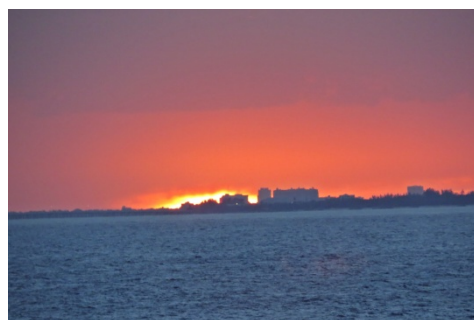
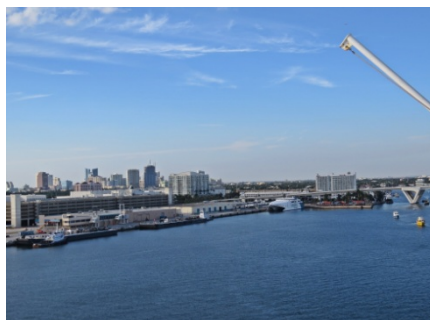


Western Caribbean Cruise

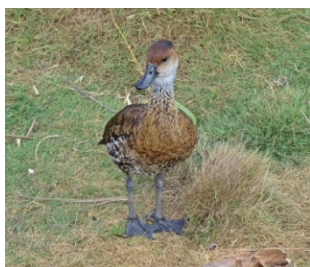
January 30 – February 10, 2017


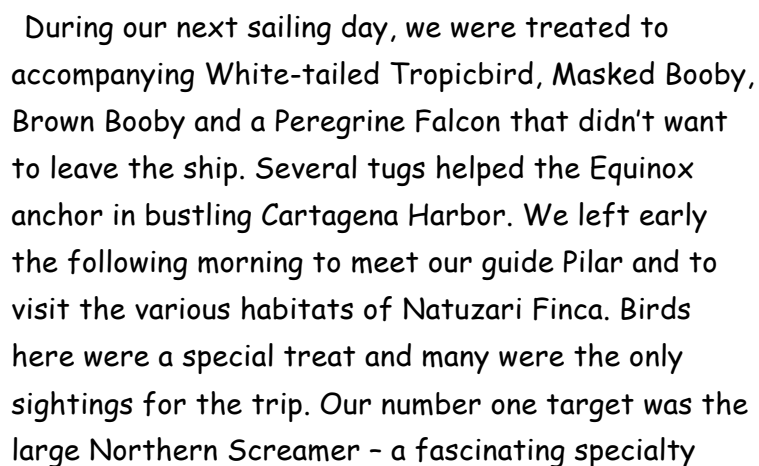
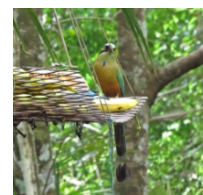
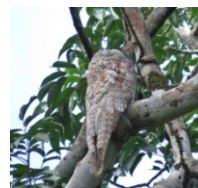
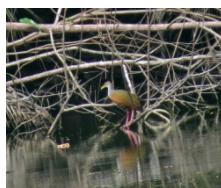
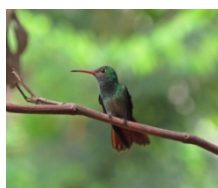
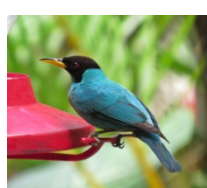
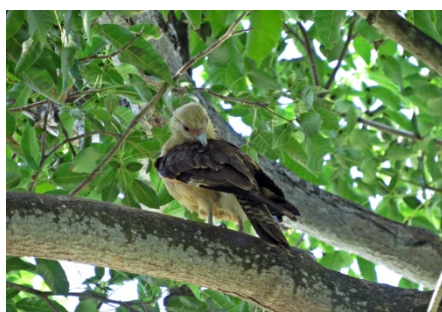


Twenty-six seafaring birders flocked together on January 30, 2017 to join the Tropical Audubon Society/Carefree Birding cruise around the Western Caribbean. The beautiful and comfortable Celebrity Equinox was home-away-from-home while we sailed and visited five ports of call during our ten-day adventure. Ken Burgener and Linda Warschauer of Carefree Birding hosted our land birding excursions, as well as our organized ship birding activities. A beautiful Sun Dog escorted our departure from Port Everglades in Ft. Lauderdale and it seemed to be a good omen.



