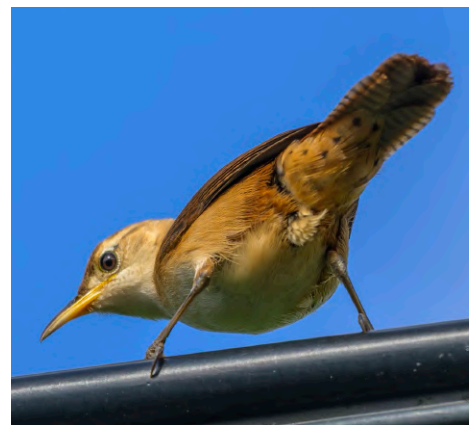


Lesser Antilles Endemics: A 3-Island Classic Dec 2-13, 2025 | Trip Report by Chris Harbard



Naturalist Journeys guide Chris Harbard, local guides Willow (St Lucia), Dr Birdy (Dominica) and Lystra and Pewee (St Vincent) and participants Brian, Kina, Bob, Jane, Michael, Babs, Emily, Lisa, Alison and Thomas.



Tuesday, December 2 Arrival | Balenbouche

Eight of the group had arrived by the afternoon, only Alison and Christina (Kina) were still delayed. For those that arrived early there was a chance to explore Balenbouche a little. The old plantation house is set in grounds that are fabulous for wildlife with a chance to see birds like Mangrove Cuckoo, Green-throated Carib and even Spectacled Thrush. There was time to settle in before Chris outlined the plan for tomorrow and we all enjoyed a lovely dinner and then bedtime.

Wednesday, December 3 Des Cartiers Rainforest | Eau Piquant | Moule á Chique

Breakfast was early, at 6:30, and we all enjoyed delicious bread with eggs, cheese and fruit. Our driver Linus picked us up at 7:30 and we drove up into the mountains and met with our local guide Willow at a road junction which is good for birds. We found several St Lucia Warblers and hoped to see the Lesser Antillean Euphonia and



others. A loud squawk alerted us to a couple of St Lucia Parrots flying by, seen by a few of us. We continued on towards the Des Cartiers Rainforest and from his car, Willow heard a noise and saw fruit scraps by the road. We all stopped and walked back to find we were below a golden apple tree and the scraps indicated that parrots had been, or still were, up there. As we stood looking up, we could hear noises and more pieces of fruit dropped to the ground. Eventually Willow spotted a movement ... it was a parrot, well hidden amongst the vegetation it was difficult to see, even with a scope. Eventually one moved into the open and we all got views, and Bob got some photos. There were six or more parrots there, and some flew off, leaving one behind for us to watch. This was a great start, and these views might be the best we could get as seeing them in the rainforest can be tricky. The trail up into the forest was difficult, with slippery stones and roots. Along the way we could hear St Lucia Warblers singing, but seeing them was difficult, and both Lesser Antillean Flycatcher and Lesser Antillean Pewee were also heard but not seen well. As we had seen parrots already, we turned round before the viewpoint, and headed back to the van. A Rufous-throated Solitaire was heard calling, and one of us saw it briefly near the van.

We drove back down towards the coast to a café, where we ordered wraps for lunch. Just across the road from here was a wetland at Eau Piquant, and we drove there for a quick look before lunch. Willow slowed and stopped just before a small pond and gestured for us to be quiet, and leave the van. As we approached the pond a small duck could be seen at the far end, swimming among the vegetation – it was a Masked Duck. Willow explained that birds had been seen here for the last couple of years, a very rare sighting. We all got nice views of an eclipse male with a bright blue beak, and a couple of females. On the lake there were lots of American Coots, Common Gallinules, Blue-winged Teal, Great and Snowy Egrets and a few Pied-billed Grebes. We ate our lunch and then drove to Vieux Fort, following signs to the Moule á Chique lighthouse. Perched high up on cliffs, the lighthouse is one of the highest lights above sea level in the world and walking from it to look over the cliffs we were in a perfect position to see a most spectacular seabird. Down below a white bird appeared, with an incredibly long, thin tail – a Red-billed Tropicbird. Then more joined it there were six of them, chasing one another and calling. From our high position we could see the twin Pitons, and also get a great view of the airport far below. Soon it was time to head back to Balenbouche, where we enjoyed another wonderful meal from Uta, before doing the bird list and retiring for the night.

