

Trip Report: Bonaire (Netherlands Antilles)

30th June - 6th July 2007 (David Southall)

Emma and I spent a week-long, action-filled holiday on Bonaire in the Netherlands Antilles. We scuba dived, windsurfed on Lac Bay, mountain biked along the coastal roads and on hilly inland single-track and dirt trails, and casually birded in the mornings.



Yellow-shouldered Parrots

Arriving early in the morning we headed straight up the coast towards Washington Slagbaai National Park, passing landmark dive sites '1000 Steps' and 'Ol Blue', to an elevated spot adjacent to the ancient reef cliffs close to 'Karpata'. Here we had great views of endangered Yellow-shouldered Parrots and the Caribbean race of Brown-throated Parakeets flying overhead and stopping to feed. With views out to sea and the sun shining this made a great start to our week.



Brown-throated Parakeet; Iguana

Each day the dawn chorus at Captain Don's Habitat included more Yellow-shouldered Parrots and Brown-throated Parakeets. In fact, as we travelled around the island, we saw a pleasingly large number of Yellow-shouldered Parrots feasting on fruiting trees in local gardens as well as in their natural xerophytic habitat, sitting atop the *cardón* cacti between Captain Don's and Washington Slagbaai National Park. Although we

saw no new bird species, we also enjoy excellent views of Venezuelan Troupial and Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird and Golden Warblers were everywhere in the coastal scrub vegetation.



Coastal Vegetation; Wild Donkeys in the Harsh, Reef Platform Desert Landscape

We had previously visited Bonaire from Caracas - with complicated logistics despite being only 30 minutes flight away - so the direct, weekly Continental flight from Houston on a large aircraft looked like a real find. Given the simple logistics we even decided to take our mountain bikes so that we could explore some of the trails and get fit on the hills (of which there are NONE within 100 miles of Houston!). Having duly paid the considerable bike transport fee to Continental we were less than impressed to find that our bikes were the only pieces of luggage that did not arrive in Bonaire. Especially considering that most of the diving bags in the baggage delivered were as large as our bike bags and seemed to weigh considerably more. Well, I suppose there was always next week's flight, just as we are about to return home? Wrong. Even more alarming, the bikes were assigned for re-routing via any combination of Miami, Puerto Rico, Jamaica ... and perhaps would be with us in a few days time ... To cut a long story short the bikes finally arrived intact and we were able to do some great evening bike rides, including joining the owner of the local Wellness Centre, Miguel (at Eden Beach Resort) as he showed us some of the hidden and surprisingly challenging trails through the centre of the island.



Mountain Bike Trail; Coastal Road Near to Karpata

The diving, was as usual, excellent, although the water was unseasonably cold (apparently down to 75°F at 50ft) due to strong winds lifting deep waters and consequently visibility was lower than the swimming pool clarity we experienced on our previous visits. A variety of shore dives around the main island was supplemented with boat dives on the island of Klein Bonaire. Highlights included seeing our first sea horses, as well as giant eels, huge tarpon sneaking up on us out of the blue, the amazing variety of fish and corals and snorkelling with Hawksbill turtles.



Sunset Dive at Captains Don's Habitat; Sunset Bike Ride

To complete the activities we spent several happy afternoons (very happy for Emma!) on the water and enjoying the food and drink at the Bonaire Windsurf Place. As expected for this time of year, the wind on Lac Bay was strong and consistent - as was Emma's windsurfing. I finally started to master the foot straps. Next time, Emma will be under pressure from more than the local pros racing across the lagoon (maybe!).



Emma Windsurfing on Lac Bay



Pink Lakes and Salt Mountains at the Salt Works; Lac Bay



Laughing Gulls Heading Upwind; Isolated Desert Trees Bow to the Prevailing Trade Winds



Self-Portrait on Lac Bay