

Trip Report: New Providence and Exuma Cays, The Bahamas
(15th – 18th July, 2015)



A long-weekend vacation with Emma and David M-K on New Providence and various small islands of the Exuma Cays in The Bahamas provided a wonderful introduction to the islands and waters of this beautiful country. On New Providence we celebrated David M-K's birthday and enjoyed a brief visit to The Retreat in Nassau for some forest birding, before flying on to explore the Exuma Cays – where we travelled with binoculars on hand for occasional island scrub and coastal birding. Overall I identified some 33 bird species during the trip (including 1 species endemic to The Bahamas and 6 lifers).



Giant Caribbean Sea Anemone (Condylactis gigantean) [Great Guana Cay]



An endemic and Critically Endangered Exuma Island Iguana [Bitter Guana Cay]



Underwater life [Great Guana Cay]



Mangrove shoot emerging from the seagrass [Great Guana Cay]



Schoolmaster Snapper (juvenile) in the crystal clear water amongst the mangroves [Great Guana Cay]



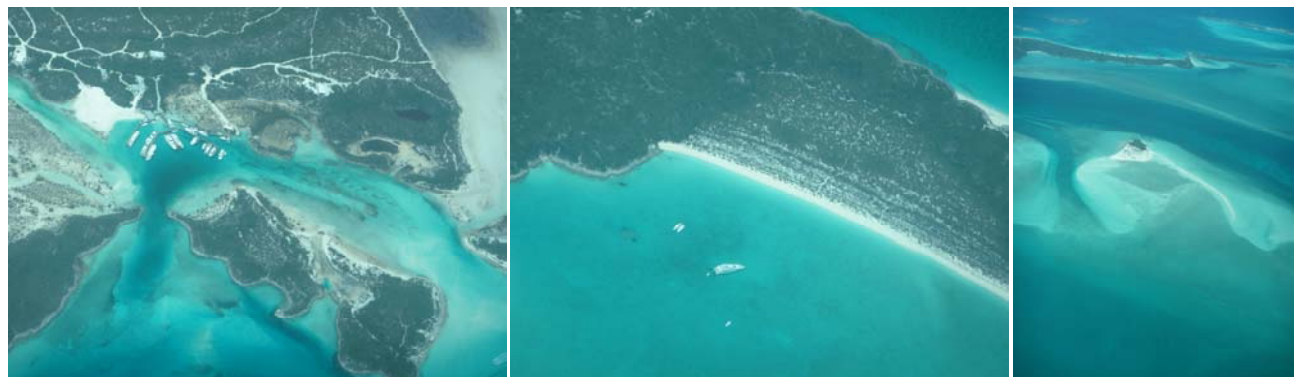
School of mangrove dwelling fish [Great Guana Cay]



Leeward side bay at Black Point [Great Guana Cay]



Oceanside beach at Black Point [Great Guana Cay]



Aerial View of life in the Exuma Cays: Marinas; large boats at secluded beaches; and beaches with no one at all



David M-K and Emma after lunch at 'the' restaurant in the area - Staniel Cay Yacht Club; Ready to enjoy the glorious water at Bitter Guana Cay after seeing the endemic iguanas and lifer Bahama Mockingbird



Sampson Cay

1. Bird Trip List¹

Confirmed personal sightings only for DJS – excludes birds heard only unless otherwise indicated. As field guide we used Raffaele et al's "Birds of the West Indies". Birds in the trip list are identified as per "The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World", Cornell, 2007 with updates through December 2010 (online version 6.5).

Locations where species were seen in the The Bahamas, in order of travel:

NP = New Providence, principally a one hour, late-afternoon visit on July 15th to The Bahamas National Trust's 11 acre "The Retreat" forested property in Nassau, and other incidental birding around Nassau on the evening on July 15th and the early-morning of July 16th.

ExC = Exuma Cays, principally around the small village of Black Point on Great Guana Cay on July 16th, 17th and 18th, and during our boat trip around the Exuma Cays between Great Guana Cay (in the south) and Compass Cay (in the north) on July 16th.

PHAETHONTIFORMES: Phaethontidae

White-tailed Tropicbird, *Phaethon lepturus* [**ExC**]: One seen flying along the shoreline when were snorkelling on the east coast of Great Guana Cay. The following day a pair flew across the bay from Black Point and over our cottage.

PELECANIFORMES: Ardeidae

Reddish Egret, *Egretta rufescens* [**ExC**]: One seen feeding at low tide on the flats in the bay at Black Point.

Green Heron, *Butorides virescens* [**ExC**]: One seen perched on Bitter Guana Cay.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, *Nyctanassa violacea* [**ExC**]: Individuals seen twice around the bay at Black Point.

CHARADRIIFORMES: Charadriidae

Black-bellied Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola* [**ExC**]: Two seen feeding at low tide on the flats in the bay at Black Point.

Wilson's Plover, *Charadrius wilsonia* [**ExC**]: At least one pair seen stalking around small ponds south of Black Point.

Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferous* [**NP**]: One seen in front of our hotel on New Providence as we prepared to depart at dawn to catch our flight to Black Point – a lifer for David M-K as he stepped out of the hotel into the taxi!

CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae

Short-billed Dowitcher, *Limnodromus griseus* [**ExC**]: Four seen feeding at low tide on the flats at Black Point bay.

CHARADRIIFORMES: Laridae

Laughing Gull, *Leucophaeus atricilla* [**NP**; **ExC**]: Numerous.

