

# Captivating Cuba: Nature Meets Culture

## Colonial Havana, Cuba's Western Mountains, and Zapata Swamp

May 30 – June 9, 2018

Join **C. Colston (Cole) Burrell**, in partnership with the Caribbean Conservation Trust (CCT), for an exclusive U.S.- led and managed cultural and natural history excursion to Cuba! The program is coordinated under U.S. government authorization through Connecticut-based CCT, which is proud of its 22-year history managing bird conservation and natural history programs in Cuba.

In addition to Cole, our team includes a bilingual Cuban tour leader as well as local professionals who are experts in their respective fields in Cuba. This customized, multi-faceted program features natural history (birds, plants, and habitat exploration), gardens, sustainable agriculture, arts, and architecture. We will explore a range of habitats that include submontane seasonal rain forest, pine forest, tropical karstic forest, coastal forest, mangrove, wetlands, and beaches. We will also spend significant time in Havana (4 nights).

Our program begins and ends in **Havana**, an unrivaled colonial city of the Americas. In Havana we will meet with a curator from **Cuba's National Museum of Natural History** for a presentation and discussion of Cuba's unique biodiversity and natural history. This presentation will cover Cuba's evolutionary history in the region, provide examples of Cuba's strikingly high degree of endemism in terms of flora and fauna, and serve as an introduction to Cuba's diverse ecosystems and the abundant life within them. We will also include a visit to the **National Botanical Gardens** on the outskirts of Havana. Here we will meet a local expert who will provide an interpretive tour of the endemic forest, as well as various other living exhibits of native and exotic flora. In addition we will explore a diversity of public and private gardens, farms that practice sustainable agriculture, and the Soroa Orchidarium



**The cultural aspects of the trip focus primarily on visual arts and architecture.** An orientation to 'modern' Havana, and a walking tour of Habana Vieja (Old Havana), the city's historic colonial center are featured. On additional days in Havana we will visit art museums, private studios and galleries, and meet

Cuban artists who are part of Cuba's recent arts revival. Habana Vieja was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987. The old city abounds with historic sites, museums, and art galleries that underscore a cultural heritage and recently resurgent energy and verve that is uniquely Cuban. We will also include a day that focuses on a sampling of Havana's fabled architecture, which spans 5 centuries. Live music, as well as an eclectic range of street performances, and high quality dining venues exemplify the very energetic response of Habaneros to recent liberal policy changes there.



While in Havana, following introductions by our local experts you will have time to safely explore on your own. Our guides will acquaint us with Cuba's education and health care systems, housing, transportation, education, employment, and other topics that will help enhance a better understanding of how ordinary Cubans go about their daily lives.

Your escort **Cole Burrell** is an acclaimed international lecturer, garden designer and the author of 12 gardening books. He has escorted garden and nature tours throughout the United States as well as to Canada, Europe and the Americas. His one-of-a-kind tours focus on the best private and public gardens, and the most ecologically diverse natural areas, to create

### The Nature of Cuba

This unique tour combines natural history and ecology of regions we visit as well as immersion in the richness of Cuban culture, architecture, and history. At different intervals throughout the program we will hear from Cuban experts about the natural relationship of Cuban species of birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, as well as arachnids (spiders) and insects and other invertebrates such as mollusks and butterflies. We will enjoy opportunities to swim and snorkel as well, and perhaps encounter some of Cuba's interesting marine life in a safe, natural habitat.



White Mariposa (*Hedychium coronarium*) Cuba's national flower

We will also indulge in informal discussions that expose the main problems of conservation in the Cuban Archipelago. Throughout the program our Cuban guide will answer your questions and offer explanations that reflect Cuban history, politics, as well as topics related to daily living in Cuba.

## WHERE WE TRAVEL

Once outside of Havana, we will explore two very distinct geographic regions of the country chosen for their diverse ecological systems and natural beauty. In these distinct locations, we will visit Cuba's pristine national parks, remote biosphere reserves, and unique natural areas. We will interact with local scientists and naturalists who work in research and conservation and explore terrain exclusively selected for us by local insiders.

