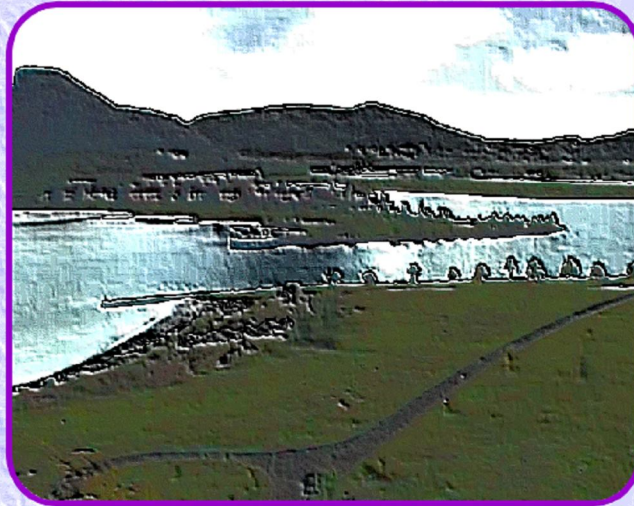
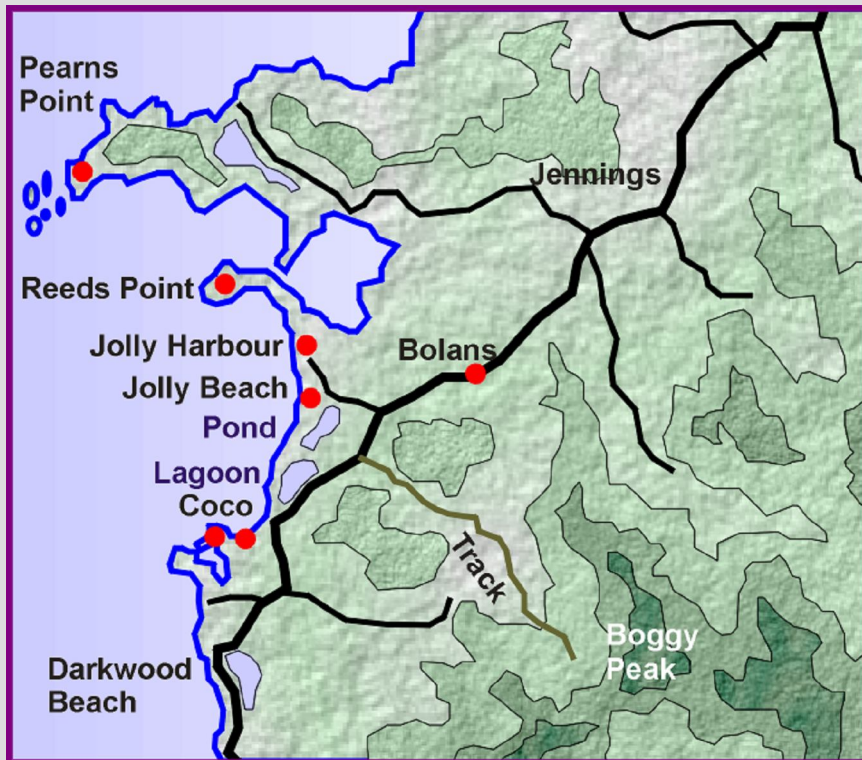


Antigua



2nd to 17th July, 2002



Sunday, 7 th	Jolly Harbour pond Coco lagoon	6:00-8:00
Monday, 10 th	Hills inland from Jolly Harbour	6:15-11:15
Friday, 12 th	Seawatch from Reeds Point	6:00-8:00
Monday, 15 th	Hills inland from Jolly Harbour	6:15-11:15
Wednesday, 17 th	Seawatch from Reeds Point	6:15-7:45

