

## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

February 13-March 1, 2010 Keith Taylor & Martin Lee

### ITINERARY

Days 1-2: (Feb 13-14) Flight AC8082 leaves Victoria on Sunday, February 13<sup>th</sup> at 21:00 (9 pm), arriving in Vancouver at 21:25 (9:25 pm). Flight AC182 departs Vancouver at 23:25 (11:25 pm) and arrives in Montreal at 7:10 am on Monday February 14<sup>th</sup>. Flight AC1776 departs Montreal 2 hours and 20 minutes later at 9:30 am and arrives at Punta Cana on Monday, February 14<sup>th</sup> at 14:55 (2:55 in the afternoon the same day) Pick up rental at Budget and drive to Paraiso Cano Hondo Eco-lodge for the next three nights. Flight AC191 departs Punta Cana on Feb 28 at 3:15 (15:15), arriving in Toronto at 6:55 pm (18:55). Spend the night at the Hotel Crown Plaza. Direct flight to Victoria leaves Toronto on Tuesday March 1 at 20:35 (8:35 pm), arriving at 22:46 (10:46 pm).

**Sabana Del Mar:** 3 nights: February 14-15-16

**Paraiso Cano Hondo Eco-lodge:** Located just outside Los Haitises Park. <http://www.paraisocanohondo.com> [info@paraisocanohondo.com](mailto:info@paraisocanohondo.com) Tel: (809) 248 5995. Rosanna. [roselman@paraisocanohondo.com](mailto:roselman@paraisocanohondo.com). A night with breakfast is \$90 US for two persons including tax. Two-night booking required for weekends for two persons. Fifteen air-conditioned rooms and restaurant <http://www.paraisocanohondo.com> [info@paraisocanohondo.com](mailto:info@paraisocanohondo.com) Approximately \$10-15 for dinner. Credit Cards accepted. \$288.00 Cdn for three nights with breakfasts. The non-English-speaking guide, Juan Cespedes, will lead you to the hawk nest at a fee of \$150.00. Juan must be paid in cash. Tel: 696-3710. **Directions:** It is a total of 122 kilometers from Punta Cana Airport to Sabana de la Mar. Higuey to Hato Mayor is 60 kms on paved Highway 4, hence 35 kms to Sabana de la Mar along Highway 103, which is partially rough broken pavement. It should take no longer than 3 hours. The major junctions in Hato Mayor are well signed. The 9-kilometer-long road from Sabana Del Mar to the lodge is unpaved but hard-packed earth with stone and can be driven carefully with a passenger car. Follow Carretera Meila (Highway 4) into downtown Hato Mayor that becomes San Antonio to the junction with Prolongacion Duarte (Highway 103), turning right. There is a sign for the hospital (Grupo Medico Las Mercedes on the right in Sabana Del Mar). Take the first road on left as you enter town that has a highly visible sign for Paraiso Cano Hondo. Hit Birds: Spotted Rail, Ashy-faced Owl; Ridgway's Hawk, White-necked Crow. Ridgway's Hawk breeds from Feb-April when easiest to find but can be located at anytime of year. Found on a one-hour walk along a trail that leads out from behind the lodge through karst limestone hills.

**Barahona:** 6 nights February 17 & 18 and February 22-25

**Hotel Club El Quemaito** <http://www.bboxbbs.ch/home/bamert/durrer/index.htm> [hotelquemaito@edencariba.com](mailto:hotelquemaito@edencariba.com). Contact Knut [knutwilland@hotmail.com](mailto:knutwilland@hotmail.com) Credit cards accepted double \$70 US plus 13% tax with air-conditioning and breakfast, dinner not included; usually around \$13. Situated ten-kilometers south of Barahona. Built on a cliff next to the seaside in a natural palm grove, this hotel has a well-tended garden and swimming pool. Online booking at <http://hotelelquemaito.com/contact-us> no card required. They will pack coffee & breakfast sandwiches for early departures. The Hotel Costa Larimar's restaurant is recommended. Try the El Curro Steak House or Grand Restaurant in Barahona.

**Puerto Escondido:** Feb 19-21

Three nights at the **Villa Barrancoli campsite** in Puerto Escondido. No E-mail or telephone here. Contact: Kate Wallace [katetody@gmail.com](mailto:katetody@gmail.com). Villa Barrancoli is a rustic campsite owned by Kate Wallace who runs Tody Tours <http://www.todytours.com>. It is the ideal place to stay, as it is convenient for listening for Hispanolian Nightjars (heard right in camp) and saves a two-hour drive to Zapoten. The countryside from Duverge (pronounced in Spanish "doo-ver-HEY") to Puerto Escondido is dry forest. You will require 3,500 Pesos to pay for the cabin (\$60 US for three nights) and evening meals at \$10 each if you wish. Buying groceries at the supermercado in Barahona is a better option. Turn right about halfway along Avendia Cassandra Damiron, the main road leading through town. It is just north of the main town square. Ask "Donde este' supermercado por favor".

#### **Directions:**

Take paved Highway 44 ten kms north from Hotel Club El Quemaito to Barahona and continue on Highway 44 another 5-6 kms to the junction with Highway 46, turning left. Duverge is another 50 kilometers on excellent pavement. The fairly decent twelve-kilometer-long gravel road leads from the center of **Duverge** to Puerto Escondido. The road is indistinct; look for two bars on each corner of the road with large green signs advertising 'Presedente', the countries beer. The road has been recently been improved and the drive will take one hour. The total distance from the Hotel Club El Quemaito to the camp is 80 kms.

As you enter **Puerto Escondido** the National Park office is on the first right hand corner, and this is where you buy your entry ticket for 20 Pesos each that is good for the entire stay. Obviously one must acquire the ticket a day before driving up in the dark. To reach Villa Barrancoli you follow the main road through the village. You reach a T intersection quickly, where a right turn takes you up to La Placa and Zapoten, and a left turn leads to Rabo de Gato trail and **Villa Barrancoli** that are signposted at each of two right-hand corners. Follow the signs to Rabo de Gato past the dam and cross three small canals, and the road will take you straight past Villa Barrancoli on your left after exactly 1.5 km. Cabins are available but the tents are more than adequate, with mattresses and sleeping bag being provided, and there

and flushing toilets and showers housed nearby. The tents cost 200 pesos/night (\$5 USD). If you want them to cook for you, they will need to know a few hours in advance, as they will have to go to the village to buy meat and vegetables, and you also have to pay a little for the cook. Rabo de Gato trail is actually a continuation of the dirt road that leads to the camp.

There are signs for various locations in the National Park at the "T-junction" in town. This is the gateway to the Northern Slope **Bahoruco Mountain Range**. It is possible to go all the way to La Placa in a conventional two-wheel drive. A high clearance is definitely needed for the last remaining distance up from that point to Zapoten as the road is very rough in places, but it is possible, though slowly in a two-wheel drive Suzuki Grand Vitara. (Note: A two-wheel Suzuki Vitara is what is available as mid-size high-clearance vehicle from Punta Cana airport). Turn right and you continue through the small town and agricultural areas into thorn and transitional forest, right up the mountain to the high elevation broadleaf and pine forests. Around the town of Puerto Escondido are cultivated fields with patchy woodland, good for White-necked Crows that are seen in the large Cana Palms in this area, easily identified by their distinctive calls. Greater Antillean Orioles, Greater Antillean Grackles, Zenaida Doves, Yellow-and Black-faced Grassquits, Village Weavers, Nutmeg Mannikins, and many other species are found in the vicinity. Also around the cultivated fields (especially the Avocado, Mango, and Papaya plantations west of town) is good for night birding where Northern Potoo, Burrowing Owl, Greater Antillean Nightjar, and Barn Owls are found.

The **Rabo de Gato trail**, a prime wooded area holding the watershed of the Las Damas River, may be the best birding location in the entire island because of its unique characteristics. There is a mix of highland and lowland species, many endemics, and a high bird density. Part of the trail is a private birding sanctuary. This trail can be hiked at your leisure from the lodge. It is also a great staging ground for birding the whole valley and the higher elevations.

Puerto Escondido is the gateway to the higher elevations of the western Sierra de Bahoruco. The approximately fifty-kilometer trek to the highest point can take four hours or more. The road up to the Zapoten sector is rough and a high clearance vehicle is necessary, but not necessarily a four-wheel drive (although recommended). A second spare tire might come in handy. It is a two-hour drive from camp to Zapoten and it is necessary to leave at four-thirty in the morning. Heading west from town, the first location at 10.6 km is called "**La Placa**", called that because of the old National Park sign with a picture of a Bay-breasted Cuckoo. The surrounding thorn and transitional forest is great for many species: Loggerhead Kingbird is quite scarce throughout the country, but fairly common in this area. The road can be driven with a conventional car to this point. The roughest stretch is 14.4 kms in length just past La Placa to Zapoten. A checkpoint is open at La Placa on your return in the afternoon.

Continuing upward on a very rough road you will come to checkpoints at **Aguate** army base at the Haitian border after driving 20.6 km. A guard will remove rocks and logs as you drive up just before dawn. Wake up and check in with the military personnel; explain that you are observing birds ("mirando aves"). Up higher, after numerous switchbacks, you reach the potato market area (about 24 km from Puerto Escondido) this is the prime high-elevation birding area despite the extensive deforestation all around. At exactly 25 kilometers you will reach the pine forest and arrive at **Zapoten** checkpoint at 26.2 kilometers and 1500 meters in elevation where a single log is removed and your park tickets are inspected and returned. The next 0.8 kilometers is the prime area for Le Selle's Thrush and the Western Chat Tanager. Ideally, you would come straight here from the camp, arriving just before dawn. It's about the only time to even have a chance at seeing these two birds. Parking your car at the Zapoten checkpoint and walking up the road to the sign displaying the La Selle Thrush at 26.6 kms is the best option as not to frighten the thrush off the road. The La Selle Thrush is found a few hundred meters below the sign with the image of the bird that reads 'Parque Nacional Sierra de Bohoruco Zapoten Sector'. It is usually looked for at the crack of dawn but can sing as late as nine-thirty am. Other highlights here include Green-tailed Ground-Tanager, Hispaniolan Highland-Tanager, Hispaniolan Quail-Dove, Hispaniolan Spindalis, Bicknell's Thrush (in winter), Antillean Siskin, the endemic subspecies of the Pine Warbler, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Antillean Euphonia, Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Hispaniolan Pewee, Golden Swallow, Antillean Piculet, Hispaniolan Emerald, Greater Antillean Eleania, et cetera.

Most end their journey here; work your way back down slowly after birding around the summit. Stop at wooded clumps, ravines; use the tape for one of the real highlights, the very rare and elusive Bay-breasted Cuckoo, known locally as la "Cúa" because of its call; there is one place dubbed "The Cúa field". It is an overgrown flat field, bordered by steep slopes, where the bird has been seen on numerous occasions.

Another well-known location for Bay-breasted Cuckoo is where the road follows a streambed for one kilometer and is surrounded by small mounds of yellowish coloured stones. This is 15.8 kilometers up from Puerto Escondido.