Thursday, December 4 Thrasher | Whiptail | Tropicbird

We met for an early breakfast as we had to drive up along the east coast a little way to meet with Willow, getting to our rendezvous just before 8am. Just off the Micoud Highway was a trail which led into the dry thorn forest, habitat for a special bird. Willow warned us to keep to the middle of the trail as venomous Fer-de-lance snakes like to hide in the long vegetation at the edges. St Lucia Warblers were singing, Lesser Antillean Bullfinches flew by and then suddenly Willow pointed ahead of us. To the left of the trail, up on a branch was a thrush-like bird with a bright white front – the St Lucia Thrasher (formerly White-breasted Thrasher), a scarce



island endemic. This was our most hoped for bird here, and with the scope we all got good views. Other birds seen included Lesser Antillean Flycatcher and Pewee, Grey Trembler and Lesser Antillean Saltator. We stopped again further along the highway where we saw two more St Lucia Thrashers as well as several St Lucia Black Finches, another island endemic. At a scenic overlook we could see the fishing town of Dennery. Fishing boats head out every morning from its harbor, heading out to catch all sorts of fish, but hoping for lucrative tuna. We could see Magnificent Frigatebirds lingering in the hope of finding food, and a single Brown Booby was flying near the harbor mouth. From here we headed back south along the coast to the village of Praslin where we stopped for lunch. The restaurant was specially chosen as you could take boats from there across to Praslin Island just offshore.

After lunch we climbed aboard the small boat and headed across the slightly choppy waves. Soon we were all ashore, and almost immediately we spotted our target, not a bird but a St Lucia Whiptail. This good-sized endemic lizard has been wiped out on the mainland by rats and cats, and now only remains on a few offshore islands. As we walked along the trail to the top of the island and round, we saw several more of these lizards, mainly males with their bright blue tails. From here we headed south to Vieux Fort, and followed a trail to some coastal pools. There were Royal Terns fishing offshore, and some flocks of shorebirds, mainly Black-bellied Plovers and Ruddy Turnstones. One small pool had Spotted Sandpiper and Semipalmated Plover feeding at the edge, as well as an immature Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Back to Balenbouche for dinner, checklist and bed.

Friday, December 5 Fond Doux | Volcano | Balenbouche

We had a nice pre-breakfast walk around Balenbouche at 6:30, and Zenaida Dove, Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Spectacled Thrush and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch were seen. Following a leisurely breakfast, Linus picked us up and drove us to Fond Doux for a demonstration of chocolate making. Our guide, Kimbert, took us on a tour of the many plants growing around the resort. He showed us cacao, and gave us a taste of what is inside a pod. We saw many fruiting trees like calabash and breadfruit, all the time looking and listening for birds. We saw Purple-throated Caribs on some of the many flowers, heard a St Lucia Wren singing but despite trying couldn't see it. A Gray Trembler posed beautifully in front of us, and the ever-present Bananquits also appeared.

Kimbert took us to the drying room, where trays of cocoa beans are dried in the sun, then he explained how the husks are separated and prepared for grinding up. We then visited the chocolate lab (not a dog!) where we saw how the ingredients for a familiar type of chocolate bar were refined and mixed, with the final product going into the refrigerator. A bar was prepared for each of us to take with us. We then had a delicious lunch in the restaurant before collecting our now cooled chocolate bars.