Sailing, eating (very well!) and becoming acquainted occupied our first day at sea and on Wednesday we explored Grand Cayman with guides from the Historical Trust. After a designated stop at Pedro Castle to see the resident White-tailed Tropicbirds, we headed to Queen Elizabeth Botanical Gardens where we picked up West Indian specialty birds such as Loggerhead Kingbird, Caribbean Elaenia, Western Spindalis, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Zenaida Dove, Thick-billed Vireo and West Indian Woodpecker. The endemic Cayman subspecies of Cuban Parrot was a target for our listers, as well as the vibrant Vitellene Warbler. We admired the endangered Cayman Blue Iguanas throughout the park. A stop at a local pond produced our only West Indian Whistling-Ducks of the trip.

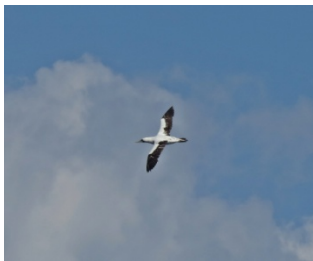
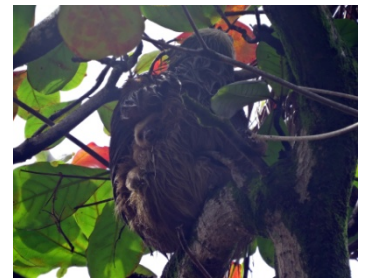


A blue-winged teal bird is perched on a thin, leafless tree branch. The bird has a dark body, a blue wing patch, and a red beak. It is facing left. The background is a clear blue sky. The tree has green leaves on the right side.



Day three of our land excursion was outside of Limón, Costa Rica with guides Alex and Kevin. Bananito Road was our destination and provided excellent birding. Our next area to visit was the coast, where we added many shorebird species to the list. However, the short road to the coast was a treasure trove of tropical birds! Each sighting brought 2-3 more birds and it was difficult to look at them all. Colorful tanagers (Passerini's, Golden-hooded, White-lined, Blue-gray), orioles (Black-cowled, Orchard, Baltimore) and a Yellow-crowned Euphonia were eye candy. We picked out several psittacine species such as Blue-headed and White-crowned Parrot, Orange-chinned, Olive-throated and Crimson-fronted Parakeet and three woodcreepers; Cocoa, Northern Barred and Streak-headed. Flycatchers and saltators were more of a challenge but Kevin helped us sort through them. Drama unfolded in a Coconut Palm as a Giant Cowbird tried to invade a Montezuma Oropendola nest. This was a very special short stretch of road! Mama sloth and baby seemed unconcerned by our ogling.

Two sea days allowed for relaxation and more good food. Did I mention that we ate very well? Docking in Cozumel during the afternoon on Tuesday allowed for a variety of excursions so four of us went birding in Chankanaab Gardens. There, we found many familiar warbler species and the stunning Cozumel subspecies of Yellow Warbler that sports beautiful dark red breast streaks and a red cap. We also visited the famous BAM No. 4 "Black Sheep Squadron" WW II airplanes on display.



