

CUBA



American Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)

## CUBA

### Coastal Ecosystems and a Christmas Bird Count: A People-to-People Journey to Cuba

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE OCEAN FOUNDATION  
December 13–22, 2014



THE OCEAN FOUNDATION



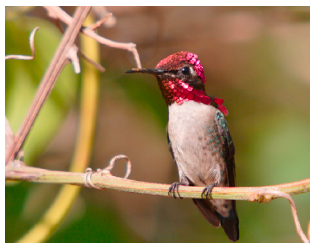
The Ocean Foundation is a marine conservation and research organization dedicated to preserving the world's ocean environments. The Ocean Foundation's Cuba Marine Research and Conservation Program (CMRC) focuses on building bridges between Cuba and the USA through the conservation of our shared marine resources. In pursuit of its mission, CMRC collaborates with initiatives such as the Christmas Bird Count, especially since marine bird populations are so closely connected with ocean health. On this 10-day journey, work with Cuban citizen scientists to help tally birds while learning about Cuba's diverse ecosystems and ongoing conservation efforts. As you engage with community members, gain a more in-depth understanding of this Caribbean island's people and their daily way of life.

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Have encounters with local scientists and naturalists to learn about the island's coastal ecosystems and to discuss ecotourism, sustainability, and conservation efforts that are in place.
- Meet with representatives of the environmental non-profit NGO ProNaturaleza to learn about the program and its initiatives.
- Be a part of helping to establish the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in Cuba and watch for endemic species like the Cuban Trogon, Fernandina's Flicker, and the Bee Hummingbird.
- Engage with local people in an important civic conservation effort.
- Explore Old Havana, including the National Museum of Natural History.
- Attend a special presentation by the Korimacao Community Project and discuss the program with the artists.
- Eat at *paladares*, restaurants in private homes, for the chance to have intimate conversations with Cuban citizens.



Left to right: Orlando Ramírez, Hiram González, Javier Rodríguez, Armando Herrera, Esdrey García. Photo by Robert L. Norton



Bee Hummingbird (*Mellisuga helenae*)  
Photo by Ernesto Reyes

## ITINERARY

### DECEMBER 13 - MIAMI

Individual arrivals in Miami today. Shuttle to hotel. This evening meet Dr. Robert L. Norton, our West Indies Christmas Bird Count (CBC) coordinator. Also meet with Fernando Bretos, The Ocean Foundation's director of Cuba Marine Research and Conservation Program. No meals included on this day. *Overnight at Miami hotel near the airport.*

### DECEMBER 14 - HAVANA

Check in three hours prior to the one-hour flight from Miami to Havana. Upon arrival, transfer to the hotel. Meet the TOF representative who will be traveling with us if different from Fernando Bretos, as well as our Cuban leader, Dr. Hiram González. Dr. González is head of the ornithology department at the Institute of Ecology and Systematics, with a specialty in endangered species, and president of the Cuban Zoological Society. Today we will also meet with a representative of the environmental non-profit NGO ProNaturaleza and learn about the program's marine initiatives. Explore Old Havana, including a visit to the National Museum of Natural History. This evening walk to a local paladar for our welcome dinner. Paladares are restaurants in private homes, providing opportunities for intimate conversations with Cuban citizens. Have dinner with Cuban scientists from ProNaturaleza to learn about Cuban culture and livelihoods from Cuban individuals (Cuban scientists and their families) who will share their stories about living in this vibrant city and working as marine scientists. *Overnight at Ambos Mundos or similar. (LD)*

### DECEMBER 15 - VIÑALES

After breakfast, depart for La Güira National Park in San Diego de los Baños, the general area where the group will conduct the first Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Stop at Las Terrazas, a UNESCO-designated Biosphere Reserve, where target species are the Cuban Grassquit and Olive-capped Warbler. Other notable species of the area include Cuba's national bird, the Toco-ro-ro or Cuban Trogon, and the world's smallest bird, the Bee Hummingbird. Hear a lecture by a Las Terrazas staff biologist about the community's natural resources, followed by a question-and-answer session focusing on eco-tourism and sustainable agriculture in both countries. Meet with community residents who helped save this site that is now a model of sustainability and ecotourism. This afternoon arrive at La Güira National Park, 54,000 acres of mountain wilderness, picturesque valleys, and hidden caves. Continue on to Viñales for overnight. *Overnight at Los Jasmínes. (BLD)*

### DECEMBER 16 - VIÑALES

Have an early breakfast, followed by a morning of counting birds in the Viñales National Park CBC circle. The area is renowned for Cuban Solitaire, our target species, as well as White-crowned and Scaly-naped Pigeons and Red-legged Honeycreeper. There will be opportunities for the Cuban Blackbird, Cuban Green Woodpecker, Greater Antillean Oriole, and Cuban Emerald. Have a Q&A session about the region with Dr. González. Compilation meeting following dinner with local naturalists. *Overnight at Los Jasmínes. (BLD)*

