

Great Abaco, Bahamas
31st March to 5th April 2011
Mike Powell & Louise James

Introduction: The Bahamas are an expensive destination so we decided to undertake a short trip to Great Abaco whilst visiting relatives in Tampa, Florida. The island of Great Abaco with its outlying Cays (Keys) holds most of the Bahama endemics with the exception of the recently split Bahama Oriole *Icterus northropi* which now only occurs on Andros. Several other interesting species are either absent, difficult or I was too early such as Caribbean & Zenaida Doves, Cuban Grassquit (introduced), Shiny Cowbird, Great Lizard Cuckoo, Mangrove Cuckoo & Antillean Nighthawk.

Flights: We booked our 70 minute American Eagle flight (a division of American Airlines) from Miami International to Marsh Harbour through Bahamas Flavour as part of our package. A number of other airlines also fly into Marsh Harbour with for example Continental flying out of Fort Lauderdale & West Palm Beach & Bahamas Air flying out of West Palm Beach.

Car hire/taxis: I hired a Buick Regal for 2 full days from A&P Rentals based at a garage in Marsh Harbour through the hotel at a cost of US\$70 per day. Taxi's are expensive and have a non-negotiable fixed rate tariff. We hired a golf buggy for a day on Green Turtle Cay.

Currency: The Bahama dollar exchange rate is pegged at the same rate as the US dollar with US dollars being accepted everywhere.

Accommodation: We booked our two hotels and flights onto & off Abaco through Bahamas Flavour www.bahamasflavour.co.uk

Field Guide: I only took the paperback version of the Helm Field Guide, Birds of the West Indies by Raffaele, Wiley, Garrido, Keith & Raffaele which was more than adequate.

Trip reports: I found three trip reports on the web that proved useful. These were by Steve Miodinow (January 16th – 22nd 1999), Nick Lethaby (March 26th – April 7th 2007) and Adam Kent & Chris Burney (April 8th -11th 2010).

Maps: Purchased the Abaco Life's Map of the Abacos, published by Abaco Life and Caribe Communications once I arrived at a cost of \$3.00, ISBN 0-9661448-5-6, www.abacolife.com Not a great map but the only half decent one I could find. Accessed maps on the internet for pre-planning.

Daily log.

31st March. We arrived at Marsh Harbour airport at around midday and transferred to the Abaco Beach Resort, Marsh Harbour www.abacobeachresort.com for a three night stay. The afternoon was spent walking around the grounds of the hotel and in the early evening I drove to the northern outskirts of Marsh Harbour. Highlights: Northern Bobwhite (10), White-crowned Pigeon (2), Red-legged Thrush (4), Black & White Warbler, American Redstart (3) & Ovenbird.

01st April. From dawn until breakfast was spent in the pine woods near the airport before heading south along the rather quiet Great Abaco Highway. The rest of the morning was spent at the dump which is situated off the highway c5miles from the airport roundabout then at the White-tailed Tropicbird cliff site at Little Harbour. To view the low cliffs, follow the sandy track around the shore at Little Harbour until you reach a turning circle. Ignore the private sign and continue for a few

hundred yards until you see a small sign for the Lighthouse Trail. Park in one of the few spaces & take the short walk up to the derelict lighthouse from where you can view the cliffs. The period from 7.00 until 08.30 is apparently best. The afternoon and early evening was spent in the Bahama Palm Shores/Long Beach/Crossing Rocks area searching the gardens for Bahama Woodstar. Highlights: **Airport pinewoods**, Cuban Emerald (4), Hairy Woodpecker, Cuban Pewee, Olive-capped Warbler, Pine Warbler (6), Western Spindalis (2). **Dump**, White-cheeked Pintail (3), Least Grebe, American Coot (6), Greater Yellowlegs (2), Spotted Sandpiper, Cuban Pewee, Tree Swallow (2) & Bahama Swallow (3). **Little Harbour**, White-tailed Tropicbird (3). **Bahama Palm Shores**, Merlin, Rose-throated Parrot (45), La Sagra's Flycatcher, Bahama Swallow (6), Olive-capped Warbler, Western Spindalis. **Crossing Rocks/Long Beach**, Rose-throated Parrot 5, Cuban Emerald (4), La Sagra's Flycatcher (2), Thick-billed Vireo (6), Cape May Warbler (3), Bahama Warbler, Prairie Warbler (2) & Painted Bunting.