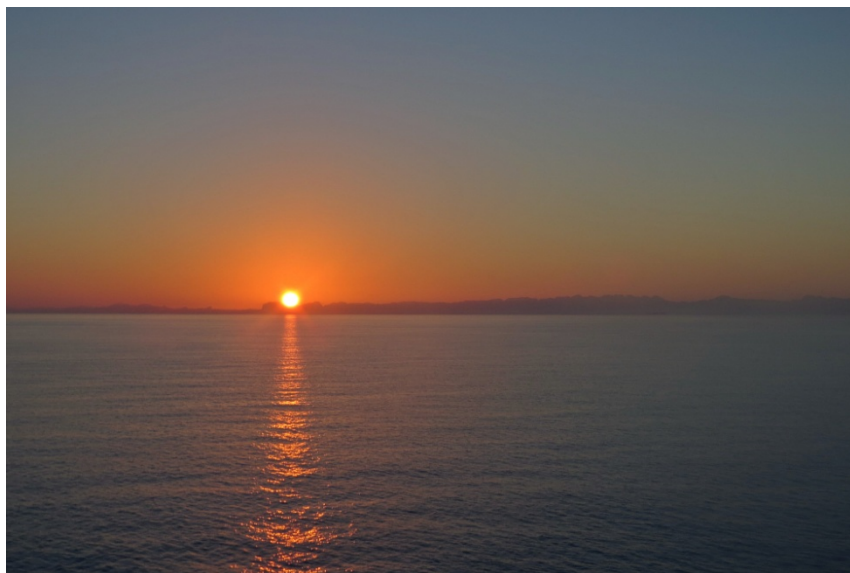
Our last day of land birding began early with guides Luis and Carolina as we boarded the "jungle bus" for our destinations. El Cedral proved to be a very active birding area and we picked up many specialties along the wide trail. Black Catbird was our first Cozumel specialty, followed quickly by the endemic Cozumel Emerald (hummingbird). The second endemic, Cozumel Vireo, eluded us during our morning of birding. Other good birds such as Couch's Kingbird, Yucatan Woodpecker, Hooded Oriole and Yellow-faced Grassquit popped up along the road, as did a group of tourists on Segway scooters. Via the jungle bus, we drove to the beautiful eastern side of the island where we scanned ponds for waders, ducks and grebes. Our last stop was Cozumel Country Club where, like many other birding spots, the parking lot birds kept us entertained. Caribbean Elaenia, Yucatan Vireo, Tropical Mockingbird and Yellow Warbler kept us busy before we walked to Hole One to explore the pond. On the way, we spotted a Black-striped Iguana, a Cozumel regular. At the pond, Luis used playback to entice three Ruddy Crakes to call and to come closer. Finally, two birds coyly allowed good looks and cameras clicked like crazy.



Following a gorgeous sunrise over Cuba on Thursday, it was smooth sailing. The group caught up on reading, exploring the ship, relaxation and meeting for a final birding discussion. A delicious dinner served by Arturo and Roger created an opportune moment to share email addresses and to say farewell. Birding wasn't quite finished though, as we sailed into Port Everglades. Bob and Sharyn found a stranded Northern Parula on the top deck Thursday evening. They rescued and released it Friday morning - a fitting farewell to a grand birding adventure.

Robin Diaz

Photos by Robin Diaz



Birds

Northern Screamer	Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture	Willet
West Indian Whistling-Duck	Osprey	Laughing Gull
Blue-winged Teal	Snail Kite	Royal Tern
Chestnut-winged Chachalaca	Common Black Hawk	Pale-vented Pigeon
Least Grebe	Savanna Hawk	Short-billed Pigeon
Pied-billed Grebe	Roadside Hawk	Eurasian Collared-Dove
White-tailed Tropicbird	Short-tailed Hawk	Common Ground-Dove
Magnificent Frigatebird	Zone-tailed Hawk	Plain-breasted Ground-Dove
Masked Booby	Ruddy Crake	Ruddy Ground-Dove
Brown Booby	White-throated Crake	White-tipped Dove
Neotropic Cormorant	Gray-cowled Wood-Rail	White-winged Dove
Anhinga	Common Gallinule	Zenaida Dove
Double-crested Cormorant	American Coot	White-crowned Pigeon
Brown Pelican	Black-necked Stilt	Eared Dove
Rufescent Tiger-Heron	Black-bellied Plover	Greater Ani
Bare-throated Tiger-Heron	Southern Lapwing	Smooth-billed Ani
Great Egret	Wilson's Plover	Groove-billed Ani
Snowy Egret	Semipalmated Plover	Squirrel Cuckoo
Little Blue Heron	Killdeer	Great Potoo
Tricolored Heron	Northern Jacana	Chimney Swift
Cattle Egret	Wattled Jacana	Vaux's Swift
Green Heron	Whimbrel	White-necked Jacobin
Striated Heron	Ruddy Turnstone	Green-breasted Mango
Glossy Ibis	Sanderling	Black-throated Mango
Bare-faced Ibis	Least Sandpiper	Red-billed Emerald
Roseate Spoonbill	Western Sandpiper	Cozumel Emerald
Black Vulture	Spotted Sandpiper	Blue-chested Hummingbird
Turkey Vulture	Greater Yellowlegs	Rufous-tailed Hummingbird

