

St Lucia & St Vincent

June 2005

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Introduction

My trip was not a birding trip although I did manage to get out for at least a few hours each day. From a birding point of view St Lucia is a relatively easy island to work being 28 miles long & 14 miles wide and is probably the most important of the Lesser Antilles as it holds either 5 or 6 single island endemics. The island has a species list of around 170 of which a significant number are North American migrants. The main roads are fairly good and are being improved in readiness for the 2007 Cricket World Cup and inexpensive minibuses cover the whole of the island. Most of the hotels are concentrated around the north-west corner to the north of the capital Castries. We stayed at Hotel Rendezvous, Vigie Beach, just north of the George F.L. Charles Airport.

Transport

Taxis from the hotel to the various sites at the north end of the island were not cheap and always seemed to be at least US\$30 one way. As most of the site locations were unknown to me I would take a taxi one way to the site then take a local minibus back to the hotel. These 'dollar buses' are very frequent to and from even the remote locations and are very cheap. Car hire through Avis worked out at US\$70 per day but could well have been less expensive if pre-booked in the UK. You will have to pay an additional US\$20 for a temporary driving permit.

Currency

The currency on St Lucia & St Vincent is the East Caribbean Dollar but most shops & taxis seem to prefer the US Dollar. If you plan to visit Martinique, the currency there is the Euro!!

Guides

I contacted Adams Toussaint adamtree@hotmail.com of the St Lucia Forestry department who charged me \$US85 per day for his services & the use of his 4 wheel drive vehicle. He collected me from the hotel on each day. He knows the sites very well and working for the forestry department has access to sites outside of normal opening hours.

Field Guide

I used the Helm Field Guide to the Birds of the West Indies by Raffaele, Wiley, Garrido, Keith & Raffaele which was very good, ISBN 0-7136-5419-8. I also consulted The BOU Checklist No. 15, The Birds of St Lucia by Allan Keith.

Reports

I used a number of reports when planning the trip with the most useful being that by Paul Noakes (25th July – 9th August 2004) off www.surfbirds.com. Others used were by Neil Tovey (1st -15th June 2003) off the Glamorgan Birdclub website, and several off www.birdtours.co.uk and www.worldtwitch.com which tended to cover the whole of the Lesser Antilles rather than just St Lucia.

Flights

I booked at day return flight to St Vincent the day prior to travel with Caribbean Star Airlines www.flycaribbeanstar.com at a cost of EC\$232 (£50). The 30 minute flight departed at 07.35 which allowed enough time to do the Vermont Rainforest Trail & Kingstown Botanical Gardens with ease before returning on the 17.35 flight to St Lucia. Departure tax from St Lucia was EC\$54 and EC\$40 from St Vincent. One problem that arose at immigration on St Vincent was they required my return ticket from St Lucia back to the UK. This resulted in a frustrating delay while they checked with BA I had the required ticket. Therefore, take your return tickets with you and your passport.

Sites, St Vincent:

Vermont Nature Trail

The reserve is situated north of the capital Kingstown and a half hour taxi ride from the airport. There is a reception area with few facilities just before the forest trails start. Take the left-hand trail as you enter the forest to reach the look out. The trail is in relatively good shape and should take c40minutes to reach the lookout. Dollar buses run directly from the village (a short walk from the reception area) back to Kingstown.

Kingstown Botanical Gardens

The gardens are situated on the northern edge of the town on the main road to Vermont. There is a small entrance fee. A captive breeding programme for St Vincent Parrots exists at the site.

Sites, St Lucia:

Union Nature Trail

The forest reserve at Union was a short drive from the hotel and is on route 1B if travelling by minibus. There are two trails through the woodland, the 0.8km Garden trail & the 1.6km Hillside trail. There is also a medicinal garden and a mini zoo with St Lucia Parrot.

Pigeon Island NR

Pigeon Island NR and the offshore Burgot Rock are situated in the north-west corner of the island. It consists of tended gardens, coastal scrub & fortifications. Apparently the Captains Cavern is a good place for a cold beer after the walk around.

St Lucia Golf Club

The golf club is situated on the northern tip of the island. It has a number of ponds which are at a premium on the island.

Toraille Waterfall

This is situated inland from Soufriere. Gardens good for hummingbirds surround the waterfall.

Choc Bay

Choc Bay and the Choc Rivermouth are situated between Castries & Rodney Bay.

Des Cartier Rain Forest trail

The trail is situated c6 miles inland from Micoud on the main Castries to Vieux Fort road. The road is of poor quality as you approach the reserve entrance. Take the left hand track as you enter the rain forest to reach the look out. Without doubt the best site on St Lucia.

Cape Moule a Chique

You can drive up to the top of the cape from Vieux Fort. Tropicbirds nest below the lighthouse and it may be possible to enter the compound for better views by seeking permission. You can also distantly overlook the Maria Islands NR.

Vieux Fort wetlands

There are a number of pools and wet areas where a river has been diverted at the western end of Hewanorra International Airport.

Dennery

The sites for White-breasted Thrasher are in the dry coastal scrub between Dennery and Praslin village. The whole area however is threatened by a large hotel & golf course development. When working this area stay to the tracks and beware of the deadly snake, Fer-de-Lance.