Some may continue on. Further up the slope (heading mostly west), the road gets really rough (impassable, at times due to wash-outs); but the birding just keeps getting better! In an area called Naranjo, you start getting into more moist broadleaf forest. All along are good spots for Hispaniolan Trogons, Greater Antillean Bullfinches, Hispaniolan Parrots and Parakeets, Antillean Piculets, and so forth.

#### **Barahona/ La Cienaga: February 26**

One night at **Cachote Eco-lodge**, which is 20 kilometers from La Cienaga via a rough unpaved road that requires high clearance but not four-wheel drive. A night will cost approximately twenty dollars US including meals. Contact Martiano Moreta [ecoturismocomunitariocachote@yahoo.com](mailto:ecoturismocomunitariocachote@yahoo.com) Spanish is only spoken at the lodge. Simply drop by to make reservations, as the gate is always open. Cachote is accessible along Highway 44 heading south along the coastal highway from Barahona. The road to Cachote is directly in the center of La Cienaga and is signed on the left. The beginning is obscure and the first two-hundred-meter sector is very

rough but soon improves. It is at least an hour or more until you get to decent broad-leaf highland/cloud forest. There are occasional signs en route, just keep to the right at the few junctions encountered along the way and follow the best road. The Cachote Eco-lodge is about the only thing up there except for a few scattered houses. It's the only reliable site for the Eastern Chat Tanager.

### **Another Birding Option from Pedernales**

After returning down the Alcoa Mining Road, turn left or west towards Pedernales. In town, check in at Mary Federales Pension which is one block to the left and signed for the pension, or head to her restaurant. Turn right at the "telephone" symbol and proceed about four blocks and turn left. If you become disoriented ask the locals. This restaurant offers wonderful seafood and other meals. Call ahead if you want at 809-524-0231 and ask for Mary. You can stay in another hotel, the Costa Caribe Hotel, Fundacipe, or Don Francisco's (809-524-0106). Stay one night in Pedernales in order to cover this slope of the Sierra. Leave at four-thirty in the morning, as it's a long drive. The road heads straight north out of Pedernales, winding up the mountains through ravines, farm land, ridges, et cetera. Once you get up a ways, there are three left turns that must be recognized due to their importance. One is marked with a sign for the National Park approximately ten kilometers from Pedernales, the next one is not marked at all except for a sign about the water project and the left turn goes downhill. This may seem counter-intuitive but this is the correct way to go. The third left is up in the agricultural fields out in the open. About 27 km from Pedernales is an area called "Los Arrollos" where there is an army border post (you are very close to Haitian border right here) and some fragmented habitat, but rich with bird life. Eventually you get up to end of the cultivated fields. Watch for Antillean Nightjars, Northern Potoos, Ashy-faced and Barn Owls along the road before dawn. The road tends to be very rough when you reach the forest area. A few hundred yards after the woods start there is a wide place on the road; park. Then there is a trail on the right, with a tree marked #2050 with red paint. It may be hard to find; just watch closely through the wooded sections where there is good habitat. Walk this trail looking for La Selle Thrush, Western Chat Tanager, Hispanolian Trogon, Rufous-throated Solitaire, Narrow-billed Tody, Hispanolian Highland-Tanager and Green-tailed Ground-Tanager. Playback may facilitate observation. Some of these birds can be seen along the road as well. Many migratory birds are also seen here in mixed flocks. This is a prime location, worth spending the morning.

**Veron:** February 27

One night at **Aparta Hotel Veron** in Veron, which is 20 kilometers from Punta Cana Airport. <http://www.apartahotelveron.com>  
[apartahotelveron@gmail.com](mailto:apartahotelveron@gmail.com) Leave at 8 am on Monday Feb 28 and drive to the airport and drop the vehicle. Flight AC1847 **leaves Punta Cana** at 15:20 (3:20 in the afternoon). Arrives in Toronto at 18:55 the same day.

**Toronto:** April 28.

Overnight at the Crown Plaza, Toronto Airport on Carlton Court that supplies free shuttle service. <http://www.ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/cp/1/en/hotel/yyzca> Less- expensive through <http://www.hotwire.com> at \$71.00.

**MAP** [http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s\\_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=dominican+republic&aq=&sll=37.0625,-95.677068&sspn=32.66491,56.513672&ie=UTF8&hq=&hnear=Dominican+Republic&ll=18.729502,-70.158691&spn=2.439666,3.532104&z=8](http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=dominican+republic&aq=&sll=37.0625,-95.677068&sspn=32.66491,56.513672&ie=UTF8&hq=&hnear=Dominican+Republic&ll=18.729502,-70.158691&spn=2.439666,3.532104&z=8)

### **ENTRY VISA**

A \$10 US entry Visa must be purchased on entering the country in cash. Make sure that you keep the thin blue Customs document, one of two filled, to present at military checks and to return to Customs when leaving the country. Here is no fee to leave the country.

### **CAR RENTAL:**

February 14-28, 2011 with Budget through Expedia.ca. A standard-sized four-wheel drive from Puerto Plata Airport for fourteen days with unlimited mileage cost \$695.00 Cdn plus the third-party liability insurance at \$145.00 or \$840.00. Collision was covered with Martin's AeroGold Infinite Visa Card. Visa phone number is 1-800-465-4653 in case of an accident telephone: 905-403-3338 or 1-866-363-3338.

### **COST IN CANADIAN DOLLARS:**

Note: Our flight was free with Air Miles; Visa \$20; Car Rental High clearance SUV \$840.00; Hotels in Dominican Republic/Toronto \$1,300.00; Camp at Puerto Escondido \$60; Guide \$100; Gas approximately \$320.00; Food for one 14 days \$250.00.

**TOTAL: \$2,890.00**

## **TRIP REPORT February 2011**

**February 13:** Woke at around seven o'clock on the morning of the thirteenth. My wife drove me up to Martins place at five-thirty, arriving at five minutes past six. The fellow traveller was ready despite our ten minutes early arrival. It was discovered at the terminal that the Air Canada website had dropped the plus one day and the date on the last line of the flights so that it appeared that the flight continued onward on the same day. With this discovery, a hotel was required in Toronto on the night of the twenty-eighth with the direct flight to Victoria leaving at eight thirty-five on March first and arriving at ten forty-six. Check-in at Air Canada went smoothly and tickets were received through to Punta Cana. The seven o'clock flight to Vancouver was presented as a replacement to the booked nine o'clock reservation which was accepted gratefully. A letter was written to my wife at nine thirty-five asking her to leave the two keys under some object near

the front door or drop them off at Martins place. The keys were not packed because the original plan was for her to meet us at the airport; she was working nights on March first and therefore could not drive me home.

Martin bought a veggie burger and coffee at Vera's Burgers for six dollars and fifty cents as soon as we arrived in Vancouver at around seven-fifty. The plane was boarded on time. Yours truly slept for about two hours after watching 'Unstoppable' with Denzel Washington. The flight arrived in Montreal at seven-thirty the next morning. Snow and miserable overcast conditions prevailed outside the terminal windows. Two coffees were purchased personally at Boulevard Express at seven fifty-five at a whopping four dollars and ten cents. The change was to use as bus fare that my dear wife had packed in case of an emergency. The airport's Wi-Fi was difficult to connect to but mail was eventually sent from Vera's Burgers.

The connecting flight was boarded at nine o'clock and an hour and a half passed before the jet arrived at the de-icing station. The flight finally departed at eleven o'clock in the morning. This leg was filled with anxiety as the car rental office in Punta Cana closed at five in the evening. A great sci-fi movie was missed as a result. Martin bought an Egg McMuffin like meal on the flight that cost around six dollars with coffee and water. A salesman from Calgary who was attending a conference was seated beside us and asked if we had taken precautions against Malaria and Cholera. We were not concerned about the slight risk of contacting both. He was taken aback when we informed him that we were renting a car and driving across the country, as he believed the country was overflowing with corruption and congested roads. He mentioned that several Argentinians had contracted Cholera in the Dominican Republic through eating uncooked fish and two had died.

**February 14:** The plane landed at ten minutes past four and we managed to clear Customs and reach the Budget rental office at four-thirty. The Customs people took both of our forms that were necessary to leave the country and yours truly managed to secure two while Martin was doing the paperwork. In my opinion he was fleeced by the agent and paid an extra one hundred and forty-five dollars for third-party insurance when it was unnecessary to do so. The Visa agent stated that all insurance could be waived on any type of rental worldwide. The vehicle that we received was an SUV high-clearance Suzuki Vitara.



Two Palmchats, Antillean Palm-Swifts, Gray Kingbirds, and Greater Antillean Grackles were seen in the parking lot prior to starting the grueling trip that started at around five-thirty. We became disoriented from the beginning and asked an English-speaking gentleman how to get to Higuey and he gave excellent directions. He also suggested that the best route was via Highway 104 from Otra Banda through El Cedro and Micha so we took his advice and the road was a disaster. The turn for Highway 106 and Higuey is about two point three kilometers past the first roundabout or four point three kilometers when travelling north from the airport terminal. The sign is small and easily missed and includes only three town names and lacks the highway number. Turn left and proceed across two lanes of traffic; the highway is four-lanes at this point. The next intersection is a T-junction in Otra Banda. Again, there are no signs. Turn left onto Highway 104 that leads directly to Higuey.

Highway 104 from Otra Banda began as multi-pot-holed pavement that passed through just as many small villages. At Miches the pavement gave way to rough hard-packed earth and stone then became good pavement from Magua to Sabana de la Mar. It was ten-twenty when we finally reached Sabana de la Mar. Four and a half hours to drive one hundred and twenty miles.

Northern Mockingbirds and three different unidentified nocturnal birds were seen en route. In comparison, Highway 106 to Otra Banda, then 104 to Higuey, and Highway 4 to Hato Mayor are in excellent condition. Lastly, Highway 103 to Sabana de la Mar is fully paved but has a many potholes while travelling some twenty kilometers over a low range of hills. This stretch is certainly not as horrendous as stated in trip reports but requires slower speeds, braking, and concentration to circumvent the gaps in the pavement. Driving time from Punta Cana to Sabana de la Mar is estimated at three hours.

An Ashy-faced Owl was observed in the powerful beam cast by the new flashlight along the road to Paraiso Cano Hondo as well as a Barn Owl. The Ashy-faced was initially seen in the cars headlights and landed in a tree next to the road where it was still visible for a short period. The vehicle came to a standstill and the call could be heard in he distance. The road had the only sharp right at this point (three or four kilometers from the eco-lodge). The owl was much closer as we reached a slight bend to the left where the tape came into play. The

owl responded and landed in an isolated tree beside the road where every detail was noted. We reached the hotel at ten-fifty pm and a non-English speaking chap handed the key over to us after consulting someone on the phone. Bottled water and two granola bars were served as supper. Tooth brushing was followed with a welcomed shower and a shave. A T-shirt and socks were washed in the shower and a sketchy report was jotted on the iPod until thirteen minutes past midnight. The iPod was plugged in for a charge and yours truly went to bed and fell asleep to the sound of the waterfall outside the room and later the pounding of heavy rain on the roof. Martin had not showered asserting unwisely that washing only removed protective oils from the skin.