It was still early in the afternoon, and rather than head back to Balenbouche, we decided to visit the nearby 'drive-in' volcano at Soufriere. Here, we were given a tour overlooking the bubbling mud pools, with an overwhelming odor of rotten eggs (hydrogen sulphide). We then returned to Balenbouche in time for the owner, Uta, to give us a fascinating tour of the plantation house, as well as a walk around part of the property. Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Green-throated Carib and Brown Pelican were seen. Dinner was followed by the checklist before heading for bed.

Saturday, December 6 Wren | Oriole | Dominica

After our last breakfast, it was time to say goodbye to Balenbouche. We packed our luggage into one vehicle, and most of us got into the second and departed at about 8:00 after a farewell from Uta. We drove up towards Soufriere, stopping at a viewpoint to see Petit Piton. Willow heard a St Lucia Wren singing and so we tried to attract it out, and several got brief views of a small brown bird. A St Lucia Black Finch put in an appearance, along with several St Lucia Warblers. Our journey took us through Soufriere where we saw a group of Shiny Cowbirds in a grassy field. The road out of the town climbed up into the hills and we stopped at Palmiste Road to look for the St Lucia Wren. After some frustrating fleeting glimpses, one bird perched put in a papaya which a few of us saw. Other birds seen included Black-whiskered Vireo, Green-throated Carib and Caribbean Elaenia.

Further along the road we stopped at Bouton Junction and explored down a side road off the highway. Willow explained that occasional St Lucia Amazons fed in a tree there, which might mean Kina could see one. We approached very quietly and just as we got there, we heard a loud squawk and had a fleeting glimpse of a shape flying off ... bye-bye parrot. The same location, Willow explained, could also be good for St Lucia Oriole, the last remaining island endemic we needed. Suddenly he heard one calling, and it appeared in a tree close by, giving us excellent views. While we were watching, a second bird appeared before they moved away. We explored further down the road where another fruiting tree sometimes attracted parrots, but there was nothing there. We did have good views of Gray Trembler and Scaly-breasted Thrasher. Soon it was time to head for lunch at the Beacon restaurant, which provided a great buffet lunch, along with views of the Twin Pitons.

We then headed north towards Castries and the airport. We stopped at a viewpoint over the harbor, where we could see a couple of large cruise ships had docked. Willow explained that the market was closed today, so we would go straight to a cafe opposite the airport where we could buy some dinner, as we would be arriving late in Dominica. We said goodbye to Willow and Linus, and checked in at the airport. The flight to Dominica was fairly short, taking us north and up over Martinique. There were two vans waiting to connect us, one for us and the other for the luggage. The journey was longer than expected due to a large vehicle which had gone off the road and was blocking one side of it. Eventually we arrived at Tamarind Tree and were shown to our rooms.



Sunday, December 7 **River Walk | Whale Watch | Dolphins**

Breakfast was at 7:30 and afterwards there was plenty of time for a walk down to the nearby river before our early lunch. We saw a Smooth-billed Ani and Mangrove Yellow Warbler was new for the trip, a species recently split from the Northern Yellow Warbler. We could hear Caribbean Elaenia calling while a loud song from nearby trees sounded wren-like. Playing a recording soon brought out a Kalinago Wren, the recently elevated species, which was previously a subspecies of the Northern House Wren and is rich a brown color, unlike the paler St Lucia Wren. The trail reached the river where we looked for kingfishers, seeing one Belted Kingfisher, and Green and Little Blue Herons were also seen along the river. An Osprey flew over as we started to walk back.

At 11:30 we had an early lunch and afterwards we were picked up by our driver for the journey south to Roseau where we joined a whale watching trip. We headed out to sea, turning north to reach a likely spot where a hydrophone was lowered into the water to try to detect noises from whales. With nothing detected, the boat continued north. Over the next hour or so there was still nothing picked up and as we continued to search, the captain suddenly saw dolphins, and a small pod of Pantropical Spotted Dolphins started playing next to us, in the bow waves. The captain turned the boat around in a tight circle and they played in the wake we left. It was then time to head back to Roseau where our driver met us and we returned to Tamarind Tree. Soon it was dinner time, followed by the species list and bed.