ANTIGUA

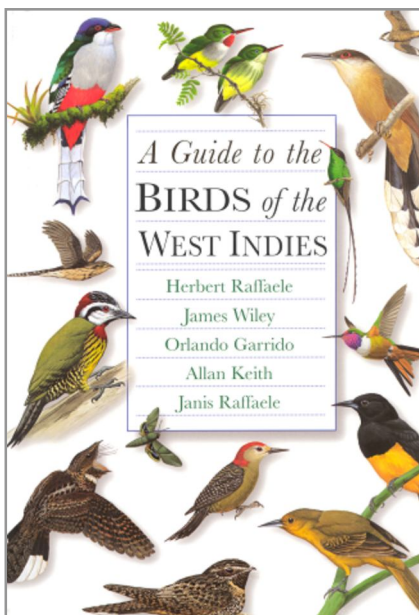
July 2nd to 17th, 2002

Introduction

Antigua is a reasonably small island (100 square miles) in the northern part of the Caribbean Lesser Antilles. It is also relatively dry when compared with other neighbouring islands. Due to this combination of size and distance from the nearest continental land masses of North and South America, the bird life is restricted in number of species. It does host an interesting spectrum, however, and there are a few species which can be even more difficult elsewhere (such as the 2 Quail Doves and Scaly-naped Pigeon). There are many other better birding spots in the Caribbean, and I would thus see the island as a family holiday destination primarily, but with some decent birding available as a side benefit - as this holiday was.



Birding on the island is roughly divided into 4 types - seawatching, the forests, inland waters, and incidentals around the resorts and other inhabited areas. While not exactly overpopulated, most of the island has given way to habitation, leaving the hilly area in the South-west as the most unspoilt. These hills are well forested, with open grazing areas cutting into the valleys between. Wader and waterbird watching can be surprisingly good - there are some well known sites such as the Potsworks Dam in the South-east,



but there are many pools and lagoons dotted around (I saw a number, ranging from ponds to open lagoons and mangroves from the coastal road in the South-west). The area covered for birds and the mode (or lack of) transport was mainly governed by the other holiday activities that we had planned as a family. We had intended to hire a car for some time (costing around \$50 per day, plus \$20 for CDW per day, and a one off payment of \$30 for an Antigua license), and use some of that time to visit birding sites. However, I decided that using the local buses was a much more interesting way to see the island (and a lot cheaper), and to concentrate the birding on the immediate area in which we were staying. This proved an excellent choice. Our hotel was the Jolly Harbour Villas, situated in the South-west, and this is the ideal location for birding. It is possible that the majority of the birds potential to the island are actually within walking distance of here, since I covered all the suitable types of habitat without any form transport.

SITES VISITED

The resort



As far as location is concerned, the South-west of the island is ideal, since it is next to the forested hills, and has a number of open water areas. Other hotels in the immediate vicinity which are just as well located are the Jolly Beach Resort, and Coco Bay Resorts. Jolly Harbour Villas are a mix of rental and timeshare / owned properties within Jolly Harbour Marina, and the whole complex covers an area of around 100 acres. The villas all have an excellent view across small fingers of open seawater, and a more distant view of the harbour if well placed. From the balcony were regular Lesser Antillean Bullfinches, Grey Kingbirds, Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Caribbean Martins, Frigatebirds, Brown Pelicans, various Herons (including a nightly flypast to the nearby roost of many Cattle Egrets), and Terns. The roads linking the villas are well vegetated, and were always alive with Bullfinches, Bananaquits, Black-faced Grassquits, and Zenaida Doves. There are 2 swimming pools, again with surrounding birdlife. The larger BBR pool is in the centre of the resort, and is not nearly as interesting, although there was a regular Antillean Crested Hummingbird, and overflying Frigatebirds, Grey Kingbirds, Caribbean Martins, and a Willet. The second pool is at the far side of the resort, and is more open, being backed up to a golf course, and having views of the adjacent Pearn's Point peninsular. The golf course was inundated with Common Ground Doves, Caribbean Martins were regularly over, and the surrounding area was good for overflying seabirds (Pelicans, Frigatebirds, Herons, and a single Royal Tern). The beach, which is near the South finger villas, was good for regular Laughing Gulls, Frigatebirds, White-crowned Pigeons, Brown Pelicans, Herons (including Little Blue & Tricoloured), Least Tern, and a single flypast of West Indian Whistling Ducks. Mention must be made of the Driftwood Beach Bar and Grill, located at the east end of the beach. Not only is some excellent food served here, but there are a regular clientele of Lesser Antillean Bullfinches and Bananaquits that visit the tables and drink from the fruit juice dispensers.

