BIRDWATCHING FROM THE CRUISE SHIP AZURA: DESTINATION THE LESSER ANTILLES
Kelvin and Jenny Pearce October 2012.

Introduction: This was a family holiday and bird watching was not a priority. I tried to bird watch every day from at least the stateroom’s balcony but must have missed much more than I saw. This trip report is to show that birdwatching can be incorporated into a cruise holiday.

Field Guides: Collins - Bird Guide Britain and Europe, Helm - Birds of the West Indies (Herbert Raffaele et al).

Currency: US Dollars were accepted everywhere.

Guide: We had arranged in advance for Stephen Lesmond, a guide who works for the Forestry Commission, to meet us from the ship in St Lucia. He heads up the White-breasted Thrasher conservation project and knows plenty of reliable sites for them. He knew all the bird calls, had all the endemics staked out and was very friendly and unassuming. As of 2012 his fee for guiding is US$45 per day. If you need him to supply transport it is best to establish exactly what he will provide and costs involved. You can contact him Phone 0017587170798 email stephenlesmond@live.co.uk

Clothing: On the trip to the rain forest in St Lucia, even though it was really hot and humid, we wore walking boots, trousers, long sleeved shirts and hats. We used a high Deet repellent on our hands and neck. The mosquitos were quite bad but we did not get bitten.

Preparation: I had researched, on the internet, Botanical Gardens, Nature Trails, and Trip Reports at ports of call. I then compiled a target list. Here is a diary of sightings and birds are listed in the order seen.


13.10.2012: Bay of Biscay: Cory’s Shearwater, Gannet, strangely no Kittiwakes?

14.10.2012: Bay of Biscay – Atlantic: Cory’s Shearwaters in large numbers. Storm Petrel (2)

15.10.2012: Approaching the Azores: Spent a few hours birding from first light: Balearic Shearwater (first light), Cory’s Shearwater (232), Common Tern, Little Tern, Yellow-legged Gull, 2 Species of Dolphin.


6.10.2012: Transit to the Caribbean: Cory’s Shearwater (2) Dolphin.

17.10.2012: Transit to the Caribbean: No birds seen.

18.10.2012: Transit to the Caribbean: Very surprised to find a Petrel on the

-Cory’s Shearwaters Azores
- Carib Grackle Antigua
balcony below. It never opened its wings fully so I did not see the rump. I reckon it was most likely a Leach’s Storm Petrel and there was at least one more on the ship.

19.10.2012: Transit to the Caribbean: No birds seen but Flying Fish.


21.10.2012: Antigua
An unfamiliar grey warbler flew from the ship to land as we approached Antigua.
Harbour: Magnificent Frigate Bird, Brown Pelican, Wilson’s Plover, Laughing Gull (breeding plumage), Sandwich Tern, Royal Tern, Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Green Heron, White-crowned Pigeon.

22.10.2012: Tortola
Josh Van Dyke: Boat trip to the beach, binoculars not taken: Magnificent Frigate Bird (12 in the air at one time), Great Egret, Brown Booby, Merlin.
J.R. O’Neal Botanical Gardens: ($5 per person Taxi from the docks) Pearly-eyed Thrasher, Bananaquit, Collared Dove, White-winged Dove, Green Heron, Scaly-naped Pigeon.

23.10.2012: St Maarten
Very hot, stayed by the beach and harbour area: American Kestrel, Bananaquit, Black-faced Grassquit, Brown Booby, Magnificent Frigate Bird, Zenaida Dove, Green Heron, Rock Dove.

24.10.2012: St Lucia
Stephen picked us up at 08:15 from the ship. We drove to his easy access Thrasher site and on the way saw; Carib Grackle, Magnificent Frigate Bird, Little Blue Heron, Gray Kingbird, Cattle Egret, Snowy Egret. The site was a very easy walk from the car. He called in a Thrasher within 10 mins: St Lucia Pewee, Black-whiskered Vireo, White-breasted Thrasher, St Lucia Black Finch (F), St Lucia Warbler (heard). We then had a long drive to an area of rainforest where he hoped we would get the rest of the endemics. We parked and after a 40 min uphill walk reached an area above the canopy. We soon heard Parrots calling a long way off, but then they started getting closer and in the end gave superb views: Broad-winged Hawk, Scaly-naped Pigeon, St Lucia Parrot (4), Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Purple-throated Carib, Green-throated Carib, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Caribbean Elaenia, Brown Trembler (2), Scaly-breasted Thrasher, Tropical Mockingbird, Rufous-throated Solitaire (heard often but not seen), St Lucia Oriole (M), St Lucia Warbler, Lesser Antillean Bullfinch.

Stephen wanted to get us a male Black Finch so we returned to the Thrasher site: White-breasted Thrasher (2), St Lucia Black Finch (M), Lesser Antillean Saltator. On our way back to the ship we stopped at a very lively bar, with fabulous views of a beach. After a celebratory drink we returned to our ship by 16:00 for the 17:30 sailing. All birds were seen very well apart from the Solitaire. Considering the late start (due to docking) and the time of year, the 5 Endemics and the near endemic White-breasted Thrasher exceeded my expectations.
25.10.2012: Grenada
It was very hot and we were a bit tired from the previous day so did not go for the Grenada Dove or Kite. Harbour: Little Blue Heron (2), Spotted Sandpiper, Royal Tern, Laughing Gull, Magnificent Frigate Bird, Brown Pelican, Barn Swallow, Rock Dove, Gray-rumped Swift (2 over the harbour). Beach: Bank Swallow (2 at least)

26.10.2012: Barbados: Most of the day was taken up with a submarine trip over a coral reef: Rock Dove, Magnificent Frigate Bird, Carib Grackle.

27.10.2012: Transit to Madeira: Brown Booby (1) Flying fish

28.10.2012: Transit to Madeira: No birds. Lots of flying fish all day. Dolphins

29.10.2012: Transit to Madeira: No birds. No Dolphins. Lots of sea!

30.10.2012: Transit to Madeira: Lots of flying fish and a bird briefly off the bow but unable to see it properly (maybe catching flying fish disturbed by the ship).

31.10.2012: Transit to Madeira: Cory’s Shearwater (5)

01.11.2012: Madeira: Bird watching 07:00 to 13:00 from our balcony as the ship approached land. Very slow to start with but got better and better the closer we get. Cory’s Shearwater (7), Great Shearwater (1 very close), Bulwer’s Petrel (2), Fea’s Petrel (1), then at long range I picked up a black and white Shearwater but was unable to ID it conclusively. Azorean YL Gull (close fly-by), YL Gull, Little Tern (3). Funchal: Atlantic Canary (everywhere), Goldfinch, Lesser-black-backed Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Turnstone, Rock Dove. Plus a feral Muscovy Duck.

02.11.2012: Transit to Southampton
Rain all morning no birds seen. Looked around the exposed decks for stranded birds but saw nothing

03.11.2012: Transit to Southampton
Early morning, we were off the Northern coast of Portugal. I glanced out of the window of our cabin and saw a large brown bird fly past close. I rushed for my bins and was totally shocked to see an Owl flying towards the stern. First reaction, when I composed myself, was SEO but the wings didn’t look right so I went for probable LEO! I searched the stern area for over an hour but did not find it.

04.11.2012: Transit to Southampton
Kittiwake (in large numbers), Bonxie (very close in good light), Cory’s Shearwater (singles and flocks of up to 20 strong flying south), Great Shearwater (2 possibles), Gannet.