**Cuba's Western Mountains** include two of the country's most diverse and dramatic ranges: the Sierra de la Rosario, and Sierra de los Organos. We will explore an area common to both ranges in search of western range endemic species of birds and other fauna. The Western Mountains includes habitat unique to much of the world that is often captured in photos and paintings of rural Cuba. Here we will encounter submontane seasonal rain forest, pine forest, and tropical karstic forest. A highlight of the trip, we will visit the magical, unusually beautiful karstic landscape of mogotes-- the towering, lushly vegetated, flat-top limestone monoliths that dominate the Organos Mountains. This is the only region in which we will likely see the *Cuban Solitaire*, *Cuban Grassquit*, *Giant Kingbird*, & *Olive-capped Warbler*. Other potential endemic species for western Cuba include *Cuban Oriole*, *Cuban Blackbird*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, *Cuban Pewee*, *Cuban Pygmy-Owl*, *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Vireo*, & *Yellow-headed Warbler*.



Vinales Valley, Pinar del Rio Province

We will also explore the diverse wetland region of the **Zapata Peninsula**, Cuba's richest and most important birding destination located in the historic **Bay of Pigs**. This peninsula is a Ramsar Convention (international conservation treaty) designated site, and is among the most important wetlands in the West Indies. Here, the best local guides will lead us through protected areas in Cienaga de Zapata National Park and other natural sites off the beaten track. The Zapata Peninsula covers more than 2800 square miles and features easily accessible, everglades-like ecology and habitat. Framed by the pristine Caribbean coastal environment of the Bay of Pigs, the peninsula features vast open swamp land, low coastal forests, sparkling white sand beaches, healthy and accessible coral reefs, and refreshing natural limestone pools called cenotes. *Bee Hummingbird*, *Cuban Black Hawk*, *Zapata Wren*, *Zapata Sparrow*, *Fernandina's Flicker*, *Bare-legged Owl*, *Tawny-shouldered* and *Red-shouldered Blackbird* are among the many birds we will hope to find (3 nights).



## THE CONSERVATION PROJECT

The U.S. Department of Treasury has provided a license for conducting bird and habitat conservation work in Cuba to the **Caribbean Conservation Trust, Inc. (CCT)**, a U.S. based organization committed to the conservation of endemic and migratory birds and their habitats in the greater Caribbean region.. CCT is dedicated to bird and habitat conservation through education and relationship building and, is in compliance with U.S. Treasury licensure for legal travel to Cuba.

## Cuba's Birds

According to BirdLife International, which has designated 28 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Cuba, "Over 370 bird species have been recorded in Cuba, including 27 which are endemic to the island and 29 considered globally threatened. Our itinerary provides opportunities to see many of Cuba's endemic species and subspecies, as listed below. This trip will also focus on the many neotropical migrant species that migrate south to Cuba in the fall (endemic species and endemic subspecies in italics):

*Bare-legged Owl*, *Cuban Oriole*, *Bee Hummingbird*, *Blue-headed Quail-Dove*, *Gray-fronted Quail-Dove*, *Cuban Black Hawk*, *Cuban Blackbird*, *Cuban Bullfinch*, *Cuban Grassquit*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, *Cuban Parakeet*, *Cuban Parrot*, *Cuban Pewee*, *Cuban Pygmy-Owl*, *Cuban Solitaire*, *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Vireo*, *Fernandina's Flicker*, *Giant Kingbird*, *Gundlach's Hawk*, *Eastern Meadowlark*, *Cuban Nightjar*, *Red-shouldered Blackbird*, *Tawny-shouldered Blackbird*, *Yellow-headed Warbler*, *Zapata Wren*, *Zapata Sparrow*, *Cuban Crow*, *Cuban Emerald*, and *Western Spindalis*.



Cuban Parrot



Red-legged Thrush



Cuban Grassquit



Bee Hummingbird



Western Spindalis

Great Lizard-Cuckoo, La Sagra's Flycatcher, Loggerhead Kingbird, *Olive-capped Warbler*, Key West Quail-Dove, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Zenaida Dove, and *Stygian Owl*.

For a glimpse of our program in action, go to: <http://video.pbs.org/program/counting-birds/> for a link to the film **COUNTING ON BIRDS**, a 2013 Public Broadcasting System ([www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)) production which describes the history of the Christmas Bird Count and features a segment on our program in Cuba as an example how birders can contribute to 'citizen science' based bird conservation efforts.