02nd April. The whole day from dawn was spent in the far south of the island re-visiting most of the sites from the 1st along with Abaco National Park and Sandy Point. Recent fire damage to Abaco NP was particularly bad. Highlights: **Crossing Rocks**, Rose-throated Parrot (4), Thick-billed Vireo (3), Bahama Swallow (28), Olive-capped Warbler, Western Spindalis (2). **Road from Crossing Rocks to Abaco NP**, Rose-throated Parrot (11), La Sagra's Flycatcher (2), Bahama Swallow (4), Bahama Mockingbird (5), Ovenbird, Indigo Bunting. **Abaco NP**, Rose-throated Parrot (5), Hairy Woodpecker, Cuban Pewee (2), La Sagra's Flycatcher, Thick-billed Vireo (2), Bahama Swallow (18), Bahama Mockingbird (9), Olive-capped Warbler (3), Bahama Yellowthroat (5), Western Spindalis (5). **Sandy Point**, Belted Kingfisher, West Indian Woodpecker, Loggerhead Kingbird, Bahama Swallow (10), Western Spindalis. **Bahama Palm Shores**, Killdeer, Rose-throated Parrot (11), Cuban Pewee, Thick-billed Vireo (2), Red-legged Thrush, Western Spindalis (4). **Abaco Beach Resort**, Red-legged Thrush (3).

03rd April. Collected from Abaco Beach Resort by taxi & driven to the Green Turtle Ferry Dock. Transferred over to the Green Turtle Club www.greenturtleclub.com for a two night stay. Highlights: **Abaco Beach Resort**, Red-legged Thrush. **Green Turtle Ferry Dock**, West Indian Woodpecker (2), Hairy Woodpecker, Loggerhead Kingbird, La Sagra's Flycatcher (3), Cape May Warbler, Western Spindalis (2). **Green Turtle Cay**, Key West Quail-Dove, Cuban Emerald (7), La Sagra's Flycatcher & Thick-billed Vireo (2).

04th April. All day spent on Green Turtle Cay finally catching up with Bahama Woodstar. Spent a few hours in the afternoon at the excellent tidal flats at Gillam Bay. Highlights: **Green Turtle Cay**, Tri-coloured Heron, American Oystercatcher (2), Wilson's Plover (2), Piping Plover (3), Short-billed Dowitcher (16), Red Knot, Semi-palmated Sandpiper (2), Dunlin (45), Herring Gull & Bahama Woodstar.

05th April. Spent the morning on Green Turtle Cay before taking the water taxi back to the main island at midday. Transferred to Marsh Harbour Airport then spent the last hour up until our flight back to Miami in the pine woods next to the runway. Highlights: **Green Turtle Cay**, Merlin, White-crowned Pigeon, Key West Quail-Dove, Cuban Emerald (4), La Sagra's Flycatcher (3), Thick-billed Vireo (4). **Marsh Harbour Airport**, Cuban Pewee, Black & White Warbler, American Redstart & Western Spindalis (4).

Northern Bobwhite *Colinus virginianus*

Ten of this introduced species just north of Marsh Harbour on 31st.

White-cheeked Pintail *Anas bahamensis*

Three on the settlement pond at Marsh Harbour rubbish dump on 1st.

Least Grebe *Tachybaptus dominicus*

One on the settlement pond at Marsh Harbour rubbish dump on 1st.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

12 at Little Harbour on 1st & one in New Plymouth on Green Turtle Cay on 4th.

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*

A total of 37 recorded, max 28 flying over the Crossing Rock area on 2nd.

Great White Egret *Ardea alba*

1 alongside the road to Green Turtle Ferry Dock on 3rd & 5th & one on Green Turtle Cay on 5th.

Tri-coloured Heron *Egretta tricolor*

One on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay and New Plymouth on 4th.

White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*

Three birds seen very well at Little Harbour on 1st with one bird ashore.

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*

A total of 14 recorded.

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*

On the 1st one near Bahama Palm Shores & one at Long Beach with 2 on Green Turtle Cay on 4th.

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*

Single birds seen on 3 dates with 22 at Gillam Bay flats on 4th.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*

A total of 25 recorded with 10 over the chicken farm near the Little Harbour turning on 1st & 3 at Sandy Point on 2nd being the highest counts.

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius sparveroides*

At least 7 around Marsh Harbour on 31st including a pair at Abaco Beach Resort seen on several dates, 2 at Bahama Palm Shores on 1st & 2nd, singles at Crossing Rock on 1st, Sandy Point on 2nd & Marsh Harbour Airport on 5th.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

Singles at Bahama Palm Shores on 1st & over Green Turtle Cay on 5th.

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*

A total of 6 seen, all on Great Abaco.

American Coot *Fulica americana*

Six on the settlement pond at Marsh Harbour rubbish dump on 1st.

American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*

Two on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay and New Plymouth on 4th.

Grey (Black-bellied) Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

One at Long Beach on 1st & 45 on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay/New Plymouth on 4th.

Semi-palmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*

40 on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay/New Plymouth on 4th.

Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia*

Two on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay/New Plymouth on 4th.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*

One at Bahama Palm Shores on 2nd.

Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus*

Three on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay/New Plymouth on 4th.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*

Six in Settlement Creek and 10 on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay/New Plymouth on 4th.

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

Two on a small pool at Marsh Harbour rubbish dump & 2 near Bahama Palm Shores on 1st.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

One on the settlement pond at Marsh Harbour rubbish dump on 1st.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia*

One on the settlement pond at Marsh Harbour rubbish dump on 1st.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

A single at Marsh Harbour on 31st, 8 at Long Beach on 1st, one at Settlement Creek on 3rd & 8 on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay/New Plymouth on 4th.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

One on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay/New Plymouth on 4th.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Twelve on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay/New Plymouth on 4th.

Semi-palmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*

Two on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay/New Plymouth on 4th.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

45 on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay/New Plymouth on 4th.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

A single at Marsh Harbour Marina on 1st, 2 in Settlement Creek on 3rd & 7 around New Plymouth on 4th.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus smithsonianus*

One attending a dead fish on the beach at New Plymouth on 4th.

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*

Common around the harbours on both Great Abaco & Green Turtle Cay, max 78 around New Plymouth on 4th.

Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*

A single at Marsh Harbour Marina on 1st, 3 at Sandy Point on 2nd, 12 on the tidal flats between Gillam Bay/New Plymouth on 4th & one in Coco Bay on 5th.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Just One!

White-crowned Pigeon *Patagioenas leucocephala*

Two in the grounds of Abaco Beach Resort on 31st & one at Coco Beach on Green Turtle Cay on 5th.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

A total of 26 recorded.

Common Ground Dove *Columbina passerina*

Recorded every day, max. 8 on 2nd.

Key West Quail-Dove *Geotrygon chrysis*

Two birds seen at Coco Bay on Green Turtle Cay. One flew past me on 3rd as I walked down the road whilst the other showed reasonably well from the path early in the morning of 5th walking about in the coppice between Coco Bay & the hotel.

Rose-throated (Bahama) Parrot *Amazona leucocephala bahamensis*

At least 45 at Bahama Palm Shores on 1st & 11 there next day with 5 at Crossing Rock on 1st & 4 there next day. 11 between Crossing Rock & Abaco NP with a further 5 at the entrance to Abaco NP on 2nd where they apparently breed in subterranean caves.

Smooth-billed Ani *Crotophaga ani*

A total of 25 recorded on Great Abaco with a max. of 10 on the 1st with just 3 on Green Turtle Cay on 3rd.

Cuban Emerald *Chlorostilbron ricordii*

Two in the grounds of Abaco Beach Resort on 31st with one there on 2nd. Four in the Airport Pinewoods on 1st & one there on 5th. Also on the 1st one at Bahama Palm Shores & 4 at Crossing Rock. On Green Turtle Cay, 7 on 3rd, 2 on 4th & 4 on the 5th.

Bahama Woodstar *Calliphlox evelynae*

After failing to find this species at a number of apparently reliable sites on Great Abaco a male showed well in the front garden of a house near Coco Beach, Green Turtle Cay on 4th.

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*

One at Sandy Point on 2nd.

West Indian Woodpecker *Melanerpes superciliaris blakei*

One at Sandy Point on 2nd then two in trees at the Green Turtle Ferry Dock car park on 3rd.

Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus piger*

Singles at Airport Pinewoods on 1st, Abaco NP on 2nd & Green Turtle Ferry Dock car park on 3rd.

Cuban (Crescent-eyed) Pewee *Contopus caribaeus bahamensis*

Singles at Airport pinewoods on 1st & 5th with one at Marsh Harbour rubbish dump on 1st, 2 in Abaco NP & one at Bahama Palm Shores on 2nd.

Grey Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis*

Singles at Sandy Point on 2nd & Green Turtle Ferry Dock car park on 3rd.

Loggerhead Kingbird *Tyrannus caudifasciatus*

Singles near Sandy Point on 2nd & Green Turtle Ferry Dock car park on 3rd.

La Sagra's Flycatcher *Myiarchus sagrae*

A single at Bahama Palm Shores & 2 at Crossing Rock on 1st. 2 between Crossing Rock & Abaco NP, a single inside Abaco NP on 2nd and 3 in the car park at Green Turtle Ferry Dock on 3rd. On Green Turtle Cay a single on 3rd & 3 on the 5th.

Thick-billed Vireo *Vireo crassirostris*

At least 6 in the Crossing Rock/Long Beach area on 1st with 3 there next day. 3 in Abaco NP & 2 at Bahama Palm Shores on 2nd then a single in the car park at Green Turtle Ferry Dock on the 3rd. On Green Turtle Cay, singles on 3rd & 4th with 4 present on 5th.

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*

Two over Marsh Harbour rubbish dump with Bahama Swallows on 1st.

