique endemic.

Scaly-breasted Thrasher LAE *Allenia fusca schwartzi*

Found to be something of a widespread and numerous species on the island, in both wet and dry habitat, it was seen or heard on every visit to suitable forest, with up to twelve in a day being noted. A Lesser Antillean endemic, ranging for Anguilla in the north to Grenada in the south. Endemic race on St Lucia.

Pearly-eyed Thrasher CE *Margarops fuscatus klinikowskii*

Only three birds recorded, all singles, at the Des Cartier Trail on 07/03/23, Grand Eden on 08/03/23 and Piton Flore on 11/03/23. Caribbean endemic, ranging through the Bahamas, easternmost Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and through the Lesser Antillean chain as far south as St Lucia. Endemic race.

Grey Trembler LAE *Cinlocerthia gutturalis macrorhyncha*

Seen and heard daily in small numbers in all forest types, even venturing into our Gros Islet AirBnB grounds. Maximum four in one day, this charismatic bird was one of my personal trip highlights. A range-restricted Lesser Antillean endemic, found only on St Lucia and Martinique, with each island hosting an endemic race.



Grey Trembler and Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Grand Eden

Rufous-throated Solitaire CE *Myadestes genibarbis sanctaeluciae*

A wet forest species on St Lucia, only recorded at the Des Cartier Trail, where three singing birds were present. This attractive and wonderfully vocal species is a Caribbean endemic with an interesting range. Six subspecies are spread between Jamaica, Hispaniola, Dominica, Martinique, St Lucia and St Vincent. Endemic race on St Lucia.

Spectacled Thrush *Turdus nudigenis nudigenis*

Small numbers seen and heard daily.

(Lesser) Antillean Euphonia CE *Chlorophonia musica flavifrons*

Seven birds seen in the canopy above the Des Cartier Trail on 07/03/23, in two groups of three plus a single; the first group were feeding on mistletoe, as the field guide suggests! Pair at Grand Eden on 08/03/22, giving unapparelled views as they fed at low level.

Currently a Caribbean endemic in IOC taxonomy, lumped as Antillean Euphonia along with the races occurring on Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. Some authorities have already recognised a three-way split, as Hispaniolan Euphonia, Puerto Rican Euphonia and Lesser Antillean Euphonia. The latter species/race occurs though the Lesser Antillean chain from Anguilla to Grenada, but is an uncommon bird throughout its range; St Lucia actually offers one of the best chances of catching up with this very smart forest bird.

St. Lucia Oriole SLE *Icterus laudabilis*

Pair seen above the Des Cartier trail on 07/03/23, at 13.840378, -60.978865, feeding high on sub-canopy boughs. Male seen plus female heard at Grand Eden on 08/03/23, this bird feeding much lower down in secondary habitat bordering the plantation farm.

Although St Lucia Oriole occurs in both wet and dry forest types, and ranges over the entire island, it is certainly one of those unnerving 'everywhere and nowhere' birds. Pre-trip research indicated that it is seen at a different location in every trip account read, with just a couple of birds generally being noted on any one trip. I would suggest that the [Grand Eden Estate](#), where Silvanus is extremely knowledgeable of its subtle calls and unobtrusive habits, is currently the most reliable place at which to search. St Lucian endemic.

Carib Grackle *Quiscalus lugubris inflexirostris*

Recorded daily in large numbers, with a maximum of forty in a day noted.

St. Lucia Warbler SLE *Setophaga delicata*

Seen and heard in every area of forest visited, both wet and dry, with up to twenty noted daily. A gorgeous little bird and often very showy, some responding well to 'pishing'. St Lucian endemic.



St Lucia Warbler, Grand Eden

Lesser Antillean Saltator LAE *Saltator albicollis albicollis*

A handful recorded daily in both wet and dry forest habitats, more often heard than seen, though could be quite approachable. A Lesser Antillean endemic, restricted to the islands of Guadalupe, Dominica, Martinique and St Lucia.

Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola martinicana*

Ubiquitous.