**February 15:** The alarm woke us at seven o'clock and we walked the nearby trail through secondary scrub picking up Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo, Hispaniolan Mango, Broad-billed Tody, Hispaniolan Woodpecker, and several female Village Weavers. We were back at the hotel around eight-thirty to find Juan Cespedes waiting for us unexpectedly. The three of us took off after changing my jeans to light pants and gathering the scope. The stroll took us in a northward direction via the stone driveway to the highest of the lodge units perched on a hill. A rather narrow pathway continued from this point over the summit to a gravel road. A gate was opened and the roadway continued downhill and veered right past a pasture with a single disheveled hut, above which were two large sandstone karst hills. Another gate took us past the hut where we began to scan for the hawk above the ridges. It took less than a half hour to walk to the site. We saw little except for a Limpkin and Black-crowned Palm-Tanager in the area. A push through the bush was necessary to reach the vacant nest and I was worried about chiggers, only to find out later that they do not exist on the island. A stream crossing using a narrow log resulted in a scratched forearm.

It was around ten or so when we proceeded to the second area that required a hike up a fairly steep hill that was extremely difficult to crest in the heat of the day. The single path led out on the right from the first site at the north end of the pasture below the right-hand hill. Heavy breathing was likely due more to the high temperatures than the fifteen-minute climb. An adult Ridgway's Hawk was perched about three hundred meters from the trail just over the summit. We carried on downhill past a second disheveled home and continued the unnecessary search in a hanging valley where a grove of Litchi nut trees were growing. Nothing was forthcoming and we managed to communicate to our guide that we were pleased with the views obtained of the rare raptor earlier. At this point, a glass of water and a refreshing shower were priority.

The same hawk was seen again from the homestead as we made our way uphill. A piece of the tripod that was glued on at home was lost somewhere along the trail. The gruelling walk in the hot sun eventually ended back in the welcomed shade of the lodge. We paid the guide one hundred and twenty dollars even though he was asking for one-fifty. Twenty dollars came from my own pocket. Martin was paid twenty-five dollars to cover the food costs thus far, the bottled water purchased at the hotel, and the Entry Visa fee at the airport. I showered and changed my underwear and T-shirt and we sat on a chair in the shade watching birds until lunch at one in the afternoon. The buffet was a mere twelve dollars and sixty cents. The selection was limited. Yours truly selected a delicious pasta dish with red sauce, several pieces of deep-fried chicken, and a tiny bit of cabbage salad. Three tiny cups of coffee and bottled water finished off the so-so meal. Unfortunately the buffet was dissembled before I could help myself to a second helping. The tame White-necked Crow appeared and it actually talked in Spanish. Its ability to speak was quite comical.

A few nearby trails were strolled afterward in the shade and Antillean Piculet and American Kestrel were the rewards. One track began at the concrete-lined stream beside the lodge and headed west and around the limestone karst hills pictured in this trip report. To reach the Ridgway's hawk sites from a different direction, continue around these hills to a wire fence, climb through and proceed across the weedy field to the aforementioned gravel road where the disheveled hut and two large limestone outcrops will be seen.

We were back at the hotel room at three o'clock to visit the toilet and to clean the filth from my face. The autobiography was brought up to date at three twenty-two in the afternoon and we drove off along the seven-kilometer road into Sabana de la Mar to fill the tank and to pick-up a case of bottled water. A single rice field was found en route where the Spotted Rail tape was played in both directions without results. A Killdeer flew overhead. Dusk was approaching at seven-thirty and we drove down to the boat ramp and the mangroves where several Limpkins were giving their usual guttural call; Black-crowned Night-Herons passed by in flight. The nightjar tapes were played without receiving an answer.

The lodge was driven back to where my face was cleaned of sweat once again and afterward both of us ordered beef and onions and vegetables and coffee for supper at ten dollars with free coffee. The beef was thin and tough but nevertheless tasty, the vegetables – carrots, potatoes, and some mystery root veggie - were cooked perfectly. Martin vented about his wife while waiting ten minutes for the brew and

afterward until nine-thirty when we went back to the room. His recurring and frequent questions on the same subjects that had been answered previously were a constant annoyance. It was if he had Alzheimer's or simply wasn't paying attention. The notes were caught up during the next fifteen minutes.

**February 16:** Yours truly woke about six in the morning and lie in bed for a further half hour when a letter was written to my wife and mailed directly. The alarm rang at seven o'clock and we were out birding within fifteen minutes along the same trail as yesterday morning. A Hispanolian Pewee was the only lifer before breakfast and easily identified through its medium length primaries, small size, evenly washed gray breast, lack of eye-ring, limited amount of color on the lower mandible, slightly peaked head, and very narrow white-edged secondary's and tertials. The tail was fairly long for such a small bird but likely in balance with the Pacific-slope Flycatchers. Two different Mangrove Cuckoos were observed and what definitely sounded like a Spotted Rail's tick call coming from a thick marsh beside the trail. The call was listened to while playing with the tape and they were identical. However, many similar sounding insects were heard in the area as well. A single mellow dove call was coming from a visible dove high on the ridge that could only have been some alternate call of a Zenaida.



We were back at the lodge at eight-thirty and our complimentary breakfast was ordered from the pleasant waiter who was able to communicate in English. The crow came to our table while we walked up the driveway to look at a pair of Common Ground-Doves. The bandit was trying to steal my reading glasses and a quick dash to the table was necessary to stop the theft. The unremarkable meal consisted of scrambled eggs, fried salty cheese, dry white bread, ham slices, and coffee. Plenty of bread was always supplied with some being fed to the geese. Martin was talking nonsense as usual about health and a surprised look came on his face when informing him that raw meat had all the vitamins needed but cooking destroyed most of those necessary for good health. After finishing the repast a stroll took us to the trail visited late yesterday afternoon. Two Ridgway's Hawks were circling above us for over a half hour and calling. The call was compared to the tape and exact. The raptors were gray-coloured overall with no visible bands on the tail that showed signs of a very slight reddish wash. The reddish thighs were thought to have been seen on one bird on one occasion. There were definite, narrow windows at the base of primaries. A Piculet song was heard twice but the secretive bird could not be found in the thick foliage and the tape did not draw it in.

We were back at hotel at eleven o'clock where the mud was cleaned off my shoes and a few snapshots were taken of the lodge. A refreshing shower followed and the autobiography was then brought up to date until eleven fifty-four.

The Internet was searched for information on the migratory status of the Red-legged Thrush because it seemed odd that we hadn't seen such a common bird as yet. The birds proved to be resident but declining in numbers. Both of us strolled out to the front desk at twelve-thirty or so and yours truly ordered a plate of spaghetti. Martin declined the meal but both of us welcomed our caffeine fix. The cost was four dollars and ninety cents with the coffee that was always free of charge. We discussed paying the bill with the young fellow at the desk who spoke some English, explaining we would be leaving at three in the morning. He had a copy of the Birds of the Dominican Republic with range maps that we skimmed through and soon realized that the thrush was likely the only species in the area to tick other than rails and nocturnal birds. Soon after we drove over to the boat docks without getting out of the car. A large flock of weavers, all female-plumaged types, and a single male Yellow-faced Grassquit were feeding alongside the road as we drove back to the branch road at kilometer three. The road crossed a deep spot on the river so we stopped and walked along the bank. It was fairly quiet and both of us felt bored for the first time. On the way back Martin was discussing how chickens had no sense of pain because they didn't make axes and evaluation-wise they didn't require pain to keep away from accidental cuts. I simply said nothing. The wandering couple was back at the lodge at two-thirty. Martin went off to the room while yours truly pulled up a chair in the shade and watched Black-crowned Palm-Tanagers and Bananaquits overhead until bringing out the iPod to catch-up on the memoirs until three thirty-seven in the afternoon. It was four in the afternoon when heading back to the room. We managed to get supper early at around six-thirty and finished at seven-fifteen. The same beef and vegetables were ordered again tonight at ten bucks a plate. The side dish was filled with plenty of potatoes and carrots. The bill was paid afterward which came to two hundred and forty-eight dollars or so.

**February 17:** Yours truly woke to the alarm at three o'clock in the dead of night and it was raining cats and dogs. The road to Hato Mayor was reasonably good with less than ten kilometers of non-paved road and broken pavement. If we hadn't followed the fellows suggestion

on the first day we would have avoided the treacherous road and reached the lodge in three hours. The signing for highways was excellent in Hato Mayo and we threaded our way through with no problem. Avenue Charles De Gaulle, the ring road in Santo Domingo was missed due to poor signing and the rental was pulled up at a gas station to get our bearings at six-twenty. Our plan to miss early morning traffic brought us into town during rush hour and driving was chaotic. Even though no one spoke English we found our location on the map and carried on. Crossing the main bridge, Puente Duarte, was problematic but it was eventually accomplished only to find that the chosen route, Avenue Duarte, was one way against us. \*\*An alternative route along Avenues Twenty-seven De Febrero, San Martin, Maximo Gomez, Nicolas De Ovando, Jose Ortega Y Gasset, and lastly Paseo De Los Reyes Catolicos were selected and the vehicle was resting in the Zoological Park at eight o'clock in the morning. The gates were to open at nine o'clock but Martin paid the four-dollar entrance fee at eight-thirty. The West Indian Whistling-Ducks were found immediately, possibly as many as fifty individuals that could fly with only one carrying a band. The camera refused to retract the lens and even later on would not work with a new set of batteries. The small network of roads in the park was strolled around finding nothing new until departing at around nine-forty in the morning. The drive out of the city was less complicated and Highway Two was found with one U-turn. A toll of forty Pesos was paid to work our way through a few towns until reaching an excellent four-lane highway. This soon deteriorated to the usual roadway in the country but a really great two-lane appeared and carried through to the Hotel Club El Quemaito, which was reached at around three in the afternoon, a five hour-drive from Santo Domingo that could have been reduced to three if Martin drove faster and the journey began at the large roundabout on Avenue Twenty-seven De Febrero where Highway Six begins. \*\*In hindsight, Avenue of the Americas would have been traced to Ave. 27 De Febrero, hence north on Jose Ortega Y Gasset.

The check-in was easy as the chef was European and spoke English. He informed us that the road to Pedernales was fairly good and it would take less than two hours to drive to the Alcoa Road. A shower and change of shirt and we seated ourselves in the restaurant. A pitcher of excellent coffee was delivered and we ordered lunch. The ravioli was chosen both for the price and because it was a personal favourite. Unfortunately it was covered in a cream sauce and not the traditional tomato but eaten anyway. The iPod was brought out to write the day's story between four and four twenty-one in the afternoon. There was no Wi-Fi in the room but it was available in the dining room.



**February 18:** Both of us were awake at four in the morning because we fell asleep around nine o'clock last night. We decided to take off an hour early to look for night birds along the way. The guard was not at the gate to let us out due to our last minute decision to leave early. He was located quickly and we were on our way. The highway was in terrific shape and the one hundred-kilometer journey was completed in three hours because of Martin's tediously slow driving. The short dirt road leading to our destination, exactly eleven kilometers from Pedernales was found easily. A sharp left turn in dogleg fashion brought us to the wide paved road. A Burrowing Owl flushed from the side of Highway Forty-four shortly before and was seen with use of the extremely efficient spotlight.