Bahama Swallow *Tachycineta cyaneoviridis*

Three over Marsh Harbour rubbish dump, 3 at Different of Abaco & 6 at Bahama Palm Shores on 1st. At least 28 on the wires at Crossing Rock early on 2nd with 4 between Crossing Rock & Abaco NP, 18 on the mobile phone tower at the entrance to Abaco NP & 10 at Sandy Point the same day.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica erythrogaster*

30 over Marsh Harbour rubbish dump & 6 at Little Harbour on the 1st with 4 at Crossing Rocks next day.

Blue-grey Gnatcatcher *Piliptila caerulea*

Two in the grounds of the Abaco Beach Resort on 31st, one between Crossing Rock & Abaco NP on 2nd & two on Green Turtle Cay on 5th.

Grey Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*

Seen every day with max. of 3 on 2nd.

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*

Seen daily, mainly near habitation or on roadside wires with a max. of 25 on 2nd.

Bahama Mockingbird *Mimus gundlachi*

On 2nd, five alongside the road from Crossing Rock to Abaco NP then at least a further 9 inside Abaco NP where the former species is apparently absent.

Eurasian Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

3 in New Plymouth on 4th.

Red-legged Thrush *Turdus plumbeus plumbeus*

Showed exceptionally well in the grounds of Abaco Beach Resort with 4 on 31st, 3 on 2nd & one on 3rd plus a single at Bahama Palm Shores on 2nd.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Small numbers seen, max. 6 on 1st.

Northern Parula *Parula americana*

Singles at Crossing Rock on 1st & 2nd, Sandy Point on 2nd and the Green Turtle Ferry car park on 3rd plus 3 in the coppice at the back of the Green Turtle Club on 5th.

Cape May Warbler *Dendroica tigrina*

Three in the gardens at Crossing Rock on 1st & one in the Green Turtle Ferry car park on 3rd.

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata*

One at Bahama Palm Shores on 2nd.

Prairie Warbler *Dendroica discolor*

Two in the gardens at Crossing Rock on 1st plus singles between Crossing Rock and Abaco NP, at Sandy Point & at Bahama Palm Shores on 2nd.

Olive-capped Warbler *Dendroica pityophila bahamensis*

Single in the Airport pinewoods & at Bahama Palm Shores on the 1st and at Crossing Rock on 2nd with 3 in Abaco NP also on 2nd.

Pine Warbler *Dendroica pinus*

Six in Airport pinewoods on 1st and 3 there on 5th then 2 at Crossing Rock, 3 between Crossing Rock & Abaco NP and a single in Abaco NP on 2nd.

Palm Warbler *Dendroica palmarum*

Seen daily in small numbers, max. 9 on 2nd.

Black & White Warbler *Mniotilta varia*

One in the grounds of Abaco Beach Resort on 31st & 1 in the Airport pinewoods on 5th.

Bahama Warbler *Setophaga flavescens*

Just one of this distinctive former sub-species of Yellow-throated Warbler recorded, in Long Beach on 1st. In the 52nd AOU supplement (2011) the split has been confirmed along with a move from *Dendroica* to *Setophaga*. See the following link for more information <http://blog.aba.org/2011/02/new-aba-area-species-in-store.html>

American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*

Three in the grounds of Abaco Beach Resort on 31st, 1 at Crossing Rock on 1st & 1 in the Airport pinewoods on 5th.

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapillus*

One in the grounds of Abaco Beach Resort on 31st & 1 between Crossing Rock & Abaco NP on 2nd.

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*

Singles in a Crossing Rock garden on 1st & 2nd and on Green Turtle Cay on 5th.

Bahama Yellowthroat *Geothlypis rostrata*

In Abaco NP at least 5 seen very well on 2nd.

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*

21 in Crossing Rock on 1st, 2 at Sandy Point on 2nd, 1 in the Green Turtle Ferry car park on 3rd & 2 on Green Turtle Cay on 4th.

Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola bahamensis*

A single at Little Harbour on 1st with 1 at Crossing Rock & 2 in Abaco NP on 2nd & 2 in the Green Turtle Ferry car park on 3rd. On Green Turtle Cay, 3 on 3rd, 2 on 4th & 4 on the 5th.

Black-faced Grassquit *Tiarus bicolor*

Seen daily in small numbers with a max. of 13 on 2nd.

Western Spindalis *Spindalis zena townsendi*

Two in the Airport pinewoods on 1st with 4 there on 5th. One at Bahama Palm Shores on 1st & 4 there on 2nd. 2 at Crossing Rock, 5 in Abaco NP & 1 at Sandy Point on 2nd with a further 2 in the Green Turtle Ferry car park on 3rd.

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*

One flew over the road between Crossing Rock & Abaco NP on 2nd.

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris*

A female type in a Crossing Rock garden on 1st.