Lesser Antillean Bullfinch LAE *Loxigilla noctis sclateri*

Commonly encountered in all but the most degraded and urban habitats, with twenty per day regularly recorded. Lesser Antillean endemic, ranging through the island chain from the British Virgin Islands in the northwest to Grenada in the south. Endemic race on St Lucia.

St. Lucia Black Finch SLE *Melanospiza richardsoni*

Only recorded on four days of the trip, a male at Praslin Trail 05/03/23, a female at Bouton Junction on 06/03/23, another female at Grand Eden on 08/03/23, and a pair plus a lone female on Grand Anse Trail on 10/03/23. This shy and retiring St Lucian endemic species spends much of its time in dense thickets and is certainly very sparsely distributed throughout its wide range; don't expect to see more than a handful.

Notes on Key Target Species and Local Specialities in Dominica (DE = St Lucia endemic, LAE = Lesser Antillean endemic, CE = Caribbean endemic, as per IOC taxonomy at time of writing):

Lesser Antillean Swift LAE *Chaetura martinica*

Seen on every visit to Syndicate, on 13, 14 and 17/03/23, with a maximum daily total of twenty-five birds. A Lesser Antillean endemic, with a distribution ranging from Guadalupe in the north down to St Vincent in the south.



Lesser Antillean Swift, Green-throated Carib (bottom left) and Purple-throated Carib, Syndicate NR

Green-throated Carib LAE *Eulampis holosericeus holosericeus*

Seen in both wet and dry forest habitat, but generally at lower altitudes than Purple-throated Carib, often in secondary growth and even gardens. Noted on four days of the trip, but only in ones or twos, at a variety of sites including Syndicate Nature Trail and Access Road, plus our Portsmouth Airbnb garden. Essentially a Lesser Antillean endemic, this species ranges from Puerto Rico in the north to Grenada in the south.

Purple-throated Carib LAE *Eulampis jugularis*

Restricted to wet forest habitat, this species was quite abundant at some sites, with up to ten per day noted. Seen on four days of the trip, at Syndicate Nature Trail and Access Road, plus Middleham Falls. This species is a true Lesser Antillean endemic, ranging from Anguilla in the north to St Vincent in the south.

Blue-headed Hummingbird LAE *Riccordia bicolor*

Restricted to wet upland forest, this species was recorded as follows. Two males at Sydicate on 13/03/23 and a male plus a female at the same site on 14/03/23. A female at Middleham Falls on 16/03/23 and another male at Syndicate on 17/03/23. Most often seen in dense dark forest at low level, it habituates favoured flowering shrubs. This localised Lesser Antillean endemic is found only on Dominica and Martinique.

Antillean Crested Hummingbird LAE *Orthorhyncus cristatus exilis*

Seen daily in all habitats, with up to twenty birds recorded on some days, when attracted to flowering trees in large numbers. Like Green-throated Carib, almost a Lesser Antillean endemic, though venturing into Puerto Rico in the north, then running south to Grenada.

Mangrove Cuckoo *Coccyzus minor*

Heard on a couple of occasions at Syndicate, one seen.

Scaly-naped Pigeon CE *Patagioenas squamosa*

Ubiquitous and seen daily at forested sites, usually in small numbers and with a maximum daily count of thirty. Caribbean endemic.

Zenaida Dove CE *Zenaida aurita aurita*

An abundant species, especially in the lowlands, with up to ten per day noted. This attractive dove is effectively a Caribbean endemic, just spilling into the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico.

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens rothschildi*

A regular sight anywhere along the coast, this species never fails to impress. Maximum fifty seen in a single day, on the whale-watching trip.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula sula*

Single brown-phase adult seen on the whale-watching trip on 15/03/23.

Brown Booby *Sula dactylatra dactylatra*

c40 seen on the whale-watching trip on 15/03/23.

Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus rivierei*

The resident race was seen every day in all habitats, maximum count of ten in one day.

Lesser Antilles (American/Ashy-faced) Barn-owl *Tyto furcata nigrescens (E)*

One seen at a day roost at St John & St Lewis Roman Catholic Church, Portsmouth, on 14/03/23 (see above for site access details). It can only be assumed that this species is much more widespread than the scant eBird records on Dominica suggest.