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The turn off for the Alcoa Mining Road from Highway Forty-four is just past the well-signed Cabo Rojo Intersection, exactly one hundred kilometers from the Hotel Club Quemaito. A bridge carries you over the Alcoa Road to a point just short of the kilometer eleven sign. Just after you cross over the bridge, turn sharply left onto a dirt road that takes you down in the opposite direction and back to the Alcoa Road about two-tenths of a kilometer away. Turn left and drive up into the Sierra de Bahoruco. The Alcoa road is amazing. It's a four lane wide paved road with virtually no other traffic. The drive to the famous

'La Charca' concrete-lined pool at kilometer twenty-eight of the Alcoa Road at an elevation of 1300 meters will take ninety minutes from the Hotel Club Quemaito, all on excellent paved road. Most of the specialties are found here as well with the Hispaniolian Crossbill the prime target. The pines grow at a lower elevation here. This is the place to begin 'ticking' as there are then fewer birds to search for along the rough road to Zapoten. The Alcoa Road continues on to the Park Visitors Center about eight kilometers away. The road becomes broken on the last stretch but easily driven with an ordinary passenger car.

The National Parks department is improving the area and has erected a few signs and has constructed a gate where fees were to be collected but it remains vacant at this time. At the sharp hairpin curve about where you start to see pine trees, stop to look for Western Chat Tanagers, Scaly-naped Pigeons, Antillean Euphonias, Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoos, Hispaniolan Pewee, etc. About 500 meters ahead where the road curves back to the right and goes straight again, look for Antillean Piculet, Hispaniolan Emerald, quail-doves, and Hispaniolan Parakeets. Continue up until about kilometer twenty-eight to the Aceitellar pool and

pull in to the right. At the pool and surrounding pine forests, look for Narrow-billed Tody, a common mid-to high elevation endemic, Plain Pigeon, Hispaniolan Crossbill, Golden Swallow, Pine Warbler, Palm Crow, Black-crowed Palm-Tanager, Hispaniolan Parrot, Hispaniolan Parakeet, Antillean Siskin, et cetera. This spot is worth spending the afternoon. Before dusk, birds gather to drink at the pool. Before dark, head back down the mountain, looking for Antillean Nighthawks and Nightjars, Least Poorwills, and where there are steep banks, look for Burrowing Owls. If you are very brave, stay up in the mountains after dark to look for Stygian Owls - very tough to find though.

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Red-legged Thrushes flushed from the edge of the Alcoa Road and the eyes of a Hispaniolan Nightjar were finally seen about twelve miles up the unbelievable four-lane abandoned mining road. The car was pulled to the side of the road and the nightjar was calling repeatedly. The tape drew the bird to the opposite side where it landed in a small tree. It was caught in the flashlight beam as it flew back to its original location. It continued to sing but I was unable to see it even from a footpath that lead under the trees. We carried on to 'La Charca' where the vehicle came to rest beside the cement-lined pool. The heavy fleece was necessary in the cool heights especially at dawn. There were few birds in the area and those in the tops of the pines were difficult to see. The four ham and cheese sandwiches and two hard-boiled eggs were polished off quickly as well as the last drops of coffee. The request for six sandwiches was not followed with four being packed with four hard-boiled eggs.



Alcoa Road



La Charca



La Charca pool

Individuals of several species were soon placed on the growing list. The endemic subspecies of Pine Warbler were singing in a few spots but impossible to see. Two Hispaniolan Parrots landed on a nearby snag, followed by a flyover Plain Pigeon that was close enough to see the overall pale buff-gray plumage and light Rufescent bar across the wings. The now easily recognized song of the Antillean Piculet was heard followed by a Narrow-billed Tody with its black-tipped lower mandible and what appeared to be a paler Granny Apple green plumage. Martin found a Prairie Warbler, a lifer for himself as well as a Hispaniolan Euphonia and Antillean Emerald that were missed while still attempting to observe a Pine Warbler. However, the so-called song of the Euphonia was recognized instantly but my knowledge of the call was doubted and the bird was looked for elsewhere.

The area seemed unproductive and there were no Hispaniolan Crossbills around so we descended to the twenty-six kilometer post where an old mining track was followed through the pine forest. Two Hispaniolan Parakeets were observed at close range here. The track was relatively unproductive so we decided to try another habitat further downhill. Martin saw a group of pigeons flush from the trees next to the road so we bailed out to see several Scaly-napped Pigeons fly past. The obvious very dark purplish-gray plumage that covered the entire bird was observed but not the reddish hindneck. The intensity of colour was enough to count this species. Several more were observed through the day in the same manner. Those that landed nearby would take flight as soon as they saw us. A Hispaniolan Trogon was heard at this point and the tape was deployed and the bird drew ever nearer and eventually settled in the pines about one hundred yards away where excellent views were obtained as it continued to sing. A raptor-like bird was seen with the naked eye with a long tail that was likely a kestrel.

Another stop took place about three kilometers down the road where a very poor observation was made of a Pine Warbler. The yellow upper breast was all that was seen at a great distance but the song of the species was coming from its direction. A Rufous-throated Solitaire sang a brief song here but was never seen. We carried on to kilometer sixteen or so and discovered a long and excellent trail through the low-stature rain forest. A rooster followed us crowing on occasion.

A second Euphonia was heard but evaded my optics. The edge of the road was much better with poor views of what must have been an immature spindalis and possibly a Black-faced Grassquit. Martin saw his first solitaire while yours truly was able to identify a fly-past Hispaniolan Spindalis due to past experience with the family.

The rental was driven back up to the cement pond where we finished off the hard-boiled eggs. There were plenty of napkins packed with the lunch and my complaining body was satisfied behind a bush while Martin watched the pool. Nothing appeared and a fog and moderately heavy rain set in spoiling our plans to stay till dusk.

The return drive took us slowly downhill beginning at one-forty with one stop along the way. Martin picked up the pace driving back to the hotel, arriving at three-fifty. Yours truly showered and washed the light pants that had become soiled with mud on the lower legs.

The jeans were worn to supper. The chicken satay with stir-fried vegetables and white rice was ordered from the scant menu. The sauce was soya based and delicious. The cost for myself was only thirteen dollars plus coffee, the price of which has not been determined. A direct route from the hotel through Santo Domingo was unearthed on Google maps for the return trip. Simply follow Highway six to the

edge of the city where it becomes Avenue February Seven to the main bridge. Soon after it becomes the Highway of the Americas that soon links with Highway Three.

The room was returned to at about five-forty in the afternoon when the day's story was written while the iPod was charging until seven twenty-two in the evening. Our plans tomorrow include eating breakfast in the hotel at seven o'clock and driving to Lago Enriquillo for Caribbean Coots and Palm Crows. At this point I had forgotten that the itinerary was to move to the camp.

**February 19:** The slight discomfort in my gut lasted through the night with another small diarrhea episode late at night and perhaps a slight fever if not simply due to the room overheating when the air-conditioner shut off as it did on occasion to save power. It was seven in the morning when awaking and partaking in an ordinary morning defecation.

Martin was aroused from a deep sleep at seven-twenty after packing my now dry clothes that had been washed recently including the light pants. Both of us wandered over to the dining room for breakfast and conversed with a couple that lived in Santo Domingo and worked in the American Embassy. The woman was from Oregon and the Spanish fellow was from Miami. The reason for our visit and where we were staying was their main interest. This particular hotel was their favourite on the island. The free breakfast was again outstanding with a large plate of fruit: pineapple, papaya, and watermelon. The usual lightly toasted white bread was wolfed down with two fried eggs and slices of ham and cheese.

The bill came to exactly two hundred dollars with the meals for two nights. The tank was filled in town and we made our way to the Super Mercado in town that the Miami fellow became aware of by speaking to the waitress in Spanish. We had to wait at an intersection for several minutes where two cops were directing traffic. Motorcycles and off-road vehicles were screaming through town as a prelude to a race that would take place up the gravel road to Puerto Escondido.

We bought fifty dollars worth of groceries, which included apples, potato chips, cookies, canned peas and corn, ravioli, peaches, fruit cocktail, et cetera. The first military check was outside Barahona and numerous stops were made at checkpoints returning from the lake. The usual procedure was to look at our Passports and when they saw we were Canadians we were waved through.

The lake came into view alongside the highway just past Duverge where we stopped and found White-cheeked Pintails. A television crew was filming and we were included in the footage. It was discovered later that the road to Puerto Escondido was bypassed by many miles so the drive continued on to Jimini where a right turn was made at the sign for Lago Enriquillo. The first area where the lake reached Highway Forty-six was where the Caribbean Coots were located quickly along with a Hispaniolan Oriole in the palms alongside the road.

The road to Puerto Escondido seemed to be unsigned and we asked a couple of locals for directions. Realizing that we did not understand, a skinny fellow jumped in back seat and directed us to the starting off point. However, about half way though the town of Duverge, there is a yellow and green "Parques Nacionales" sign on the right side of the road indicating "Sierra de Bahoruco". Turn left on the paved road that is sandwiched between two pubs with large green signs advertising 'Presedente', the countries beer. The city street soon became excellent gravel that climbed steadily upward for twelve kilometers to Puerto Escondido at one thousand and ninety meters. The landscape en route was barren, although Broad-billed Todies, Green-tailed Ground-Tanagers, Flat-billed Vireos, Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoos and other species can be seen in wooded areas. Also there are Burrowing Owl holes along this road. The motocross vehicles were run into once again. The park passes were purchased from an official standing outside the office and enjoying the motocross crowd that stopped there for lunch. It cost three hundred Pesos for six tickets due to my paranoia that two were required each day when two would have sufficed.

The campsite was found easily along a dirt road that is in point of fact the Rabo de Gato trail. Turn left at the T-junction after passing through town and follow the signs exactly one point five kilometers to Villa Barrancoli. En route you will bypass a dam and make two right turns and pass over a few small concrete water channels. The attendant showed us the cabin, two flush-toilets, and two cold showers. An apple and eight biscuits were eaten while exploring the campground.

The first step after settling in was to stroll along the Rabo de Gato trail past camp where we soon found two Antillean Emeralds, a Key West Quail-Dove, a Vervain Hummingbird and more of the expected species. It was four-thirty when we arrived back at the cabin. The toilet came into play again and my gut was back to normal. A shower was taken without soap or towel and felt great. A noisy party was taking place along the riverbank, some fifty locals yelling at the top of their lungs. They moved off at six-twenty in the evening but could still be heard off in the distance. The day's memoirs were written between five-thirty and six forty-eight and it was now fairly dark. Fortunately the cooks did not appear.