Brown Noddy, *Anous stolidus* [**ExC**]: A few individuals seen flying over open water during our boat trip in the Exuma Cays. Adults with chicks also seen on the cliffs at Thunderball Grotto, just north of Staniel Cay.

Bridled Tern, *Onychoprion anaethetus* [**ExC**]: One seen at close quarters as it hovered and fished during our return from Staniel Cay towards Great Guana Cay. The ID was heavily debated, but appears to be the best match given both the tail shape and white feathers.

Least Tern, *Sternula antillarum* [**ExC**]: Two seen around the bay at Black Point.

Roseate Tern, *Sterna dougallii* [**ExC**]: Two seen at low tide on the bay at Black Point.

Royal Tern, *Thalasseus maximus* [**ExC**]: One seen perched on the Black Point pier. Others seen flying over open water.

COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae

Rock Pigeon, *Columba livia* [**NP**; **ExC**]: Small numbers in urban areas.

White-crowned Pigeon, *Patagioenas leucocephala* [**ExC**]: Abundant on both Great Guana Cay (where we saw several dozens of these flighty birds that, although listed by the IUCN as Near Threatened, are legally hunted in The Bahamas during part of the year) and Bitter Guana Cay. Also frequently seen during our boat trip as they flew between other cays.

Eurasian Collared-Dove, *Streptopelia decaocto* [**NP**; **ExC**]: Several seen in urban areas.

Common Ground-Dove, *Columbina passerina* [**NP**; **ExC**]: Several seen at The Retreat, with many others seen on various cays.

Caribbean Dove, *Leptotila jamaicensis* [**NP**]: The nominate race is established on New Providence having been introduced from Jamaica. At the Retreat at least two were seen walking quietly on the ground, and others heard calling from trees.

Zenaida Dove, *Zenaida aurita* [**NP**]: A few seen and heard at The Retreat.

Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura* [**NP**; **ExC**]: Several seen in a variety of habitats.

¹ First sighting ever for DJS; **E** = Bahamas endemic species; * = photo available

CUCULIFORMES: Cuculidae

Smooth-billed Ani, *Crotophaga ani* [NP]: Several seen in roadside vegetation around Nassau.

CAPRIMULGIFORMES: Caprimulgidae

Antillean Nighthawk, *Chordeiles gundlachii* : [ExC]: Late-afternoon and early-morning up to three individuals heard calling and seen flying over our cottage above the bay at Black Point.

APODIFORMES: Trochilidae

Bahama Woodstar, *Calliphlox evelynae* [NP; ExC]: Excellent views of male and female pairs at both The Retreat and in a beachside *Casuarina sp.* tree on Great Guana Cay. I had recently seen a Bahama Woodstar of the same subspecies on Provo, Turks and Caicos where they are also found (despite this species being listed as Endemic to The Bahamas in the reference below).

FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae

American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius* [ExC]: One seen perched in front of our cottage above the bay at Black Point.

PASSERIFORMES: Tyrannidae

Gray Kingbird, *Tyrannus dominicensis* [NP; ExC]: Common in all areas visited. All the kingbirds seen are considered to be Gray Kingbirds as we could not confidently identify any as Loggerhead Kingbirds (which would have been a lifer).

PASSERIFORMES: Vireonidae

Thick-billed Vireo, *Vireo crassirostris* [NP; ExC]: One calling individual finally located in the sub-canopy at The Retreat, then another seen at point black range in scrub vegetation near to our cottage above the bay at Black Point.

Black-whiskered Vireo, *Vireo altiloquus* [NP]: One seen tending to a mid-storey nest at The Retreat.

PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae

Red-legged Thrush, *Turdus plumbeus* [NP]: One individual calling from the sub-canopy at The Retreat was finally seen well. A few others heard there went unseen.

PASSERIFORMES: Mimidae

Bahama Mockingbird, *Mimus gundlachii* [ExC]: Only conclusively identified in the Exuma Cays, although likely also heard and seen flying at The Retreat. Larger than the Northern Mockingbird and with different behaviour – on occasion striding along the ground or clambering through low bushes in search of food. In the end we saw around a dozen, including a very confiding singing individual on Bitter Guana Cay.

Northern Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos* [NP; ExC]: Common. Readily distinguished from the Bahama Mockingbird by the white wing patches visible during flight.

PASSERIFORMES: Thraupidae

Bananaquit, *Coereba flaveola* [NP; ExC]: Several seen around Nassau and on the Cays.

Greater Antillean Bullfinch, *Loxigilla violacea* [NP; ExC]: A pair seen very well in The Retreat. A male also seen in scrub vegetation near to our cottage above the bay at Black Point.

Total 33 confirmed species for the trip (including 1 Bahamas endemic - as per Clements 6th Edition Updated 2014 on <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org>), of which 6 were 'lifers' for DJS.

2. Reptile Trip List

Exuma Island Iguana, *Cyclura cyclura figginsi* [NP; ExC] *: We saw about a dozen of these IUCN Red List Critically Endangered iguanas during a visit to Bitter Guana Cay, which is one of six cays where this species is found. There we had the glorious beach all to ourselves (and the iguanas), before enjoying our first swim of the morning. Against best practice some tourists feed the iguanas, but the only food these vegetarians came close to getting from us was when one gently nibbled on my toe!

3. Mammal Trip List

"Swimming Pigs" [ExC] *: We stopped off to see the famous swimming pigs that frolic in the beautiful water around Big Major Cay. These must be the cleanest pigs in the world!