### Program Leadership

Cuban Trogon

Our program is designed and managed in the United States and is professionally staffed and field tested **over 22 years in Cuba**. We are dedicated to providing participants with informative nature oriented experiences with the help of our highly skilled local leaders.

### Our Cuban Naturalists

We work with a very competent team of professional biologists, museum curators and general naturalists in Cuba.

**A full time Cuban bilingual guide** will accompany us upon arrival and remain with the group until departure. He or she may share specific and general information relative to life in Cuba, it's culture, history, and environment. Along with a professional driver, our guide will also deal with logistics, meals, translation, and other nuts-and-bolts aspects of the travel experience. Additionally, we will work with regional experts from the national parks, biosphere reserves, museums and academic institutions that we visit around the country.



Fernandina's Flicker

### Accommodations

Accommodations feature hotels in Havana and 3 additional provinces. Our Cuban hotels are staffed by friendly, helpful hosts and represent the best Cuba has to offer in the regions we visit, and may include refurbished vintage 4 star hotels, modest 3 star facilities, and simple beach-front bungalows. All hotels are safe, clean, air-conditioned tourist facilities. It should be noted that standards in Cuba differ from those in the U.S. and other developed countries.

### Additional Details

Following program registration, we will provide all participants with details covering travel to Cuba, including all of the basics you need to know about travel documents, customs, facts about Cuba, currency, health and safety, food, flights, and what to bring. U.S. Government authorization documents will be provided following receipt of your final balance payment.

### Physical Demands and Expectations

This program offers opportunities for several days of exploration in Havana in both indoor and outdoor settings. There will also be opportunities for casual birding, with easy walking in various habitats, including urban exploration. Some days may provide leisure time after lunch and before our afternoon or evening sessions. Physical exertion will be light to moderate on most days, with the longest walks approximately 2 miles. Terrain is mostly flat and dry, with some hills present in western Cuba. All participants should be in reasonably good physical condition.

Be prepared for strong sun, with day time temperatures in the mid 80s to low 90s. Mosquitoes can be bothersome in the Zapata Region. Rain may occur as well, so bring adequate rain gear. Those with medical concerns should check with their physician before taking part in the program. Your health and well-being are very important to us!

## Registration, Trip Costs, Terms, and Conditions

Land costs for the 10 day program are \$ **4,850.00** per person for shared accommodations. Single supplements are an additional \$**650.00** per person. **Trip costs are based on 14 fully paying participants. A lower number of participants may result in a modest small group supplement.**

### What is included:

**CCT Cuba Programs** include the following: all accommodations, all meals in Cuba beginning with dinner on day 1, ending with breakfast on the last day of the program (unless otherwise indicated), guide services, most tips (guides, drivers, naturalists and restaurant and bell staff), airport/hotel transfers, ground transportation, bottled water, some drinks, admission fees (itinerary only), U.S. Department of Treasury authorization documents, and program management services which include the provision of all pre- and post-program materials, escort Cole Burrell, a full-time Cuban bilingual guide, bilingual Cuban naturalists and other specialists, and a fulltime driver. Program fees include a donation to help support our conservation efforts in Cuba.



Great Lizard Cuckoo

### Not Included:

Travel to Havana, Cuba (\$ **225 - \$ 275 from Florida**) and Cuban health insurance (required by law and approximately \$3 per day); items of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, additional beverages, bar and housekeeping tips, etc., airport departure taxes, U.S. passport fees, meals outside of Cuba, or other fees not listed in the program. Cost estimates are as of September, 2017 and are subject to change.

### Flights



Cuban Trogon

We typically fly from south Florida to Havana with a group reservation on a major U.S. airline. This ensures an easy arrival for all, with enough time to begin our Cuban experience on Day 1 of the trip. We will provide all of the information necessary to make booking these flights simple & secure.

### Travel Insurance Protection

Any U.S. citizen traveling internationally these days should consider insurance protection. Reasonably priced coverage is available to provide protection against financial loss due to trip cancellation or delay, as well as lost baggage. Although uncommon, cancellations due to illness, accidents, work related schedule changes, and other un-planned or un-welcome events have happened. Unforeseen travel related events which you have little or no control over can also effect travel plans. All of these factors make trip cancellation insurance a very important consideration.