**February 20:** Loud music persisted until after midnight a mile away in Puerto Escondido but yours truly slept like a baby in any case. The door was opened several times through the night to urinate due to the cold temperatures before putting on a heavy shirt and fleece and finally jeans. A wool sleeping bag was supplied but not adequate to keep out the cold. The alarm woke us at four-thirty in the morning and we were soon off to the La Selle Thrush site with the vehicles headlights cutting through the remaining hours of darkness. The first 12.2 kilometers were in good enough shape that an ordinary sedan could drive the stretch at slow speeds. A large park sign with a picture of a Bay-breasted Cuckoo was situated at the 10.6 kilometer point at a brightly blue painted building, the "La Placa" checkpoint for entering the park. There was no one there so we continued onward. The road became much worse soon after but no worse than the road driven into California Gulch to see the Buff-collared Nightjar in Arizona. There were ten or more areas that were very rough indeed. After driving twenty kilometers I was becoming nervous that were not on the right road.

Several buildings appeared out of the darkened night and then a barrier of logs and large stones and I breathed a sigh of relief. This was the Haitian border checkpoint known as "Aguacate". The horn was honked and we yelled to wake up the guards. They removed the barrier, looked at our passports with blurry eyes and waved us on. The next known landmark was the strange potato market, two large blue tar pollens waving in the breeze with sacks of potatoes waiting to be loaded on today's trucks for delivery to the nearby towns. Pine trees appeared at twenty-five kilometers then another building with a single log blocking our way. Two more fellows approached and asked for our park permits, which were handed back. As always a hand was offered for a polite shake. We drove on another eight-tenths of a kilometer to the park sign with the La Selle Thrush. We listened briefly and played the tape with no response. For some strange reason, the idea came to me that this was not the location and we took off downhill to the pine trees and parked. Two packages of cookies served as breakfast. A Green-tailed Ground-Tanager was spotted quickly and it responded to the tape and sang only a few feet away, obviously the same species. The demarcation between the blue-gray head and white breast was no more apparent than on the two birds seen later that day in dry forest along the Rabo de Gata Trail.

A slow walk took place uphill where two Pine Warblers were seen extremely well, one with virtually no markings on the sides of the breast, the other looking like a typical male in North America.

The walk continued back to the thrush sign, reaching that point at around eight forty-five and then proceeded on past but no thrush sang. Martin got a brief look at a Western Chat-Tanager. The tape was played and I heard what must have been an annoyance call but saw nothing. We continued about a quarter kilometer beyond the sign and turned back. A Golden Swallow circled overhead at some three to four hundred feet above our heads. The brilliant white belly and throat contrasting with the black underwings and short, black forked tail certainly separated this species from any migrant. The wings were shorter than those on a Tree Swallow. The green-gold flash of colour showed nicely on its upper back on one occasion. Again nothing was heard at around nine-fifteen. Martin decided to drive back down at nine forty-five when there were still other species to be found like Hispaniolan Highland-Tanagers, Antillean Siskins, and possibly even the thrush itself.

Our next stop was at "La Placa" where the now awake guards asked to see the park permits. A can of Vienna sausages was opened for a snack with one given to the guard. We strolled down the track in search of a Bay-breasted Cuckoo but were satisfied with excellent looks at two Flat-billed Vireos that came within ten feet after playing the tape. Even the light-colored eye was seen.

Perhaps an hour was spent here and we were back at the cabin at twelve-fifty. I went straight to the washroom after plugging in the iPod and spotlight for charging. A semi-shower followed. The attendants were paid a visit after eating a can of peaches and another package of cookies. The lady showed me how to boil our bottled water for coffee. Martin was invited over and drank two cups to my one.

The temperature was cooling off slightly and both of us had recuperated at around two-thirty in the afternoon. The same length of the Rabo de Gata trail was walked at a slow pace. A small dark pigeon flew off the road a fair distance ahead and I suggested that we walk up very slowly and carefully. Three Hispaniolan Quail-Doves were seen briefly right beside the road. Proceeding onward, two Green-tailed Ground-

Tanagers were found that seemed to have duller gray breasts than those seen previously. They were not singing and ignored the playback. The dove site was scanned from a distance on the way back and a single individual was seen a long way down the track. Both of us managed to get to within a hundred meters of the bird where its buff-orange undertail covers and purplish and bluish sheen and white forehead were seen well before it caught sight of us and flushed.

Another turn on the toilet was necessary when arriving back at the cabin at around five-twenty in the afternoon. The electricity was shut off at this point in time. Martin asked the old matron to boil water again while yours truly was eating a can of Spaghetti-like pasta from the can. The absent-minded associate was joined afterward for coffee. The gentleman was asked for a can opener to undo a can of green peas only to discover that they were large lentil-like things. The old fellow simply used a large knife to cut the lid. Yours truly ate a small plastic cup of the produce and drank the tasteless juice. The iPod was brought out to type the day's story at around six-thirty and finished in the dark at seven fifty-two. The loud music I town seemed even louder tonight. The flashlight was plugged in again as the power remained on all night.

**February 21:** Yours truly awoke at nine minutes past four and visited the washroom. Martin was awake at four-thirty. A similar night passed with even louder music coming from town. The fact that the bass was subdued over the kilometer made it easy to fall asleep.

The exact same scenario was repeated as yesterday morning except for flushing a small nightjar off the road about three kilometers from Puerto Escondido. The mileages were of concern and recorded. The first was 10.6 kilometers to " La Plata" and the sign with the Bay-breasted Cuckoo, the second was 12.2 kilometers that indicated the end of the better section of road that could be driven with an ordinary car, the third was noted at 15.8 kilometers where a one kilometer plus length of the road follows a riverbed surrounded by small mounds of yellowish coloured stones. A rock cut face begins on the left side of the vehicle after driving 17.8 kilometers from Puerto Escondido that continues for several kilometers, At 18.7 kilometers there is an obvious view across a broad valley that is detectable even at night, After driving 20.6 kilometers and one and a half hours you reach the military checkpoint at Aguacate where there is a barrier of logs, barrels and large rocks, The next recognizable location is the potato market around 24 kilometers. Pine forest comes into view at exactly 25 kilometers. A single log barrier blocks the road at Zapoten checkpoint at 25.8 kilometers. It is exactly 26.6 kilometers to the highly visible park sign with a picture of the La Selle Thrush, a two-hour drive. Always park the car with the border guards there if you intend to walk any distance from the vehicle, as break-ins are possible. [http://www.travellingbirder.com/tripreports/reports/100705202134\\_birding\\_trip\\_report.pdf](http://www.travellingbirder.com/tripreports/reports/100705202134_birding_trip_report.pdf)

It was six-forty when we parked the car at the Zapoten checkpoint and began to make our way slowly to the La Selle Thrush area eight-tenths of a kilometer away. We decided to leave the car in case the noise frightened the target. It was known that the thrush sat on the road while it was still quite dark and to glass ahead for silhouettes and wait for the dawn light to increase until the birds could be identified. Three Western Chat-Tanagers were heard singing but it was still too dark to bother looking for them. The sign was reached at the perfect time without hearing a sound. We continued beyond the sign where a dark looking thrush flew over our heads and disappeared down slope. The dark appearance was likely due to silhouette and lighting. Both of us then moved back as slowly again not hearing the thrush. A Greater Antillean Elaenia came into view at close range; close enough to see some of the concealed yellow crest feathering. Two small birds landed at the top of a tree that might have been Antillean Siskins by size and flocking behavior. We reached the spot where the Western Chat-Tanagers were singing earlier and soon got excellent views of the large birds. The tape was successful in drawing out three individuals, all lacking the yellow eye-ring and orange spot on the lores. Martin drove the car to the thrush sign to get the mileages and yours truly gave the thrush one last try while the falconer headed downhill. We met back at the car in a half hour.

The drive was a repeat to the bottom and onward to the camp, reaching it much too early around eleven-thirty. The iPod was not working properly from the point of Martin driving up to the thrush sign to check the mileage. The species selected would not play and it flipped to another song. The idea was that a charge might help as the battery was down to the red line. A shave and mouth cleansing were in order before wolfing down a can of peaches, wieners, potato chips, cookies, and an apple. Meanwhile Martin had the coffee made and I joined him. Martin then had a snooze while I wandered the grounds seeing a few Magnolia Warblers.

We took off for the Bay-breasted Cuckoo trail at three-forty in the afternoon and Martin took the lead. His pace was less than relaxing and it was interrupted frequently to play the tape. Nothing was found for the effort. The drive proceeded back one kilometer towards Puerto Escondido where Martin relaxed in the car while yours truly made another hour's attempt for the cuckoo along a different track. It was six-thirty when I got back and dusk was approaching rapidly. A half hour passed and the tape of the Least Poorwill was played only once with a response. Both of us rushed down the road while there was still enough light to see and realized there were two birds calling. One flew past us and was visible in the available light. Size and lack of large areas of white in the tail was all that was seen. It continued to call but could not be seen in the beam with the thick branches. Three more were heard that would not approach the tape as well as two or three Hispanolian Nightjars for direct comparison. We made two more stops, the last close to town where another was no more than one hundred yards away but would not move.

It was eight-thirty in the evening when we reached camp. A can of ravioli and fruit cocktail were eaten from the can followed with writing the day's adventure from around nine-thirty to ten twenty-five.

**February 22:** Last night was very cold but the town folk were not partying at least. It was six-thirty when waking and the washroom was the first destination. The final belongings were packed and we were off to civilization at seven o'clock.

The first stop was made at the area along Highway Forty-four where the lake abutted the highway. The goal this morning was to find the Palm Crow. Two Plain Pigeons were observed closely in a nearby palm, close enough to see the white eye. Next in line was a cooperative male Caribbean Martin that flew directly overhead. The almost black plumage and snowy white breast, martin shape, and black, short forked tail made this bird unmistakable. The drive proceeded west to a point where the lake was visible but now at a distance of half a kilometer.

Crows were heard as soon as I stepped out of the car and Martin spotted a group of ten flying over a distant ridge. The call was unmistakable but the murder disappeared out of sight. We were somewhat satisfied and made a U-turn for Barahona. Another flock was sitting in the trees directly beside the road and seen without exiting the vehicle. The eyes were dark on this species and the call was quite like the Fish Crow of North America.

Martin stopped at a liquor store in Duverge to buy a litre of booze and I gave him two five hundred Peso notes and subtracted the amount from what was owed.

The tank was down to one-quarter on entering Barahona and a fill-up cost only fifty-five American dollars. It was almost ten o'clock when we reached the driveway to the Hotel Club El Quemaito. A small corner store at this location was paid a visit where four packets of shampoo and a partial case of bottled water were purchased with money from my pocket. It was slightly after ten when we checked in. A welcomed shower was first in line while washing most of my clothes.

When Martin was finished we headed for the dining room where the coffee was waiting for us. The notes of the past three-day's were sent to my dear wife and myself while waiting for the scrambled eggs, ham, cheese, fruit plate, and slightly toasted white bread. A lovely fruit drink made from a large prickly fruit came with the meal that tasted creamy with an undertone of dry, sweet coconut. It's called Guanabana. It was about eleven o'clock when the meal was finished and Martin took off to the beach while yours truly caught up on the days adventure and searched the Internet on a location and description for the lowland Green-tailed Ground-Tanager type. E-mail was sent to the Cachote people asking for information on the road and if pick-up was available. Martiano Moreta is the one to contact at [ecoturismocomunitariocachote@yahoo.com](mailto:ecoturismocomunitariocachote@yahoo.com). The day's notes were done at twelve forty-five in the afternoon while chatting to four Americans from Chicago who found the hotel by accident while driving by.