Seawatching

Although a small variety of seabirds could be seen from the beach, most were local. The beach is set back from 2 peninsulas, which are likely to push any passing birds too far out to be seen clearly. I made two early morning visits to Reeds Point, which is at the North end of the beach. It does offer a better view for passing birds, although the rather larger Pearn's Point would still tend to push birds a little further out. There is a track which goes to the top of Reeds Point, giving a good high position. Despite having a telescope, it seemed that passage was limited to a few Laughing Gulls and Terns (mainly Least and Sandwich) - a Brown Noddy was the only other bird seen away from the land.

However, there are 5 small islands off the tip of Pearns Point, and these are excellent for birds. They are almost a mile away from Reeds Points, which indicates that a trip round to Pearns Point would be a lot more productive, but was good nevertheless. The islands seem to be a roost for Frigatebirds and Pelicans, with smaller numbers of herons (possibly also breeding islands in season?). There are also a reasonable number of terns that can be seen, including around 20 Sooty Terns, and a small number of Brown Noddies.



Hills and Forests



This is where the more specialised birds tend to hide, and they are an easy walk from the Jolly Harbour complex. On meeting the main road, I turned right (South-west), and then left after 100m on to a track in a clearing which quickly became a narrow path climbing through the trees and into the valley. The view here looked over the grazing clearings of the valley, which cut into the tree covered slopes. I aimed in the direction of the masts of Boggy Peak, which could be seen in the distance, and managed to walk for some way up the slopes. The whole area is good for Grey Kingbirds, Caribbean Elaenias, Common Ground Doves, Carib Grackles, White-crowned Doves, and Broad-winged Hawks. Among the calls of the larger doves, there were also others calling (6+), which matched the description of Ruddy Ground-dove. They are easy to hear, but very difficult to approach, since they call from within the tangle of vegetation. A group of 3 Scaly-naped Pigeons flew over this area, and the finding of a Scaly-breasted Thrashers nest site might indicate the suitable habitat for both species of thrasher. I did see Black-whiskered Vireo here, but was surprised that they were not more evident (although more birds could be heard singing). Other sites such as Christian Valley and Wallings Reservoir have been reported as being good for specialities, but my feeling is that both quail-doves, both thrashers, and Scaly-naped Pigeon can all be seen with a bit of time and luck in this part of the hills.

Ponds and lagoons

It is fairly obvious that to see a reasonable selection of waders on the island, stretches of water and mud would be necessary. When I decided to dispense with the idea of hiring a car, I thought that I would have to concentrate on other habitats. It was therefore a nice surprise when I found some pools adjacent to the hotel on my first walk out. There are 2 pools of interest, both bounding the resorts of Jolly Harbour and Coco Bay. On leaving the Jolly Harbour Marina, a right turn on the main road finds the first, which is a partially dry pond, leaving areas of water and wet mud and plenty of waders, including a



Saltpans



Lagoon adjacent to saltpans

good selection of Black-necked Stilts, Semipalmated Sandpipers & Plovers, Wilson's Plovers, and a group of Dowitchers on the third visit. In among the resident Moorhen were also small numbers of American Coot, which were a little bit of a surprise. On the other side of the track to the beach from this pool was a larger and deeper lagoon, which meant another mix of birds. The depth meant more chance of fishing Brown Pelicans, and seemed more favourable to the group of White-cheeked Pintail and mixed Herons.



Deeper lagoon



Deeper lagoon



Darkwood Beach area



Hills behind Darkwood Beach

SPECIES SEEN

Brown Pelican

Pelecanus occidentalis

These were seen every day and in good numbers. They were usually flying, although some could also be seen swimming and fishing at the Jolly Coco Lagoon, with occasional birds also fishing over the sea. The islands off Pearns Point held good numbers of Pelicans (30+) - this may well have been a nesting spot as well as roost



Magnificent Frigatebird

Fregata magnificens

Not so sure that other birds would see them as so magnificent, since they were constantly seen gliding around looking for hapless victims to thief from. As with the Pelicans, the best numbers were seen on Pearns Point islands (50+), where they may also have established a breeding colony. Although they were most often associated with water, some could even be seen over the inland valleys. Only a small proportion of the birds seen were adult males



Great Blue Heron

Ardea herodias

The only bird seen was a white phase bird on Coco Lagoon

Great White Egret

Egretta alba

The peak number actually identified as this species was 5, but they could have been more common than this. The most regular places to see them were on the lagoon and pond, and amongst the many Cattle Egrets regularly flying over the villas each evening towards the roost