Go to: <http://www.travelex-insurance.com/index.asp?location=07-0067> or call **1 800-228-9792**. Be sure to use the agency **location code 07-0067** to access coverage explicit to this program. CCT's U.S. Department of Treasury issued **OFAC** license falls under the **HUMANITARIAN** category of authorization.

### Payment

A deposit payment of \$ **800.00 per person** accompanied by a reservation form guarantees space on this trip. Registration can be done online with a wire transfer or Paypal deposit), or via USPS (payable by check).



### Caribbean Conservation Trust

353 West Todd Street  
Hamden, CT 06518

Please do not write **Cuba** on the check memo, or with any electronic payment option.



**Wire transfers** can be made using the following information:

**Bank of America**, account number 3850 1183 9668 for Caribbean Conservation Trust. Routing number is **026 009 593**.

Two additional payments are to occur as follows

- An additional \$ 2,000.00 per person is due 4 months prior to departure or by January 30, 2018.
- Full payment is due 75 days prior to departure or by **March 16, 2018**.

You will receive a detailed receipt/invoice following receipt of your deposit and reservation form. All cancellations must be done in writing and are effective upon receipt in the CCT office. Should it become necessary for you to cancel, all payments will be refunded after a deduction of our cancellation fee outlined below:

More than 90 days prior to the tour..... \$ 550.00 per person (land only)  
Fewer than 90 - days prior to the tour... FULL DEPOSIT  
Fewer than 75 days prior to the tour..... NO REFUND (unless we can fill your place)

In the unlikely event that we must cancel the tour, a full refund less a \$100.00 processing fee for your license application will be forwarded to you, should cancellation occur after your license has been processed. **\*Please be aware that the refund policies apply only to the land portion of the trip. Airlines may have different policies that exist beyond our ability to control.**

Caribbean Conservation Trust and its agents and constituents reserve the right to make changes to the itineraries.  
Land and air arrangements may be subject to price increases beyond our control.





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### ITINERARY

#### May 30 – June 9, 2018

#### Day 1 May 30, 2018 (Wednesday)

arrive *Havana from Florida*

Arrival by midday in **Havana**. Orientation meeting and lecture on Cuba's evolutionary history and biodiversity. Accommodation in Havana ( 4 nights).

#### Days 2, 3, 4 May 31 – June 2, 2018

**Havana**

The ensuing 3 full days in **Havana** will include a guided tour of Havana, including historic **Old Havana**, one of the best preserved colonial cities in the Americas. This **UNESCO World Heritage site** is loaded with a variety of museums, a thriving arts scene, and a full range of architectural examples of both renovated and neglected structures, many opulent or otherwise unique, representing 5 centuries of human habitation. We will have full days devoted to botanical and urban gardens, arts, architecture, with various visits to art museums & galleries, to notable and obscure buildings representing different architectural styles & periods, and to sites such as Ernest Hemingway's former estate, Finca Vigia, as well as one of Latin America's largest and most intact coastal fortresses. We will visit Cuba's **National Botanical Gardens** for a guided interpretive tour of various parts of the expansive 1500 (acre complex, with the focus on plants and habitat. The gardens feature more than 4,000 plant species native to tropical areas of the world. The gardens emphasize flora native to Cuba, but also feature groupings of cacti and other desert, semi-desert, and tropical rainforest plants from around the region and the world. We will benefit from discussions and presentations by some of Cuba's leading professionals in the fields of architecture, visual arts, and horticulture.

#### Day 5 ~ June 3, 2018

**Havana to Vinales**

Depart after breakfast west to Alamar community garden, the largest and most successful urban garden in Cuba. We will meet the director and have a brief but informative discussion regarding the origins and current operations of this model for sustainable agriculture. From here we continue west to the stunning Valle de Vinales (2.5 hours), in the heart of Cuba's renowned tobacco growing region. Vinales is surrounded by lushly vegetated 'mogotes', or blunt and ragged limestone monoliths that dominate the region. Our afternoon concludes with a visit to the private home and art studio of Nils Navarro - Cuba's best natural artist and author of the new Field Guide to Endemic Birds of Cuba. Accommodation at **Rancho San Vicente** nestled in the magical Valle de Vinales ( 1 night). Various resident bird species, including the endemic *Cuban Bullfinch*, *Cuban Vireo*, Cuban Pewee, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Red-legged Thrush (endemic subspecies), West-Indian Woodpecker, and several other species of birds may be present here.