Returning to the room, the washing was placed in the sun where it dried quickly. Even the jeans had dried by five o'clock. The camera was

working again. It likely stopped working due to humidity, and several shots were taken of our room, the hotel, and grounds. A fellow named Fernando was working in the gardens and spoke English and he said it was twenty kilometers to Cachote and that our vehicle was capable of making the journey. He said that the road was in reasonable shape.

A chair was pulled up outside the suite to pass the time and to review the driving route and times to Higuey. The day's memories were typed in once again.

The two of us took off to look for nightjars and Potoos at around six in the evening. The directions were inadequate to be positive of the first location that was a 'few' kilometers before the checkpoint. The first road that was selected lead through a ramshackle suburb of Barahona but it was deemed unlikely to be the correct site we were looking for. Another road led out directly beside the checkpoint that seemed to be a more productive area and we picked a spot to wait for dusk. At six forty-five in the evening the two nightjars and Potoo recording were played at several points heading back towards the highway. Nothing responded so we drove to kilometer four of Highway Forty-four, a site for Northern Potoo. Again nothing responded so we headed back for supper at seven-forty in the evening. An Argentinean group of eight was seated at a table next to us and each was delivered a plate of lobster and several bottles of wine before we were served. Our meal of Asian chicken satay with stir-fried vegetables at thirteen dollars American was very late coming despite that we were seated some fifteen minutes before them. It was well after nine when it finally arrived.

Tomorrow's breakfast and lunch was secured from the staff when we were finished. We were back in the room around ten in the evening and sleeping soon after. Martin's strange sleeping habits were on target as he was awake at three and had turned on the light to read a book.

**Feb 23:** The morning was a duplicate of the first trip to the Alcoa Road. Dawn was breaking as we headed uphill at seven o'clock. Martin's tediously slow driving was responsible for the unnecessary early rising at four-thirty, which could easily have taken place at five-thirty if he drove faster. The skies were scanned unsuccessfully for Antillean Nighthawks en route. The vehicle was resting beside the cement pond at seven-twenty in the morning. We strolled uphill taking pictures of the conifer-filled scenery watching all the while for the few birds that remained to be ticked. The main goal was the Hispaniolan Crossbill of course and the distinctive call was listened for intently.

The egg sandwiches were wolfed down with the coffee when we got back to the car. Again the staff had packed the incorrect number of sandwiches leaving out two eggs.

The walk then moved in a southward direction where Hispaniolan Parakeets were photographed beside the road. Martin was also using his digital device that lacked the zooming capabilities of the Canon. A pair of 'Hispaniolan' Sharp-shinned Hawks were circling above us followed by two White-collared Swifts.

The cement pond became the object of interest as the crossbills often came to drink mid-morning. It was about nine-thirty when we sat down on the cold, hard surface to wait for the endemics. I grew impatient after a half hour when nothing appeared and walked over to see if the Hispaniolan Euphonia had returned to the same area where the aging falconer had discovered it. No bird of any kind was in the area. Martin appeared at that moment to say that three Antillean Siskins had flown right over his head five minutes after yours truly had departed.

A female Sharpie was bathing in the artificial pond when I returned and viewed through the scope. The cheeks were bright cinnamon, the upper chest was barred with reddish that was widely spaced with thinner barring below. The flanks were washed with cinnamon as well and the lower belly and undertail coverts were white. The overall coloration of the mantle was similar to that on North American Sharp-shinned Hawks. Two Plain Pigeons decided to take off rather than putting down on the edge. A Redtail came to bathe. Hours passed with nothing further so we drove down to kilometer sixteen and walked uphill. An untried trail lead into a deep ravine with a remnant patch of rainforest where several pictures were taken of buttress trees, vine covered rock faces, lichens et cetera. Martin had not followed and was later found sitting in his car. Meanwhile, I had unearthed a farm road and made my way along it where the bird activity was moderate but certainly better than the other areas we explored today.

The pond was returned to again with another long wait before heading up the road to find the campsite and park headquarters. A gate was opened after telling the military personal we were birders. A half hour passed here listening unsuccessfully for crossbills. The guard was asked if there were any other pools other than the one at La Charca. The answer was negative. Lunch was eaten when we got back. Martin ate the packed meal while the canned speghetti-o's and canned peaches were relished personally.

The pool became the sole object of attention as various trip reports mentioned that birds visited the site especially just before dark. Martin fell asleep on occasion or just rested his eyes in total boredom. Yours truly used the last of the toilet paper and napkins supplied with the packed lunch and removed dirt from the windows and front panels and under the fenders with a stick.

Dusk had just arrived at six-thirty when Martin angrily insisted it was time to leave. The birding was uninteresting to him now that there were fewer birds to find. We definitely had a different opinion of how to enjoy birding. The conversation was slightly heated momentarily.

Martin was encouraged to drive faster and we arrived back at the hotel in forty-five minutes at eight-forty. This was half the time of previous trips. We went straight to the dining room and ordered the pasta with tomato sauce and coffee. The Wi-Fi was shut down so Martin's mail to Chrystal would have to wait. The pasta came immediately and mine and half of Martins, who disliked pasta and tomato sauce, was wolfed down enthusiastically. A breakfast time of eight o'clock was set with the chef, likely because of their late night serving us. It was just after ten in the evening when stepping into our lovely room.

A brief sponge bath was followed with catching up on the life's story from around ten-thirty to eleven-forty in the evening while nodding off to sleep on occasion.

**February 24:** Yours truly woke at seven in the morning and walked through the bush surrounding the hotel finding very little except for Mangrove Cuckoos. The gate was climbed when arriving back at the hotel. Martin was just making his way to the dining room at that point in time and I joined him. It was eight o'clock when we sat down and ordered breakfast. The usual meal was put on the table with a juice made from a variety of fruits. The waitress was asked for directions to Cachote with little new information due to language.

Directions were asked for en route and we unknowingly received the wrong mileage. Directions were asked for once again and we had gone seven kilometers past the road. Driving back seven kilometers to La Cienaga, exactly nine point four kilometers from the hotel, we asked once more and discovered that we were directly across from the road. The first sector running from the highway looked dreadful. A sign - Proyecto Consolidacion De La Microempresa Ecoturistica Comuntara De Cachote – was posted beside the highway.

The drive proceeded up about a quarter-kilometer and Martin was unwilling to go further so we parked the car and walked. The road improved immediately and was much better than expected after seeing the beginning stretch. We must have walked seven kilometers or so and gained well over a thousand feet in elevation. The hike was no longer a strain for me but Martin was huffing and puffing. The overcast conditions and lovely breeze cooled the temperature but the humidity was high. Birds were scarce and it was obvious that Martin was not enjoying himself any longer. It was eleven-thirty when we started back downhill. A fellow near the car told us that he was watching the vehicle for us and asked for money. We ignored his request and headed into town to fill the tank.

A shower was in order when arriving back at the hotel at around twelve-thirty. Martin was his lazy self and lay in bed while yours truly headed for the dining room to order lunch. Fernando was contacted to ask about washing the car and he would have everything ready in an hour or so. The shrimp seemed like the best choice but again the spaghetti noodles were smothered in Salsa Blanca. Despite this the meal was wolfed down quickly, again with no ill effects. Perhaps the sauce is made with flour and butter and not cream. The English-speaking chef was in the kitchen and four egg and two ham sandwiches and coffee were ordered for the final trip to the Alcoa Road. He was also asked if he could make arrangements with Cachote Eco-lodge for the night of the twenty-sixth and transportation up at eight in the morning and back to Quemaito at nine am on the twenty-seventh. The telephone was not working and an English-speaking fellow leading an eco-tour there today would speak to the people in charge. The cost was one hundred American for two with meals and transportation with the eco-tour people. The lodge did not offer rides.

The rental was then driven onto the lawn and Fernando helped me wash it thoroughly. The pleasant chap was given a five hundred Peso note to help with his education. A plastic water pipe was unobservable while backing up and snapped off. An apology was imparted to Fernando and the chef. The staff said that it could be easily fixed.

The Eco-tour fellow, Johan Guyot, was talked to personally when the car was resting in the parking lot once again. The same story was repeated and he would give me the news tomorrow around noon. It must have been around two-thirty at that point in time.

The rest of the afternoon was idled away talking to Martin while staring out at the beautiful ocean. The girl finally came to clean the room at four-thirty and we were back in the place at five. The day's story was brought up to date during the next thirty-five minutes.

We were seated at the supper table at around six o'clock and waited to around six-thirty for the chicken kabob to arrive. The sauce was flavored with pineapple and Ginger this evening and very tasty. It was seven twenty-six in the evening when the meal was over. Martin's story about his wife's death and the contention of the Will and his disrespectful Mother-in-Law were unfortunately repeated once more.

Tomorrow's packed breakfast and lunch was picked up before heading for the room. The memoirs were brought up to date at seven thirty-three in the afternoon and sent off.

The exact distance is nine point four kilometers from the Hotel Club Quemaito to La Cienaga and the gravel road leading right to Cachote Eco-lodge. Two stores with brightly colored lettering and a metal sign with Proyecto Consolidacion De La Microempresa De Cachote are used to recognize the beginning of the road. It certainly does not look like a major roadway and the first stretch is somewhat steep and rough, but drive a half-kilometer and the road improves greatly and can easily be driven with two-wheel drive with high clearance.

**February 25:** The same routine took place to the Alcoa Road, arriving at six-forty in the morning. Two sandwiches were eaten and the first coffee of the day was poured into an empty water bottle as we had forgotten to bring glasses. A slow drive then took place uphill until hearing a Green-tailed Ground-Tanager at low elevation to tick if split in the future. The song seemed to be identical but the bird did not respond. The appearance was identical to others we had seen at higher elevations but the "warbler" was possibly a bit smaller. The journey continued uphill at a slow pace with one or two stops when hearing something of interest. The sixteen-kilometer site was attained at eight-forty or so and the red-colored dirt road leading to the homestead was strolled along with very few birds seen. Yours truly continued up the main road while Martin went back to pick up the car. A bird caught my attention high up in a pine tree with a bright orange-yellow breast and black hood with a white patch in its wing. It was an obvious male Hispanolian Euphonia accompanied by a female. The birds flew down to lower branches and disappeared behind the clumps of needles. The next sight of them was when they flew across the road over my head and disappeared entirely. Several birds were observed in the immediate area. Martin drove up and the feeding flock was scanned without seeing anything of interest.

The upward trek proceeded to the cement pond at 'La Charca' where a Plain Pigeon was observed. A half hour passed from nine to nine-thirty with nothing coming to the water hole so we drove up the end of the road and drove back slowly listening for the crossbills with no results.

The vigil at the Aceitellar pool lasted from ten to noon with only one bird appearing; a single Golden Swallow skimmed over the water's surface on one occasion. I was beginning to think that the low water level might have contaminated the supply and that was stopping the birds from drinking.

The wonderfully cool climate and unseen birds were left in the rearview mirror forever at noon. We pulled up to the store at the corner of the driveway to the hotel at two in the afternoon. Martin bought a bottle of rum while the attendant wandered into the back to grab a couple of double-A batteries, likely his own that were previously used. They were dropped into the camera and worked fine. The total was only three dollars and seventy cents American.