Placed as a race of Ashy-faced Owl *Tyto glaucops* by Kirwan et.al., and under American Barn Owl by the IOC. Agreement comes at subspecies level, with the *nigrescens* race being endemic to Dominica. The *insularis* race is found on St Vincent and the Grenadines, plus Grenada. Taking some time to track down this *Tyto* is a very worthwhile exercise as, aside from taxonomic insurance, it's a beautiful bird.

Ringed Kingfisher *Megaceryle torquata stictipennis*

Recorded on four days of the trip, at various riverine and coastal sites; best views were above the river right next to the airport terminal building!

Red-necked Amazon DE *Amazona arausiaca*

Eleven seen at Syndicate on the morning of 13/03/23, mainly from the lookout over the Picard River on the nature trail at 15.525821, -61.41707 (see above for site access details). Three more recorded in the evening of the same day at the same site. Ten recorded at Syndicate on the morning of 14/03/23. Twelve noted at Middleham Falls on the morning of 16/03/23, primarily on the descent to the falls. Ten plus seen at Syndicate on the morning of 17/03/23 and four seen over the lowland plantations in the north east of the island en route back to the airport, early on 18/03/23.

A straightforward bird to see at either Syndicate or Middleham Falls, and likely other good forested sites too, much in the same vein as its close relative, the St Lucia Amazon. Dominican endemic.



Red-necked Amazon, Syndicate NR and Ringed Kingfisher, Douglas Charles Airport

Imperial Amazon DE *Amazona imperialis*

A pair seen at 09.40 on 13/03/23, at Syndicate Nature Reserve, from the lookout over the Picard River on the nature trail at 15.525821, -61.41707 (see above for site access details). The birds had commenced calling around an hour beforehand and were eventually seen well in flight along the valley, heading from northwest to southeast. Also heard to call on the evening of the same day, at the same location.

It seems that Imperial Amazon is the only challenging bird to locate on the island. I hired Bertrand Baptiste for a morning, and his up-to-date knowledge of its current whereabouts and best locations from which to look for this very rare bird undoubtedly added greatly to my relatively rapid success.

Caribbean Elaenia CE *Elaenia martinica martinica*

Seen and, more often, heard daily in good numbers. Maximum count was ten in one day. Caribbean endemic, with a rather odd distribution essentially covering the Lesser Antilles and Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico.

Lesser Antillean Pewee LAE *Contopus latirostris brunneicapillus*

A single in the Colihaut Valley at 15.492782, -61.450802, on 13/03/23, and another single at Middleham Falls on 16/03/23. This species/race appears to be more of a wet forest specialist in Dominica, and although the Colihaut Valley bird was at lower level it frequented a shady damp area adjacent to a permanent stream. Very different in appearance from the cinnamon-bellied birds recorded in St Lucia.

A Lesser Antillean endemic in current taxonomy, ranging from Puerto Rico to St Lucia. Going forward, the likely convention seems to be a three-way split into Puerto Rican Pewee, Lesser Antillean Pewee (occurring on Guadalupe, Dominica and Martinique) and St Lucia Peewee.

Grey Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis vorax*

Common throughout the island.

Lesser Antillean Flycatcher LAE *Myiarchus oberi oberi*

Just a single record of one at Middleham Falls on 16/03/23. A true Lesser Antillean endemic, ranging from Barbuda in the north to St Lucia in the south.

Black-whiskered Vireo *Vireo altiloquus barbadensis*

Seen and, more often, heard daily.

Dominica House Wren *Troglodytes aedon rufescens (ER)*

A numerous bird by voice at all forest sites visited, with up to twelve per day recorded. Very different in appearance from the birds on St Lucia, with dark brown underparts as opposed to creamy white, and also much more liberal in terms of its habitat preferences.

House Wren taxonomy is clearly complex and evolving, with the four extant races occurring in the Lesser Antilles being forest birds which vary considerably in appearance across islands. Dominica, St Lucia, St Vincent and Grenada now support endemic races, with those formerly on Guadalupe and Martinique considered extinct. It has been variously suggested that they are best grouped together as Antillean House Wren, or as island endemic species in their own right.