#### Day 6 June 4, 2018

**Vinales to La Guira National Park**

Breakfast, and morning visit to trails within **Vinales National Park**. Endemic birds such as *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Green Woodpecker*, *Yellow-headed Warbler*, *Cuban Trogon*, *Cuban Pygmy-Owl* and Great Lizard Cuckoo will be among the birds we pursue here. We will visit **Jardin de Caridad**, a 100 year-old garden featuring billows of bougainvillea blossoms, flowering shrubs, and fruit trees on the edge of town, and later drop in at a small operational tobacco farm. Lunch is at a **Finca Paraiso**, privately run organic farm, with tremendous sweeping views of the gorgeous valley. After lunch we depart for Cueva Portales, a beautiful cave carved by the San Diego River. This historic natural area is our best opportunity for the endemic Cuban Solitaire. It also served as Che Guevara's headquarters during the tense days of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Accommodation in the quiet town of San Diego de los Banos (1night).



### Day 7 ~ June 5, 2018

### San Diego to Soroa and Las Terrazas

Early breakfast and birding around Hacienda Cortina, a sprawling former lavish estate with excellent birding as well as an eclectic representation of buildings and statuary first constructed in the 1930s. Fernandina's Flicker, Giant Kingbird, *Olive-capped Warbler*, *Scaly-naped Pigeon* and *Red-legged Honeycreeper* will be pursued here. Lunch is at our hotel in San Diego, followed by departure east to the **Soroa Orchidarium** ( 45 minutes), which maintains the largest collection of orchids in Cuba, with over 130 species of **autochthonous orchids** and nearly 700 international species being cultivated here. The orchidarium is managed by the University of Pinar del Rio, and is located within the **Sierra de la Rosario Biosphere Reserve**, a UNESCO administered protected area. From here we continue east to **Hotel Moka** located in **Las Terrazas** ecological community (1 night).



### Day 8 June 6, 2018

### Las Terrazas to Zapata National Park

Morning birding near Las Terrazas, nestled in the forest and foothills of the **Sierra de la Rosario Mountains**. We will also visit the studio of artist Lester Campo, whose surreal landscapes have been on display in galleries throughout the world. Lunch at **Cafetal Buena Vista**, a restored 19<sup>th</sup> century coffee plantation, offering sweeping views of the mountains, plains and *Cuban Grassquit*, *Cuban Tody*, *Cuban Bullfinch*, *Great Lizard Cuckoo* are likely species to encounter. *Lunch at Cafetal Buena Vista, a restored 19<sup>th</sup> century coffee plantation.* Accommodation and dinner in tourist board certified private homes stays in the beach community at Play Larga ( 3 nights).



Royal Poinciana ( *Delonix regia* )

### Day 9~ June 7, 2018

### Zapata Peninsula

Early breakfast and a morning of birding in a nature preserve adjacent to the small village of **Bermejas**. Here is our best opportunity to see the endemic *Bee Hummingbird* (world's smallest bird), *Fernandina's Flicker*, *Bare-legged Owl*, *Cuban Parakeet*, Cuban Parrot, *Blue-headed* and *Gray-fronted Quail-Doves*, Key West and Ruddy Quail Doves. Lunch at Caleta Buena, a beautiful limestone rimmed inlet abundant with fish and excellent snorkeling opportunities. The historic Bay of Pigs museum is nearby. Afternoon birding or an opportunity to enjoy the beach. Dinner/accommodation in Playa Larga.

### Day 10 ~ June 8 , 2018

### Zapata Peninsula

Early breakfast and departure for birding within **Zapata National Park** and a morning walk along a dry roadway in the swamp near Santo Tomas. This is our best opportunity for *Zapata Wren*, *Zapata Sparrow*, *Red-shouldered Blackbird* and Tawny-shouldered Blackbird and a variety of warblers and other migrants. Lunch and optional birding or leisure time at your beach front bungalows. Farewell dinner at a private restaurant in the village, accommodation in Playa Larga.

### Day 11~ June 9,

### Zapata to Havana, and the U.S.

Breakfast and transfer to Jose Marti International Airport (2 hours) for your return flight to the U.S. Flight times will be determined approximately 6 months prior to departure.