We went directly to the dining room after emptying the contents of the car. The chicken-stuffed pasta with tomato sauce and juice and coffee was selected for myself while Martin had coffee and took off to the room to sleep.

Pat had mailed and refused to hide the keys to the condo next to the front door and wanted Martin to drop me off at the hospital to get the keys and drive the Mazda home. A letter was sent back to say that it was a good idea but I would return in the morning to pick her up. The thirty centimeters of snow that had fallen recently at home and temperatures of minus nine were highly unusual for late February.

News was then received that everything was set for the night at Cachote Eco-lodge including meals and transportation at one hundred and ten American in cash for each person. Each of the three girls and the chef were tipped a five hundred Peso note - amounting to almost fourteen dollars American each- after sending and checking the mail.

A necessary visit to the toilet was followed by a welcomed hot shower and finally packing at around three-fifty. The day's memoirs were written while seated in the sitting area next to the dining room until five o'clock. Martin actually came down and played with his iPod Touch and attempted to send his first e-mail. He did not know his own address and was unsuccessful. [Bubo.org](http://Bubo.org) was opened and a few species were added until six-thirty.

Supper seemed ludicrous after such a heavy lunch but a beef dish with mashed potatoes and a few skimpy vegetables was ordered and not too much to bear. The total had climbed to one hundred and six dollars owed to Martin at this point. Supper was done at seven twenty-seven in the evening and we waited for the bill to be tallied for tomorrow's departure at eight o'clock after breakfast.

**February 26:** Sleep was impossible past five in the morning likely due to going to bed early and the anticipation of moving to a new accommodation. The brief time available today and tomorrow morning that was best for observing the Eastern Chat-Tanager was worrisome as well; the secretive bird would only be attracted to the recorded calls on the iPod in the early morning.

Yours truly climbed out of bed at six-twenty in the morning and finished gathering the gear together. The stuff was stored in the car parked outside our door and the vehicle was moved to a spot where it would remain until tomorrow at around ten-thirty.

It was only six-forty when we sat down in the dining room. Martin was actually playing with the notes option on his iPod. It was discovered that the reason for his interest was to mail rude if not incriminating letters to one of his wife's daughters who was causing unrest in the family.

Breakfast was served promptly at seven and we were finished in twenty minutes and awaiting the ride up to Cachote. A few more birds were placed on [bubo.org](http://bubo.org) and the day's memoirs were underway until seven thirty-two when I walked out to our vehicle to wait.

The vigil took place until five past eight when a passenger vehicle arrived with a non-English speaking driver who handed me a note from the Barahona Eco-tour operator Johan Guyot [contact@ecotour-repdom.com](mailto:contact@ecotour-repdom.com) or [johan.guyot@ecotourbarahona.com](mailto:johan.guyot@ecotourbarahona.com). We had to drive eighteen kilometers to Paraiso to pick up the four-wheel drive. The impression was that we would have to drive back to La Cienaga to access the road to Cachote. The English-speaking Frenchman was standing in front of his home and or office and he was informed that we were expecting a four-wheel vehicle to drive us straight to the site so that we could arrive early and begin birding. I insisted that we get a reduction on the bill due to the inconvenience and he reduced the bill to two hundred from two hundred and twenty. As the morning was now wasted, and because several people had said that it would take only six hours to drive to Punta Cana, we decided to leave Cachote at nine o'clock instead of eight to give us two hours to look for the Eastern Chat-Tanager.

It was approximately eight-fifty when the truck appeared with only one seat. Yours truly sat on the spare in the back. It came as a surprise when we drove directly through Paraiso and joined an extremely rough road. The route was indeed four-wheel and after driving across rivers and up exceptionally rough sections we met with the good road coming up from La Cienaga. The thoroughfare was then in excellent condition through to Cachote. The alternative route was twenty-four kilometers while it was only twenty or less from La Cienaga. Why that route was chosen is unknown but it was obvious that we should have driven ourselves, as their road was very good for the entire distance. We arrived at ten minutes to ten, hence two hours of driving instead of the one described.

We passed through a gate signed Bienvenidos Centro De Visitantes Canto Del Jiguero with no mention of Cachote. A sign a quarter kilometer before this had similar wording but it included the word Cachote.

On arrival, the driver was told that we should take the better and shorter route through La Cienaga tomorrow and that he would be paid when he picked us up at that time and not before. He phoned Johan Guyot who said the two routes would take the same time to drive. I argued the fact and relayed that the road to La Cienaga was shorter and in much better shape. He was asking me to pay the driver and I insisted that he would not see any cash until tomorrow morning. We shook hands and he drove off.

A gentleman showed us our rooms that were a pleasant surprise. Rustic maybe and somewhat ill lighted but there was a clean flushing toilet, two triple bunk beds, and a tiled shower with cold running water. The roof was made of corrugated iron with cement and natural wood siding of thin tree trunks. The beds themselves were also constructed of natural wood and not attractive in my opinion.

We threw the suitcases on the bed and took off down the road. Nothing of great interest was found and the hike brought us back to the kitchen in an hour's time. A cup of spicy coffee was downed and the staff had already prepared fried chicken for us. Neither of us was hungry and we told them that we would eat at six.

The sign at the gate was worrisome and everyone present was asked if this was indeed Cachote. The answer was yes and one fellow opened a pamphlet that illustrated the same name by the gate with Cachote in brackets below. The same trail system with walkways made of branches was in the brochure that matched those in the advertisement at the hotel.

The sign was also problematic for a Canadian couple that worked for the Canadian Embassy in Santo Domingo who dropped by to ask for directions. They also thought that they were at the wrong place and we insured them they had reached their destination.

The birding continued soon afterward at ten o'clock. The back of what was surely a chat-tanager was seen briefly in a clump of dead fern. Martin was fortunate to see the head a little later but it kept hidden from myself.

Back at camp, Martin headed to the room as always at only eleven-thirty or so to sleep. I continued birding along a lengthy trail with two short boardwalks. A slow stroll took place with virtually no birds seen. Due to the slow birding, the iPod Touch was brought out to type in a rough copy of my autobiography for the morning from twelve-forty until one-forty. The batteries were already dead in the camera attesting to the amount of prior use they had experienced.

Martin just happened to choose the same trail and walked up behind me. We walked back together to the room where I searched the bag once more for the two spare batteries that were believed to be packed. The iPod was running low so it was plugged into the wall socket.

A stroll took place afterward to the back of the cabins where an indistinct trail was found leading through the forest. An Eastern Chat-Tanager was spotted immediately and seen well enough to see a yellowish spot on the lores. It disappeared rather quickly but the bird was now in the bag.

The day's notes were edited and the story then proceeded. The work began around four o'clock and finished to this point at five-seventeen. The Canadian was playing loud music on his car radio and the electricity in our room was shut off. Hopefully there are blankets available for tonight as none are lying on the bed.

Martin took a few photos of our room and surrounding vegetation. I requested more to be taken so that he could share them with me. The digital device was brought to the ranging fire to snap a few of the group and two were taken personally of the round wooden building used to teach the public about natural history. The warm bed comforters were discovered and two were taken back to our rooms.

Two sorted coffees were partaken of before supper arrived on the table at around seven o'clock. The lights were not operating and as a result the white plastic tables were carried to a point not far from the fire where the flames provided at least some light. The meal consisted of a metal bowl of white rice and a large metal bowl of what could only be described as slop. The watery 'gravy' was disgusting. Large chunks of slightly uncooked potato, corn still on the cob, some sort of orange root vegetable, and pieces of freshly killed chicken floated in the mess. Regardless, the meal was eaten quickly as my craving for food was overwhelming. At chicken at least was fresh and well cooked.

The meal was finished at seven-thirty and yours truly watched the fire for a while until getting bored of the chitchat and went back to the room and grabbed the flashlight. The entrance road was walked to the gate then along the fork to the right. Interestingly this shortly veered to the right again and became the minor road that we had walked earlier where the first chat-tanager was sighted. Cachote is therefore at the end of the better section of road. This was followed for a kilometer without hearing anything but the clicking of insects. Dimly lit fireflies were fun with one picked up off the ground to stare in amazement at the little green light.

The last of today's story was written between eight and eight thirty-eight. An intermittent rain was making music on the roof. Although slightly cool, the blanket supplied was too warm while wearing my fleece.

**February 27:** Yours truly woke at six in the morning due to going to bed so early. The triple bunk was not abandoned until six forty-five when the first light appeared through the skylight. The washroom was paid a visit and the last of the belongings were packed. Martin woke and both of us then wandered along the obscure trail and played the tape at numerous spots with no results. The wind was blowing quite strongly and that was most likely responsible for the low number of birds. The entrance road was strolled to the spot where the ticking notes were heard the previous day and the tape brought one to within a few feet where the yellowish eye-ring was seen clearly.

It was eight-thirty when we arrived back at the complex. The driver had not shown at this point in time and anxiety began to build slightly. Breakfast was served and two cups of coffee and scrambled eggs with onion were wolfed down along with cut up Weiner buns and papaya.

The driver appeared at eight-fifty with a safari-like vehicle. Martin handed over the two hundred American dollars. The phone routine occurred again likely because I asked for a signed receipt. The volume on the cell was too low for me to understand what was being said, especially with the Frenchman's accent but it was loud and clear that we would be motoring directly through La Cienaga to the Hotel Club Quemaito. Both of us were seated in the back as we jerked and wobbled towards the coast.

The bumpy ride only took an hour and fifteen minutes, arriving at the Hotel Club Quemaito at ten-fifteen. Martin was dumb enough to give the driver a five hundred Peso tip. The car was loaded instantly and we said goodbye to two of the girls and headed into town to fill the tank. The store actually sold double-A alkaline batteries and a package of two cost about fifty cents.

Unfortunately we took a wrong corner a kilometer or two after passing the abandoned Barahona Airport where the highway veered right at a cane sugar railway track. The road straight ahead was of better quality and assumed to be the highway. Although it was obvious from lack of signs and some short sections narrowing to one lane, we did not turn around until driving forty kilometers. The round trip of eighty kilometers wasted an hour.

The drive was swift to Santo Domingo after getting back on track. Highway six was left behind at a sign for the city center at two o'clock. A right turn brought us to the beginning of the Twenty-seventh of February Avenue, which was signed Winston Churchill at this point and it appeared as if we were lost again. The road however was four lane and we were heading in the right direction so we carried on. We finally stopped to ask a woman on a street corner and she said we were on Twenty-seventh of February Avenue. A glance up to a street sign confirmed we were on the right road and heading in the proper direction. Not long after we were pulled over by two cops who stated that we had driven through a red light. We both knew for a fact that this had not taken place and they were looking for a bribe. They asked for one hundred and fifty dollars and Martin offered a hundred, which was grabbed immediately. No ticket was written thus confirming the whole scenario was not on the up and up. Personally, I would have said that we were heading for the Santo Domingo Airport with only a Visa card, that all 'dinero' had been spent and got away without losing a hundred bucks.