Tricoloured Heron

Egretta tricolor

1-2 birds were regularly seen very close to on the Coco lagoon. A further 1-2 were also seen on most days flying over the sea from Jolly Harbour beach, and a single bird was over Splash swimming pool on the 10th



Little Blue Heron

Egretta caerulea

Birds were regularly flying to and fro over the sea as seen from the Jolly Harbour beach, with up to a maximum of 5 doing this on any one day. 3 birds were also on the Coco lagoon, and occasional individuals could even be seen flying over the villa balcony

Snowy Egret

Egretta thula

These were probably a lot more common than the peak of 15 seen early on the Jolly Harbour. Most of the small white egrets not identified were likely to be Cattle Egrets

Cattle Egret*Bubulcus ibis*

These birds are everywhere, and in good numbers. In addition to those seen throughout the day in all areas, they showed as quite a spectacle when flying over the villa each evening towards the roost

Green Heron*Butorides viriscens*

These were only seen in 2 locations. 3 were very approachable on the Coco lagoon, and a further 2 were in trees surrounding a water hole in the clearing which led up to the inland valley

**Yellow-crowned Night Heron***Nycticorax violacea*

Up to 6 were on in the mangroves surrounding Coco lagoon

West Indian Whistling-duck*Dendrocygna arborea*

This is usually a very difficult bird to see throughout its range in the Caribbean, which is not so much a sign of its scarcity, but of its secretive day time habits, where it usually hides in trees and mangroves, only to start feeding from dusk onwards. I was lucky to see a group of 9 Whistling-duck flying northwards over the sea (close in) while sunning myself on Jolly Harbour beach, and to see the characteristic wing pattern and body colouring before they disappeared into the distance

White-cheeked Pintail*Anas bahamensis*

These birds were only seen on the Coco lagoon and Jolly Harbour pond. They tended to favour the former, where a group of ~50 birds tended to collect in the thin mangrove area of the North-eastern corner. Smaller numbers of birds could also be seen on the more open water of the Jolly Harbour pond

**Osprey***Pandion heliaetus*

These birds are not very common in Antigua, so I was probably quite lucky to see the single bird over Jolly Harbour marina on the 9th

Broad-winged Hawk*Buteo platypterus*

On an island where there is little variety in birds of prey, this was quite easily the predominant species. The birds seen on Antigua are of a pale subspecies found only on this island. A pair were seen in the woods near Darked Beach, with a separate bird the same morning over the Coco Lagoon. 2 birds together in the hills may have been a pair or competing males. 2 were seen in the Marina area - 1 over, and 1 seen perched on a television aerial from the villa balcony

American Kestrel*Falco sparverius*

I expected these to be more common on the island than I found. It was left until the end of the holiday (15th) for my only sightings - 4 in the hills may have been the same bird

American Coot*Fulica americana*

Both American and Caribbean Coot tend to be scarce on the island, so I was quite surprised to find 10 birds in the vicinity of the resort - 8 on the Jolly Harbour pond, and 2 on the first visit on the Coco lagoon. Expecting them to be Caribbean, some time was spent getting good views of the frontal shield to clinch identification. First impression on seeing them close to was that they were American, but one had a high white shield, and the others had what looked more like a dirty area on an otherwise white shield. However, none had the



noticeable protruding high white shield of Caribbean

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

~25 on the Jolly Harbour pond

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*

As usual with Stilts, these were not only visible and in good numbers (~40) on the Jolly Harbour pool, but also very vocal. A few extra birds were also among the low mangroves of the Coco Lagoon. The birds on the Jolly Harbour pool included 3 fairly young juveniles (they looked around 3 weeks old)

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*

About 5 birds were on the Jolly Harbour pool

Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia*

At least 10 birds were dotted around the Jolly Harbour pool, and a single bird was very approachable beside the track on the edge of the Coco lagoon. Although this is the Southern part of its breeding range (it is reported as a year round resident in Antigua), I was surprised to see that all the birds were in non-breeding plumage, and there was no sign of any young birds



Dowitcher spp *Limnodromus spp*

25 dowitchers were together on the Jolly Harbour pool on the 15th (they weren't present on the previous visits). The literature states that it is highly unlikely that they would be Long-billed, but the bill length on the birds present seemed to be on the upper limits for even that species (in length they were similar to some godwits) - they most certainly looked a lot longer than the Short-billed Dowitchers that I have seen previously in the USA. Unfortunately, they were all in non-breeding plumage