Tropical Mockingbird *Mimus gilvus antillarum*

Either seen or heard on most days of the trip, but only in small numbers and often around human habitation.

Scaly-breasted Thrasher LAE *Allenia fusca fusca*

A widespread and numerous species on the island, in both wet and dry habitat, it was seen or heard on every visit to suitable forest, with up to eight in a day being noted. A Lesser Antillean endemic, ranging from Anguilla in the north to Grenada in the south.

Pearly-eyed Thrasher CE *Margarops fuscatus densirostris*

This species appears to be more of an urban resident in Dominica, with three seen around the Portsmouth suburbs over 13 and 15/03/22. Caribbean endemic, ranging through the Bahamas, easternmost Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and through the Lesser Antillean chain as far as St Lucia.

Brown Trembler LAE *Cinlocerthia ruficauda ruficauda*

Seen or heard on every visit to Syndicate and also at Middleham Falls, but with no more than three noted in one day. A Lesser Antillean endemic, ranging from St Kitts and Nevis in the northwest to St Vincent and the Grenadines in the south. Its range omits Martinique and St Lucia, which are occupied by Grey Trembler, formerly a subspecies of Brown Trembler.

Rufous-throated Solitaire CE *Myadestes genibarbis dominicanus*

Two seen and several others heard at Middleham Falls on 16/03/23. This attractive and wonderfully vocal species is a Caribbean endemic with an interesting range. Six subspecies are spread between Jamaica, Hispaniola, Dominica, Martinique, St Lucia and St Vincent. Endemic race on Dominica.

Red-legged Thrush CE *Turdus plumbeus albiventris*

Recorded at the Colihaut Valley, Syndicate and Middleham Falls, with just a handful of sightings in total. This striking Caribbean endemic thrush has an interesting and patchy distribution, with the pale-bellied Dominican endemic race being particularly disjunct from all of the others. Kirwan et. al. actually splits the

birds inhabiting Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and Dominica as a species, Eastern Red-legged Thrush, from Western Red-legged Thrush in Cuba and Northern Red-legged Thrush on the Bahamas. More conventional IOC taxonomy recognises just a single species.



Pearly-eyed Thrasher, Portsmouth and Red-legged Thrush, Colihaut Valley

Forest Thrush LAE *Turdus lherminieri dominicensis*

A contender for the title of scarcest and also most attractive species on the island, I saw two separate territorial birds at Middleham Falls in the early morning of 16/03/22. Site access details are set out above, but to reiterate, the section of the Middleham Falls trail between the top of the initial steep climb and the fork which leads to the falls themselves is the key area. The track levels off on a plateau at approximately 15.343957, -61.334242, after which there is some great forest habitat and several appealing damp gullies. I found two separate territorial birds, at 15.344877, -61.334106 and 15.346842, -61.333835. Endemic race.

I heard no song, but the presence of both birds was given away by the distinctive high-pitched 'chack' contact call. Both responded to playback, but in very different ways. The first hopped onto a low bough, in the dark depths of the forest, in the typical charismatic manner of a rare forest dweller. On the other hand, the second bird flew onto an open branch, right about the track, and called back at me! One of the scarcest Lesser Antillean endemics, it is found locally on the islands of Monserrat, Guadalupe, Dominica and St Lucia, with an endemic subspecies on each; very few recent St Lucian records.

Spectacled Thrush *Turdus nudigenis nudigenis*

Small numbers seen and heard most days.

Carib Grackle *Quiscalus lugubris guadeloupensis*

Regularly encountered around habitation, with a maximum of ten in a day noted.

Plumbeous Warbler LAE *Setophaga plumbea*

Quite a numerous inhabitant of forest habitat, seen at all suitably wooded sites visited, but not quite in the same proportions as St Lucia Warbler. Recorded at Colihaut Valley, Syndicate and Middleham Falls, on 14, 15, 16 and 17/03/23. Plumbeous Warbler tended to be much more comfortable in deep shade than its St Lucian counterpart, invariably feeding deeper within undergrowth and rarely venturing into open, sunlit,

situations; the comparable standard of images taken reflects this trait! A range-restricted Lesser Antillean endemic, found only on Dominica and Guadalupe.