Monday, December 8 **Amazons | Colihaut | Thrush**

An early start this morning, we were picked up at 6am and brought a packed breakfast with us. Our local guide, known as 'Dr Birdy' took some of us in his car and we drove up to the Syndicat Trail on Morne Diablotin. We ate our breakfast at the information center there, where we also had a brief look at a Blue-headed Hummingbird one of the local endemics. The trail to the lookout point took us through the forest, and while less challenging than the Des Cartiers trail on St Lucia, was still slippery with some were tricky roots crossing the path. We could hear a few parrots but these were the Red-necked Amazons, which were endemic, but were not the main goal for the day. The viewpoint looked out across a thickly wooded valley and we were soon settled there with our scopes ready, hoping to hear and see the incredibly rare and endemic Imperial Amazon. As we waited a small warbler appeared above us, a Black-throated Green Warbler, a rarity on the island. We were all prepared for the rain when it came, with umbrellas and waterproofs. Showers came and went, and eventually Birdy heard an Imperial calling along the valley to the right. We decided to move location to another viewpoint higher up, and waited there, listening. Eventually calls came from the left, perhaps the bird had moved. We heard a second one call ... and then nothing. With the rain looking settled in, we decided to head back to the van to see if it might



clear later. By the center we saw Plumbeous Warbler, a delightful endemic, and also had more views of the Blue-headed Hummingbird.

We headed back down towards the coast and stopped at Molly's Pork Parlour to get some lunch - wonderfully barbecued food was on offer. With it still looking cloudy up in the forest, we decided to look for some other good birds in the nearby Lower Colihaut Valley. Our main goal was the Eastern Red-legged Thrush and we soon heard one calling from a stand of trees. Brief glimpses were had by some but no good views. We continued walking up the trail, stopping at a more open area near the stream. A couple of Red-necked Amazons were perched up in a nearby tree and a couple of birds were feeding in a fruiting palm close to the trail. One of them was a Scaly-breasted Thrasher, which gave good views, and the other revealed itself to be an Eastern Red-legged Thrush before flying off. Luckily, it returned to the palm and posed for us. Other birds seen included Kalinago Wren, Brown Trembler and Plumbeous Warbler. We returned to Tamarind Tree for a short break before dinner. Tomorrow's plan is to start early again and have another try for the Imperial Amazon. At the daily list we heard that those in Birdy's car had seen Lesser Black-backed Gulls by one of the beaches by the road.

Tuesday, December 9 **Euphonia | Indian River**

Another early start with a packed breakfast as we had one more try to see the Imperial Amazon. Back to the Syndicate Trail, this time heading straight for the upper viewpoint as another group was at the lower one. The weather was fine, in contrast to yesterday, but the parrots were not playing ball. The guide from the other group appeared ... they might have glimpsed one, but not all of them. After several hours we decided we should leave and try to find a few other birds on our way to Portsmouth, where we would be having lunch. A stop on the road down from the forest proved worthwhile as there was a fruiting tree which was attracting Scaly-breasted Thrashers and lovely Brown Trembler. Then our hoped-for species arrived, the gorgeous Lesser Antillean Euphonia.

After a fairly short drive to Portsmouth, we stopped at a cafe called 3C's for a delicious lunch and a cold drink. Benjamin Park is just opposite, and we saw our only Bank Swallows skimming the grass there while on nearby wires a pair of Scaly-breasted Munias landed briefly. We headed for the Indian River for a boat ride. Our boatman was Basil and with the boat's quiet electric motor we gently sailed along. He took us off onto a side branch of the river, past a wooden shack which had been constructed on the shore for a Pirates of the Caribbean movie. He explained that the trees along the river with large buttress roots were Dragon's Blood trees because of their bright red sap. We saw many different crabs on the mud, and on one overhanging branch was a large Lesser Antillean Iguana. A Green Heron was perched on the shore and several Common Gallinules were seen among the river vegetation as we sailed along. We went as far as a small bar on the river's edge which served bush rums, and other drinks. Sailing back we saw an Osprey over the river before we disembarked and joined



our van for the drive back to Tamarind Tree. Along the way we slowed down to see the Lesser Black-backed Gulls on the beach near the hotel. Dinner was at 7, and Chris revealed that there had been changes to our flight tomorrow, and we had a later flight to St Vincent, via Barbados, which gave us chance for one more walk in the morning.