Gartered Trogon	Yellow-chinned Spinetail	Stripe-backed Wren
Whooping Motmot	Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet	Bicolored Wren
Ringed Kingfisher	Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Russet-throated Puffbird	Caribbean Elaenia	Tropical Gnatcatcher
White-necked Puffbird	Common Tody-Flycatcher	Clay-colored Thrush
Black-breasted Puffbird	Tropical Pewee	Black Catbird
Keel-billed Toucan	Pied Water-Tyrant	Gray Catbird
Black-cheeked Woodpecker	White-headed Marsh Tyrant	Tropical Mockingbird
Yucatan Woodpecker	Cattle Tyrant	Northern Mockingbird
Red-crowned Woodpecker	Yucatan Flycatcher	Louisiana Waterthrush
West Indian Woodpecker	Panama Flycatcher	Northern Waterthrush
Northern Flicker	Lesser Kiskadee	Black-and-white Warbler
Crested Caracara	Great Kiskadee	Prothonotary Warbler
Yellow-headed Caracara	Social Flycatcher	Tennessee Warbler
Peregrine Falcon	Gray-capped Flycatcher	Gray-crowned Yellowthroat
Orange-chinned Parakeet	Streaked Flycatcher	Common Yellowthroat
Blue-headed Parrot	Tropical Kingbird	Hooded Warbler
White-crowned Parrot	Couch's Kingbird	American Redstart
Yellow-lored Parrot	Gray Kingbird	Cape May Warbler
Cuban Parrot (Cayman Is.)	Loggerhead Kingbird	Northern Parula
Blue-winged Parrotlet	Fork-tailed Flycatcher	Magnolia Warbler
Olive-throated Parakeet	Purple-throated Fruitcrow	Yellow Warbler (Northern)
Brown-throated Parakeet	Thick-billed Vireo	Yellow Warbler (Golden)
Crimson-fronted Parakeet	Yellow-green Vireo	Palm Warbler (Western)
Fasciated Antshrike	Yucatan Vireo	Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle)
Northern Barred-Woodcreeper	Black-chested Jay	Yellow-throated Warbler
Cocoa Woodcreeper	Southern Rough-winged Swallow	Vitelline Warbler
Straight-billed Woodcreeper	Gray-breasted Martin	Prairie Warbler
Paled-legged Hornero	Mangrove Swallow	Hooded Tanager

White-lined Tanager

Passerini's Tanager

Crimson-backed Tanager

Blue-gray Tanager

Glaucous Tanager

Palm Tanager

Golden-hooded Tanager

Plain-colored Tanager

Blue Dacnis

Shining Honeycreeper

Red-legged Honeycreeper

Green Honeycreeper

Variable Seedeater

Bananaquit

Yellow-faced Grassquit

Cuban Bullfinch (Cayman Is.)

Western Spindalis

Buff-throated Saltator

Grayish Saltator

Summer Tanager

Northern Cardinal

Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Painted Bunting

Red-winged Blackbird

Yellow-hooded Blackbird

Red-breasted Meadowlark

Common Grackle

Great-tailed Grackle

Greater Antillean Grackle

Carib Grackle

Bronzed Cowbird

Giant Cowbird

Black-cowled Oriole

Orchard Oriole

Hooded Oriole

Yellow-backed Oriole

Yellow-tailed Oriole

Yellow Oriole

Baltimore Oriole

Scarlet-rumped Cacique

Yellow-rumped Cacique

Chestnut-headed Oropendola

Montezuma Oropendola

Yellow-crowned Euphonia

House Sparrow

Critters

Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin

Common Agouti

White-fronted Capuchin

Mantled Howler Monkey

Two-toed Sloth

Three-toed Sloth

Red-tailed Squirrel

Leaf-cutter Ants

Leatherback Turtle

Hickatee (Northern Antillean Slider)

Red-eared Slider

American Crocodile

Cayman Racer

Black-striped Iguana

Green Iguana

Black Spiny-tailed Iguana

Grand Cayman Blue Iguana