The drive proceeded over the bridge and we followed the signs for the airport and hence onto Highway Three. The road was four-lane and it didn't take long to reach Higuey. The location of the Hotel Naranjo was asked for as we entered downtown with negative results. One fellow on a motorbike said he knew where the accommodation was located and we followed him to a vacant building. It was a scam and he was looking for money and got none. Martin was complaining about the fact that a certain hotel had to be looked for when many were likely available; he was obviously tired at this point but his negativity and constant complaints were getting on my nerves. We almost got into a serious disagreement but this did not upset me because the trip would end in a matter of hours.



A reasonably nice group of cabanas was spotted outside of town and we drove in and asked the price. A night was thirteen dollars and the room we were shown was aesthetic enough for one evening. We went back to the office to pay and to receive the key and some sort of disagreement commenced. I would not have any of it and stormed off to the car. Martin followed and we continued along the highway towards Punta Cana. A really nice looking hotel was spotted at the village of Veron, some twenty kilometers from the airport. A room at the Aparta Hotel Veron was seventy-one American dollars and there were two huge bedrooms, each with separate bathroom and television. A large living room and kitchenette were also included. The motel had its own restaurant although many towns in this area, including Veron, had a Burger King. One was situated at Higuey where we should have stopped en route but Martin refused to make a simple U-turn.

We booked and showered and yours truly repacked and plugged the iPod in for a charge. The restaurant was to open at seven and we strolled down for a meal. The establishment was closed but a sexy girl who spoke a little English asked what we would like to eat. A menu was handed over to us and beefsteak was chosen to be safe. She said it would cost three hundred Pesos each with a side dish of fried plantains. The dish was ordered and we ordered coffee as well. A tiny demitasse and a large cup with milk for my friend appeared in rather short order. The simple meal however did not arrive at our table after an hour and a half and the girl was informed that we were going to our rooms and they could keep the meal, as we were not paying. Why we didn't drive out the gates to the town's Burger King will always remain a mystery.

The day's autobiography was underway while lying in bed when a heavy knock was heard on the door. The meal was delivered to our room shortly before nine o'clock in the usual metal dishes used in this country. The large amount of food was surprising but the thinly sliced beef and onions were somewhat salty and there were way too many fried plantains, half of which were not eaten. The entire meal could have been prepared personally in twenty minutes even though the plantains were flowered.

The autobiography resumed at nine-fifteen and was finished at nine fifty-two. The weather channel was switched on to discover that snow was predicted in Seattle tomorrow. The channels were flipped through subsequently to find nothing of interest and a night's sleep followed.

**February 28:** Yours truly woke at around six in the morning and Martin turned on the lights at six-twenty. Both of us dressed and delivered the suitcases to the car at six-forty. The "chef" was waiting for his five hundred and twenty-five Pesos and yours truly paid five hundred of the share. The hotel was left in the rear view mirror immediately afterward and the tank was filled at a Shell station down the road where the Burger King was located. The rental pulled up at the airport terminal at seven o'clock; we were expecting the office to open at eight o'clock. A kiosk opened at eight and we had two small coffees each at eighty Pesos.

The information counter opened soon after and we discovered that the car rental office was actually open at nine o'clock not at eight as advertised on the Expedia document. The Avis representative checked the car over for damages and everything was fine.

As there was no Wi-Fi available in the terminal, a brief e-mail was sent to Pat from the rental office computer to inform her that we had arrived safely at the airport. The Avis fellow stated that the police scam had cost a woman, who rented a car from them, two hundred dollars and a regular fine for locals involved a ticket and a thirty-dollar charge, usually paid at the station. This method would of course be a great inconvenience and one might well get lost in the city to follow the proper procedure. I asked if we had informed the crooked cop that we had no cash only Visa if we could have avoided the fine and he thought that would have worked.

The adjacent food outlet was strolled over to where we ordered four thin ham and cheese sandwiches on white bread for breakfast. They were rather bland with no sauce or butter to boost the flavor. The meal cost three hundred Pesos, which came from my pocket.

We returned to the rental office to wait for the Budget agent at nine-thirty where yours truly typed the day's account until seven minutes past ten. One of the Avis agents gave Martin a form to fill to complain to the Tourist Bureau about the police corruption in Santo Domingo. The Budget agent finally arrived at ten-thirty and the final paperwork was completed with the price remaining at the initial quote of eight hundred and forty dollars. The twelve hundred dollar deposit was also returned.

The Air Canada check-in was supposedly open as stated on the board but this seemed not to be the case as the wrong terminal 'A' was publicized. It was eleven o'clock when we returned to the kiosk for another coffee at fifty cents each. The time was actually passing by quickly. A photo was taken of a Greater Antillean Grackle for fun at eleven twenty-six while seated in the patio at the kiosk.

Yours truly asked where Air Canada normally opened at noon and we were lead to adjacent Terminal B. A photograph was taken of us with two beautiful women dressed in native custom. The picture was available at cost next to the Duty free shop and obviously was not purchased. Check-in was to begin in twenty-minutes so we took a seat.

Check-in was smooth but the only ticket received was to Toronto. Only one line was open at Customs and it was twelve-thirty when it was cleared. A spicy salad with minimal lettuce and lots of minced beef and beans was purchased at the Wendy's in the food court. Martin watched the bags and asked for a double cheeseburger. The bill was five hundred and sixty Pesos or fifteen dollars.

We continued on to Terminal 6 and took a seat in air-conditioned comfort where the notes were brought up to date from around one to one-eighteen. Growing restless at two-fourteen, yours truly moved closer to Gate 6 in an attempt to get a view out the window to watch the planes coming and going. The front rows were filled and the nearest seat facing the front was several rows back.

The flight was called early at two-forty with a walk of some six hundred feet across the tarmac to the plane. We were seated at two-fifty. The plane likely departed somewhat early at three-fifteen. 'Date Night' a comedy starring Steve Carol was enjoyed to four-fifty. The flic was hilarious to say the least. The movie following was a highly entertaining gangster show called 'The Town' starring and directed by Ben Affleck that passed the time until seven minutes past six. The beautiful young woman sitting next to me was chatted with during the last ten minutes prior to landing. The plane began its descent into Pearson International at six forty-five, ten minutes early.

The line at Customs was very long but moved surprisingly fast. It took perhaps a half hour to clear. The washroom was priority afterward including using the toilet. A second wait in line was necessary to clear the final check at the point where most travellers had picked up their checked luggage. It was after seven when we stepped out into the freezing Ontario winter temperatures of minus four. A light wind was blowing from the west that made the cold unbearable without the proper clothing. Martin was wearing saddles with no socks and a T-shirt. I at least had my flannel coat over a short-sleeved shirt. Lacking a reservation, the plan was to ask the drivers of several shuttle buses the price of the hotels and select the one with a fee of around one hundred dollars. The first sighted ran to the Crowne Plaza Toronto Airport and the price was one hundred and fifty dollars. Martin was satisfied with the price and we climbed aboard. The coach motored east along the four-o-one for ten minutes and we disembarked with the other passengers. The price of the fancy hotel was actually one hundred and fifty-nine dollars plus tax but the exact fee is unknown.

Our gear was dropped in the room and the notes of the past three-day's were mailed off to Pat and myself. It must have been eight-fifty at this point in time. We stepped outside at nine o'clock to move quickly across an expanse of pavement and parking lots to the adjacent Boston Pizza. A chicken salad was ordered for myself with coffee. Two refills were tossed back while munching on the first real greens in two weeks. The pregnant waitress was asked for a crispy deep apple dish after to celebrate the relatively successful trip. The scoop of ice cream lying on top was given to Martin due to my lactose intolerance the rest of the sinfully sweet cinnamon-flavored dessert was eaten with enthusiasm. My part of the bill came to twenty-one dollars. The retreat to the warm hotel room took place at nine-forty. A few shots were taken of the room prior to writing more of the day's memoirs to ten thirty-seven. The television was switched on to the news that was mainly centered on Libya and it's leader.

**March 1:** A half-day was spent at the Crown Plaza along Carlton Court in Toronto. Waking at seven o'clock, my hair was simply washed in the sink using real shampoo for a change. Coffee was prepared in the room soon after.

Martin's iPod Touch was then given the once-over until eleven minutes past nine. This was due to the fact that he could not send e-mail, likely because of the iPod being registered to my name. The final determination was that he would have to use his own gmail account and not the note option to send mail. Coffee was made in the room during the session.

It was nine-forty when we stepped out into the cold to look for a restaurant for breakfast. All of the establishments were closed so we came back to the hotel to be pleasantly surprised. A buffet that included the price of coffee was just sixteen dollars. Scrambled eggs, French toast, bacon, muffin, two dishes of yogurt, one with orange juice the following with yogurt, and two cups of coffee were consumed during the sitting that lasted to ten-thirty.

The day's autobiography was brought up to date after handing two hundred dollars in American cash to Martin. The actual amount owed for food was one hundred and seventy-five bucks. Various bird reports on Cuba along with sites on the countries road conditions and driving were investigated before settling down to watch television until two o'clock.

The shuttle was full so the Yahoo chat rooms were checked on a genuine computer in a side room of the hotel until two-thirty. The only thing of interest was a Swainson's Hawk seen in Victoria on the twenty-fifth of February. The shuttle pulled up at the airport at two-forty when a gentleman showed us the method to print off a boarding pass, a very simple procedure. Customs was cleared at three o'clock. The baggage was inspected for the second time since leaving home. The Kensington Marketplace near our gate was chosen where Martin went off to buy us a couple of coffees.

The Internet was searched afterward until four fourth-three in the afternoon, looking without success for information on whether credit cards could be used to purchase gas in Cuba.

Despite a large breakfast yours truly was quite hungry at six-twenty. A vegetable mixture with beef and jasmine rice was stir-fried with peanut sauce on a grill and served in a plastic bowl. It was purchased at Zyng Noodlery for ten dollars, which Martin paid.

Seats were selected in front of the television set that was simply repeating the same news over and over were opted for again once the some what reasonable meal was finished. It was five minutes to seven at this point with approximately an hour before boarding. The direct flight to Victoria was scheduled to leave at eight thirty-five.

The Air Canada flight departed more or less on time. The first movie was 'The Social Network' a flic about the creation of Facebook that ended at nine fifty-three. The second choice of the evening was 'Red' with Bruce Willis and John Malkovich, a comedy with plenty of explosions and gunfire. However, yours truly drifted off about half way through and woke when the credits were running and slept again until around ten-twenty. The destination map was then placed on the screen to follow our progress into Victoria. We were running late and the plane finally put down at eleven-seventeen. Lars was waiting and the exchange of drivers took place at Martin's home after telephoning my wife. Martin dropped me off at the hospital at midnight. A wait ensued outside the back door in the freezing cold for ten minutes until receiving the keys from Pat for the car and condo.

Yours truly arrived safely at home at around twelve-fifteen. Everything was thrown out of the bag on the floor and a few things placed in their rightful places. A few almonds were eaten and yours truly climbed into bed at half-past and fell asleep instantly.

Photographs that accompany this trip report are available for viewing at:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/pat.mary.taylor/DominicanRepublic#>