Wednesday, December 10 Kingfisher | Wren | St Vincent

After a 7:30 breakfast we once again birded down by the local river. We stopped on the road bridge first and eagle-eyed Bob picked out a kingfisher perched in a overhanging tree but this time it was the big one ... the Ringed Kingfisher (aka King Kongfisher). After good looks through Chris's scope we walked along the trail to the next bridge. This was closer to the kingfisher and again Bob picked it out, getting some fabulous photos as a reward. Walking back towards the hotel we called out the Kalinago Wren at the same place as before and got cracking views plus good photos. There was time for final packing before lunch at 12, and we left for the airport at 1pm.

Check in was slow as every bag was weighed, and some shuffling around of items was needed. Eventually we were all assembled in the small departure lounge. There was no indication of flights or departure times anywhere, only almost incomprehensible announcements. It got close to boarding time and nothing happened then it got close to departure time and there was nobody to talk to. I was reassured by our agent that the flight from Barbados had never left without anyone before, and I kept my finger crossed as we eventually embarked at about the time we should have been arriving. We got to Barbados 30 minutes after our supposed departure time and sure enough the plane had waited. It was a very relieved group which disembarked in St Vincent. We had already ordered our food at the Beachcombers Hotel, and quickly checked in before heading for dinner.

Thursday, December 11 Whistler | Amazons

Breakfast at 7:15, and then our local guides arrived - Lystra and Glenroy aka "Pewee", each in a vehicle, plus a third van. We headed up into the mountains to look for an elusive endemic, the Whistling Warbler. We stopped on the way to look for Lesser Antillean Tanager, and while we did not see one, we got our first look at the special form of the Bananaquit found on Dominica, which is all black! A delightful little bird which behaves and sounds like a normally colored Bananaquit, which is also found on Dominica. We parked by the road and followed a trail which took us into the nearby forest. We saw several Common Black Hawks soaring over the mountainside and a Merlin flew over. Along the way we heard Yellow-bellied Elaenias and saw a Brown Trembler. We reached the warbler spot and watched and listened. Nothing. One had been seen here the week before and it was usually a reliable place, we were told. We worked our way back down the trail and stopped at another spot to look and



listen. A short 'chip' note was different ... both Lystra and Chris heard it and Chris suddenly saw a movement "There ... it's brown" Chris said. And indeed it was. The call note is given by immatures, which are browner than adults, and this bird perched conveniently up on a branch for Bob to quickly grab some shots. It was quite active and we all got views of it, and a possible second bird was also seen. We walked back down the trail with a bounce in our step!! Our trail took us down the road to a spot where we searched for Lesser Antillean Tanager again and on the way. Cocoa Thrush flew across our path and into some trees. Not usually difficult to find, the tanagers remained well hidden although we heard some.

It was early afternoon and so we collected a packed lunch and headed to our next stop, Amazon Nest. This was a guest house on the edge of the forest where St Vincent Amazons can be seen coming to feed before going to roost. The road up into the hills was narrow in places and eventually the van had to stay back and the cars ferried everyone up to the house. We ate our lunch when we got there and sheltered from the rain which had started to fall. Armed with our umbrellas we took a short walk to look for the St Vincent Wren, which we heard but could not see. We did see some distant parrots flying along a ridge. Pewee found some golden apples, the fruits which the parrots like, and he cut them up so we could all try them. Not very sweet but still tasty. Back at the house we waited for more parrots and had some distant scope views of a couple of birds. It was time to leave and the first group got into the cars to be ferried down. Just after they left some parrots arrived in the trees closer to the house and those remaining got reasonable views. Back at the hotel we said goodbye to Lystra and Pewee, as this was our last official birding with them. We ate dinner and did the bird list.