### DECEMBER 17 - PLAYA LARGA

After breakfast transfer to Zapata Peninsula. Located on Cuba's southern coast, the Zapata Swamp is one of the most important estuaries in the Caribbean. Its diversity of ecosystems includes mangrove forests, evergreen coastal and sub-coastal forest, inter-tidal flats, estuarine waters, coastal lagoons, and coral reefs. As such, it is an important refuge for the conservation of biodiversity in Cuba, providing protection for a variety of birds, primarily resident or migratory waterfowl. Two birds, the Zapata Rail and the Zapata Wren, are endemic to the peninsula. Have lunch at a local restaurant with special guests, Zapata area conservationists, who will update us on continuing projects to preserve the wetlands. In the late afternoon, birding in the nearby Sopillar region of the reserve. Dinner at a local paladar. *Overnight at Hotel Playa Larga. (BLD)*

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact Debbie Sturdivant Jordan at 866-748-6146 or email [debbie@holbrooktravel.com](mailto:debbie@holbrooktravel.com), or visit [holbrook.travel/tofcuba](http://holbrook.travel/tofcuba)

### DECEMBER 18 - PLAYA LARGA

After an early breakfast, begin the Las Salinas CBC. In the area's coastal lagoons, flamingos are present among the herons, egrets, ibis, storks, spoonbills and a variety of waterfowl, as well as Cuban crocodiles inhabiting the marshes. Compilation meeting followed by dinner at the hotel. This evening have a special performance by students of the Korimacao Community Project. The Korimacao Project consists of artists from communities all over Cuba who are given the opportunity to develop/improve their performing skills (singing, dancing, and musical instruments) and other art forms. Learn about the development of the program and interact with the talented artists, including a Q&A session between participants and the community. *Overnight at Hotel Playa Larga. (BLD)*

### DECEMBER 19 - VARADERO

After breakfast this morning, leave for the Bermejas CBC site, a popular bird watching area. Endemic species here include the Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Pygmy-Owl, Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Woodpecker, Fernandina's Flicker, and Cuban Grassquit. A mosaic of dry forest, swamp, mangrove, and mudflats, the Zapata Peninsula is one of the largest and best-preserved ecosystems on the island. Birding opportunities include several endemics such as the Cuban Trogon and Cuban Tody. Other species we might encounter are Bare-legged Owl and Blue-headed and Gray-fronted Quail-Doves. Later, transfer to the Peninsula de Hicacos, Matanzas Province and Varahicacos Refuge area. Hear a short lecture by local CBC representative Ernesto Reyes, followed by time for Q&A. Then meet with the CBC group leader to discuss strategies for CBC the following day. *Overnight at Hotel Blau. (BLD)*

### DECEMBER 20 - VARADERO

Following breakfast, conduct Varahicacos Refuge CBC, followed by a compilation meeting. *Overnight at Hotel Blau. (BLD)*

### DECEMBER 21 - HAVANA

Transfer back to Havana. Have a farewell dinner at El Patio Restaurant and a wrap-up session with the TOF representative and members of ProNaturaleza, the Cuban Zoological Society, and/or the naturalist community to review the findings of this initiative and discuss future projects. *Overnight at Ambos Mundos or similar. (BLD)*

### DECEMBER 22 - MIAMI

Depart for the airport and the flight back to Miami. Upon request, Holbrook Travel can assist with hotel arrangements this night in Miami.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED?

Program includes: Miami-Havana-Miami flights; Cuban visa; expert leaders: Cuban ornithologist Hiram González, The Ocean Foundation leader, and Caribbean birding expert Robert L. Norton; bilingual Cuban guide; and all items as indicated in the itinerary such as meals, accommodations, speakers, entrance fees, and group transportation.

Does not include: individual tips, bottled water, departure tax of approximately \$27 USD (25 CUCs), and items of a personal nature.

Please refer to [holbrook.travel/tofcuba](http://holbrook.travel/tofcuba) for program costs.

## THE FINE PRINT

To enroll in this program, a completed application must be submitted to The Ocean Foundation. Additionally, a completed enrollment form and a \$200 deposit are due to Holbrook Travel. Visit [holbrook.travel/tofcuba](http://holbrook.travel/tofcuba) for links to The Ocean Foundation application and to Holbrook's online enrollment form. Once TOF has accepted your application, Holbrook will process your enrollment and advise confirmation.

The \$200 deposit is refundable less a \$100 cancellation fee if cancellations are made before September 9, 2014. Cancellations made after this date are non-refundable. Final payments are due no later than September 9, 2014.

Travel/trip cancellation insurance is strongly recommended. For more information call Travel Insured at 800-243-3174. Holbrook Travel's agency number is 15849.