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

A maximum of 5 were on the Jolly Harbour pond (10th)

Willet *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*

2 birds were on the Coco lagoon on 2 occasions. They tended to favour the North-east corner, which was next to a track, and so were very approachable. The strangest sighting was of one over the BBR swimming pool of the Jolly Harbour resort, seemingly flying from the ponds in the direction of the marina. A further bird (presumably Willet and not Grey Plover, since distance only allowed the black axillaries as ID aid) flew past the Pearn's Point islands on 12th



Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

~15 birds on Jolly Harbour pond

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*

There was a small collection of Stints (~40) feeding on the mud of the Jolly Harbour pond on each of the 3 visits. They were carefully scrutinised, and almost all seemed to be of this species. Unfortunately, all were non-breeding adults, so plumage was not a great help in sorting them out

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*

Some of the stints in the groups seen on the Jolly Harbour pond may have had credentials for Western Sandpiper, but only one (on 15th) could be positively identified as such

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*

Arguably the most visible and constant of all species seen on Antigua. They are in every habitat and in good numbers. All birds seen bar one were in full summer plumage

Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*

Only 3 were seen - the first was from the villa balcony, flying towards the marina; second was flying over Splash swimming pool; and the last was perched on a jetty at the entrance to the marina one morning with a Sandwich Tern

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

This species was surprisingly more common than I would have expected for this part of

the world. Single numbers were seen on around half of the days, usually flying along the Jolly Harbour beach. Peak number was ~15, when seawatching from Reeds Point

Least Tern

Sterna antillarum

Easily the most common tern seen. They obviously breed in the area, since there were ~20 juvenile birds on the muddy fringes of the Jolly Harbour on each visit. There were usually very few, if any, adults here - presumably they were away catching food for the young. Away from here, best numbers were seen while seawatching from Reeds Point (25+), and adult birds were also regularly seen flying and fishing along Jolly Harbour beach



Sooty Tern

Sterna fuscata

The 5 islands off Pearns Point hosted at least 20 of these birds. Because of the distance, it took some time to positively identify them as Sooty Terns. On the first visit, the light seemed much stronger, and seemed to give the appearance of white collared (Bridled?) birds. But the second visit was dedicated to this species, and it was obvious that they were in the main Sooty, although some being Bridled could not be ruled out. At times, some of the birds left the islands in small groups and flew quite high, giving better views, and then returned to the island shortly after

Brown Noddy

Anous stolidus

The first bird seen was fishing at distance from Reeds Point with other terns and gulls, and was followed for some time. 3 more could be seen flying around the islands off Pearns Point on the 12th, although an extended watch of the islands on the 17th found none

White-crowned Pigeon

Columba leucocephala

These are apparently quite a common species on the island, and are probably one of the most dapper. In the first week, they were seen sporadically, with an initial bird on the first evening from the Jolly Harbour beach restaurant being followed by 4 on the morning of the 7th (including a bird collecting nesting material in the Coco lagoon area) and 12 on the 10th (where most were seen flying around the hills). In the second week, they were seen every day, with again a maximum of 15 on 15th (most in the hills), and between 1 and 4 on other days. Occasional bird were seen flying along the Jolly Harbour beach



Scaly-naped Pigeon

Columba squamosa

One of those specialities that are probably seen mostly by luck than planning, although the more time spent in the hills, the more luck you would have. After many false alarms from White-crowned Pigeons, 3 birds were flying overhead together in the hills on the 10th

Zenaida Dove

Zenaida aurita

Extremely common - including around the resort, where they were often on doorsteps



Common Ground-Dove

Columbina passerina

Extremely common. They were not quite as common as Zenaida Doves around the resort, but once habitation was left, they were abundant - particularly in open grazing areas and on golf courses

Green-throated Carib

Eulampis holosericeus

A total of 7 were identified as this species, although only one was seen perched and reasonably approachable - strangely, this was in a tree during the revelries at Shirley Heights on 14th. Despite this, the bill shape and size enabled separation from Antillean