Forest Thrush, two different birds, two very different experiences and views, Middleham Falls; Plumbeous Warbler, Syndicate NR

Mangrove Warbler *Setophaga petechia melanoptera*

Only recorded at Cabritts NP on 15/03/23, possibly overlooked elsewhere though little suitable habitat visited on entire trip.

Lesser Antillean Saltator *Saltator albicollis guadelupensis*

Seen or heard on three of our days on the island, usually in drier forest habitat; the Syndicate access road was the best site for this species, of the limited number visited. A Lesser Antillean endemic, restricted to the islands of Guadalupe, Dominica, Martinique and St Lucia.

Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola bartholemica*

Ubiquitous.

Lesser Antillean Bullfinch LAE *Loxigilla noctis dominicana*

Commonly encountered in all but the most degraded and urban habitats, with ten per day regularly recorded. Lesser Antillean endemic, ranging through the island chain from the British Virgin Islands in the northwest to Grenada in the south.

Notes on Key Target Species and Local Specialities in Barbados (BE = Barbados endemic, as per IOC taxonomy at time of writing):

Carib (Barbados) Grackle *Quiscalus lugubris fortirostris*

A single bird seen within the airport terminal landscaped grounds on 18/03/23. This race together with the one occurring on St Vincent show very little sexual dimorphism, and is mooted as a potential future species, Barbados Grackle. Endemic subspecies.

Barbados Bullfinch BE *Loxigilla barbadensis*

A single bird seen within the airport terminal landscaped grounds on 18/03/23. This fortunate encounter must rank as one of my greatest ever strikes of good birding fortune, considering that we had approximately forty-five minutes on the ground on Barbados and never left the terminal building! The bird was recorded on a patch of bare ground within the compound which links the two sets of passenger gates. Barbados Bullfinch is noted to occur in heavily urbanised areas, therefore scanning of the airport environs during transit periods is highly recommended and can clearly pay dividends. Barbados endemic species.



Barbados Grackle and Barbados Bullfinch, Grantley Adams Airport

Mammal Species Recorded on St Lucia and Dominica:

Small Indian Mongoose *Herpestes auropunctatus*

Several of these highly destructive introduced carnivores were noted during our travels around St Lucia.

Red-rumped Agouti *Daysprocta leporina*

An introduced species, one was seen in Dominica at the roadside in the north of the island, en route to the airport, on 18/03/23.

Common Opossum (Manicou) *Didelphis marsupialis*

One seen, in Dominica, on the road before first light on the journey to Middleham Falls on 16/03/22.

Pantropical Spotted Dolphin *Stenella attenuata*

A 'superpod' of c200 of these energetic cetaceans were watched at very close range on our whale trip out of Portsmouth, Dominica, on 15/03/23.

Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus*

Three individuals, two adults and a large calf, were savoured at close range on our whale trip out of Portsmouth, Dominica, on 15/03/23.

Reptile Species Recorded on St Lucia and Dominica

St Lucia Anole *Anolis luciae*

One photographed at our Belenbouche AirBnB accommodation.

Dominica Anole *Anolis oculatus*

Several seen and two photographed at Syndicate Nature Reserve.

Lesser Antillean Iguana *Iguana delicatissima*

One seen on the access road to Syndicate Nature Reserve.



St Lucia Anole, Belenbouche and Dominica Anole, Syndicate NR

Fish and other Oceanic Species Recorded on St Lucia and Dominica (This list is not exhaustive and purely relates to fish identified from memory, post snorkelling, via a field guide) :

- | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Southern Stingray | Trumpet Fish | Four-eyed Butterfly Fish | Banded Butterfly Fish |
| Sargent Major | Blue Parrotfish | Spotlight Parrotfish | Princess Parrotfish |
| Peacock Flounder | Black Durgon | Porcupine Fish | Blue Tang |
| Yellowhead Wrasse | Bluehead | Spanish Hogfish | Caribbean Reef Squid |
| Caribbean Octopus | West Indian Sea Egg | | |

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Silvanus at Grand Eden and Asa at Morne Tabac, two of the many unforgeable memories from St Lucia