Friday, December 12 Bequia | Boobies | Snorkel

After breakfast we were picked up and taken to the nearby marina, where we met with Captain Mike who was in charge of the boat taking us across the Bequia island in the Grenadines. On the choppy crossing we saw several Red-footed and Brown Boobies, and saw a group of at least 50 of them feeding close by. The boat skirted the edge of the island where some Ruddy Turnstones were spotted on some rocks. We called in at a dive center to rent some snorkeling equipment for the three of us who were venturing into the water. Captain Mike took us along the shoreline and pointed out some interesting properties along the way including one interesting 'open air' rental. Brown Boobies could be seen sitting on some of their edges, easily seen as they were stained white. We reached a small island where we dropped anchor and Kina, Lisa and Emily went snorkeling, while Thomas took a swim. Lots of different fishes were seen, but no turtles, sadly. The island used to be where they processed whales that were caught and we were told that they still caught up to two (humpbacks) every year. At about 1pm we stopped by the famous Jack's Beach Bar for a delicious lunch and then headed back to St Vincent. We met before dinner to go through the list, and then enjoyed a lovely farewell dinner, sharing many favorite memories of the trip.



Saturday, December 13 Wren | Airport

Our last breakfast at Beachcombers. Followed by a last-ditch attempt to see our final two endemics on St Vincent. As we all had late flights out we had several hours to spare in the morning and Pewee, who had agreed to take us out for a couple of hours birding, met us at 8:30. He had arrived early and had already found a St Vincent Wren near the hotel. We followed him along a path to the back of the hotel, his squeaking first attracted some Black-faced Grassquits and then suddenly on the wire above us was the wren!! Paler than the Kalinago, it was white underneath and gave us great views. We then gathered by the road outside the hotel and Pewee flagged down one of the many local buses, which we all boarded. We were taken down to an area known as Brighton Beach and started to explore the mangroves there. There were plenty of birds in the trees but they were difficult to see. Yellow-bellied Elaenias were calling and eventually on perched out above us. A Grenada Flycatcher and a Mangrove Yellow Warbler were also spotted. We then returned to the beach and followed a path up the other side of the mangroves with Pewee finding a Yellow-crowned Night Heron crouched near the water. The path led us through some trees and onto a small road looking down towards the valley. Here we searched for the Lesser Antillean Tanager, our last endemic. A Spectacled Thrush was calling and a Broad-winged Hawk was heard and seen. Despite Pewee's efforts we could not find the tanager and dark clouds which were gathering prompted Pewee to look for shelter, as the rain came down strongly. We were soon back at Beachcombers ready to check out and head for the airport. Lunch was available at the airport, and it was soon time for goodbyes as we separated for our different flights home.

Group at Petit Piton, St Lucia (Chris Harbard - CH), Pantropical Spotted Dolphin (Robert Bedell - RB), St. Vincent Wren (RB), Green-throated Carib (RB), Mangrove Cuckoo (RB), St. Lucia Warbler (RB), St. Lucia Amazon (RB), Purple-throated Carib (CH), Purple-throated Carib (RB), St. Lucia Oriole (RB), Mangrove Yellow Warbler (RB), Pantropical Spotted Dolphin (CH), Blue-headed Hummingbird (RB), Eastern Red-legged Thrush (RB), Tamarind Tree Hotel sunset (Michael Carey - MC), Lesser Antillean Euphonia (RB), Kalinago Wren (RB), St. Vincent Amazon (RB), American Oystercatcher (RB), Royal Tern (RB), Scaly-naped Pigeon (RB), Western Cattle-Egret (RB), Grenada Flycatcher (RB), Magnificent Frigatebird (RB)