Crested Hummingbird to be easily made

Antillean Crested Hummingbird *Orthorhynchus cristatus*

These were seen on most days, and they are a stunning little bird. The maximum was 11 in one day, and they could pop up anywhere - both around the resort (best views were actually in the flowers surrounding Splash swimming pool, and one also turned up in the sparse flowers around the BBR swimming pool, with many birds passed along the roadside shrubs), and in the countryside. From the villa balcony, one could even be seen regularly returning to a favoured bush on the opposite row of villas. Most of the birds seen were males - they look black until seen more closely, when the green sheen on the back is more evident. When the sun catches the front of the crest, it can show the stunning green sheen that is characteristic of the local subspecies (compared with the purple fronted form from elsewhere)



Caribbean Elaenia *Elaenia martinica*

Only 2 were seen around the Jolly Harbour resort - most were in the areas away from habitation, with a maximum of 6 on the 10th. The diagnostic white crown of the Elaenias is usually difficult to see - it was only visible on a juvenile bird seen on the 7th. Quite a few of the birds seen were singing from prominent perches in the hills



Grey Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis*

These birds are very common and visible everywhere on the island. Even when not seen, they can usually be heard. There were a few families of parents feeding well grown juveniles around the resort

Caribbean Martin *Progne dominicensis*

This is supposedly an uncommon bird on the island, but they were more or less guaranteed around the Jolly Harbour marina area. The maximum number was 20+ on the 10th, and there were only 2 days when they weren't seen. The best guarantee of views seemed to be over the Splash swimming pool, where the birds flew over quite low, but they were also seen from the Villa balcony, over the BBR swimming pool, and over Reeds Point

Scaly-breasted Thrasher *Margarops fuscus*

Of the 2 Thrashers, the guide books point to Pearly-eyed as the one most likely to be seen on the island. I was lucky to see a thrasher flying into a distant lone tree in the hills, and when I got closer it was obvious that the bird (or birds) seemed to like returning to it. However, they became difficult to see once they had landed in there, and it was only after around an hour watching that it was obvious that there was a nest with young inside, and that the black bill and seemingly scaled breast indicated the more unlikely of the 2 species

Black-whiskered Vireo *Vireo altiloquus*

I had the impression that these were very common on the island, yet, although they could be heard singing occasionally in the hills, only 1 of the 4 seen was watched for any length of time. Having seen many Red-eyed Vireos in the past, and looked forward to my first Black-whiskered, the bird seen was disappointing - drab and pale, with a not particularly distinct moustachial stripe

Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*

Of the 3 groups of Yellow Warblers, those on Antigua (*D.p.bartholemica*) belong to the "Golden Warbler" group, which includes the rufous hooded Mangrove Warbler seen in Mexico. They are characterised by a rufous golden cap on the males. Most of the birds I saw were males, and they seemed to vary a lot in appearance, from a seemingly yellow cap, to a rufous wash on the crown. None had what I would consider to be a distinctive

cap. They are a common bird, especially away from habitation, and the maximum seen on one day was ~15 on the 10th



Bananaquit

Coereba flaveola

This is another of those species that varies widely in plumage depending on geography. The birds on Antigua have the characteristic dark brown back and yellow breast and belly of most of the subspecies, with a dark throat, and white supercilium. They are very common in almost all habitats, and their high pitched "zip" call can be constantly heard around the resort. They tended to favour some of the larger flowering plants, presumably for nectar, but were not averse to visiting the fruit juice dispenser in the restaurant

Black-faced Grassquit

Tiaris bicolor

Extremely common everywhere. Unremarkable from a distance, the males are quite a smart bird when seen well, which is not difficult - some of my best views were of a bird only feet away from my sun lounger at Splash swimming pool - with black face, sooty underparts, and a smooth dark olive green back. Another characteristic call around the resort - more of a short high pitched "buzz" than the "chip" of the Bullfinches



Lesser Antillean Bullfinch

Loxigilla noctis

This is probably the Spuggie of the Antilles - they seem to fit into exactly the same niche as our House Sparrows, and are both abundant and approachable. They formed a queue with the Bananaquits to drink from the juice dispenser at the restaurant, but were also clever enough to recognise sugar packets, which they would pick up from the table and peck into. They were also the most frequent visitor to the villa balconies. The males are black all over, with red throat, short eye stripe, and undertail coverts. The females are quite a drab brown, with warm rufous brown undertail coverts

Carib Grackle

Quiscalus lugubris

Another very common species. They seem to resemble Common Grackle in appearance, but are smaller and more compact



TOTAL SPECIES = 48