

Jamaica: island paradise

Josh Jones



The Caribbean is known for its turquoise seas, stunning white-sand beaches and lush islands, each hosting unique wildlife. When it comes to combining a productive birding trip with a relaxing holiday (particularly with a non-birding friend, partner or family), few places can be better balanced than Jamaica, as the editor of Birdwatch magazine explains.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This article was first published in January 2024 as part of *Birdwatch* magazine's 'World of Birds' supplement. It is reproduced here with the kind permission of the author and editor, Josh Jones.

All photographs were taken by Josh Jones (birdwatch.co.uk; joshjrjones.com) on Jamaica, during January 2023.

1 Red-billed Streamertail *Trochilus polytmus* (male), Rocklands Bird Sanctuary, Saint James. Endemic to Jamaica, and the country's national bird.

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It was soon after daybreak and I was stood on a narrow track that snaked its way between the highest peaks of Jamaica's Blue Mountains National Park. It was eerily quiet—an ethereal mist clung to the forested slopes, sponging up the morning birdsong.

I was inherently focused on one target, and I was sure it was close by. Occasionally, the faint sound of leaves and pieces of bark falling to the forest floor betrayed its presence. But it was not a woodpecker, a nuthatch nor indeed any other 'creeper'—it was in fact an icterid. The curious Jamaican Blackbird *Nesopsar nigerrimus* is a scarce and globally Endangered resident of the island's forested mountains. Glossy-blue in plumage, this oriole-like bird spends its time furtively squeezing between bromeliads, tossing leaf litter aside or probing cracks in bark, looking for a meal.

Eventually, two Jamaican Blackbirds came into view. Although not particularly shy—as evidenced by the birds harmoniously feeding just a few metres from me—it is a quiet bird and its unobtrusiveness can make it a tricky target that is best looked for early in the mornings, before human activity picks up.

I was made up, for this was my final and most wanted of the island's endemic birds ticked off on my Jamaican holiday. With that, I packed up and headed back down the winding roads to the coast, where I joined my girlfriend on a sunbed at the hotel and spent the rest of the day basking in the Caribbean sunshine.

Perfect combination

With so many unique bird species—approximately 30, depending on your taxonomic preference—Jamaica is widely regarded among birders as an attractive and rewarding destination to visit at some point. But it is the rich, vibrant culture and wonderful beach resorts alongside great birds that makes it the perfect place to combine a birding trip with a relaxing holiday.

If lounging on the beach is not for you, it is likely that you can clean up on all the Jamaican endemics in just a few days before perhaps moving on to some of the other nearby islands, such as Hispaniola. However, taking things at a relaxed pace ensured that I was able to enjoy brilliant views of all the endemics and soak up an array of wintering North American



Jamaica's two endemic columbids are **2** Ring-tailed Pigeon *Patagioenas caribaea* (Vulnerable) and **3** Crested Quail-Dove *Geotrygon versicolor* (Near Threatened). Both were photographed at San San Police Station Road, Portland.