Grande Anse

This site near Desbarra is better known as a Leatherback Turtle watching site. The track down to the old airstrip/beach is very poor and probably only accessible with a 4WD. Note that the gate at the top is locked at dusk so if you plan to stay late for Rufous Nightjar obtain a key.

Vigie Lighthouse

The lighthouse is just west of the terminal building of George F.L. Charles airport. There are lots of gardens and the whole area is well wooded.

Forestiére Rainforest Trail, Piton Flore

This site is c20mins east of Castries and is easily reached on fairly good roads. The walk up to the lookout and Piton Flore is very strenuous.

Birding

12th June. Flew with British Airways from London Gatwick to Hewanorra International Airport, St Lucia via Antigua arriving at approx. 16.00. Following immigration etc transferred by minibus to the Rendezvous Hotel, Vigie Beach, just to the north of Castries. Last hour of daylight spent walking around the surprisingly lush hotel gardens.

Highlights; **Antigua Airport**, White-crowned Pigeon (2). **Rendezvous Hotel**, Bare-eyed Thrush & Grey Tumbler (3).

13th June. Spent the day in and around the hotel grounds and adjacent areas acquainting myself with the commoner species.

Highlights; **Rendezvous Hotel area**, Green Heron (2), Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Osprey, Lesser Antillean Swift (8), Purple-throated Carib (4+), Green-throated Carib, Antillean Crested Hummingbird (2), Grey Tumbler (2), Yellow Warbler (2) & Lesser Antillean Saltator.

14th June. Spent the early morning on the beach in front of the hotel. After breakfast took a taxi to the St Lucia Forestry Department at Union and spent the rest of the morning/lunchtime walking around the Hillside & Garden Trails.

Highlights; **Rendezvous Hotel beach**, Brown Booby (2) & Yellow-crowned Night Heron (2). **Union Nature Trail**, Purple-throated Carib (2), Green-throated Carib (2), Antillean Crested Hummingbird (2), Caribbean Elaenia (2), St Lucia Pewee (3), Bare-eyed Thrush (4), Grey Tumbler (2) & St Lucia Warbler (2).

15th June. Walked to the George F.L. Charles Airport from the hotel via the cemetery to catch the Caribbean Star Airlines 07.35 flight to E.T. Joshua Airport, St Vincent arriving at 08.05. Took a 30 minute taxi ride from the airport to the Vermont Nature Trail. Walked up the trail to the view point and spent the rest of the morning and lunchtime in the rainforest. Took a 'dollar bus' back to the Kingstown Botanical Gardens where I met Fitzroy Springer who kindly ran me into town to catch a taxi to the airport for the 17.35 flight back to St Lucia.

Highlights; **Vigie cemetery**, Grey Tumbler. **Vermont Nature Trail**, St Vincent Parrot (20+), Cocoa Thrush (8), Whistling Warbler (2), Lesser Antillean Tanager (3), St Vincent House Wren (2), Common Black Hawk (3), Scaly-necked Pigeon (25), Purple-throated Carib & Antillean Crested Hummingbird (2). **Kingstown Botanical Gardens**, Grenada Flycatcher (3), Common Black Hawk & Bare-eyed Thrush (4). **Kingstown Harbour**, Green Heron (3) & Caribbean Martin (4). **E.T. Joshua Airport**, Brown Booby (4) & Eared Dove (4).

16th June. Drove up to the top of the island mid afternoon and spent the rest of the day walking around the gardens & scrub at Pigeon Island National Park.

Highlights; **Pigeon Island National Park**, Brown Booby (30+), Royal Tern (10), Bridled Tern (20), Green-throated Carib, Antillean Crested Hummingbird (2), Caribbean Elaenia, Caribbean Martin (4), Bare-eyed Thrush (6), Yellow Warbler (8) & Lesser Antillean Saltator.

17th June. Spent the early morning at the top of the island again visiting Union, St Lucia Golf & Country Club & Pigeon Island NP. In the late morning drove down the west coast towards Soufriere and visited Toraille Waterfall before having lunch at the Ladera Hotel which has stunning views of both Petit Piton & Gros Piton. Late afternoon until dark spent at Choc Bay.

Highlights; **Union**, Yellow-crowned Night Heron (2), Black Swift (4) & St Lucia Pewee. **St Lucia Golf Club**, Yellow-crowned Night Heron & Green Heron (2).

Pigeon Island NP, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Bridled Tern (6), Brown Noddy & Caribbean Martin (6). **Toraille Waterfall**, Purple-throated Carib (2), Antillean Crested Hummingbird (2) & Caribbean Elaenia. **Ladera Hotel**, Broad-winged Hawk (6) & Scaly-necked Pigeon (12). **Choc Bay**, Yellow-crowned Night Heron (2), Green-throated Carib, Grey Tumbler & Lesser Antillean Saltator.

18th June. Collected from the hotel at 05.00 by Adams Toussaint and drove to the Des Cartier Rainforest Trail. Walked up to the view point and spent several hours here. Visited the wetlands at Vieux Fort then onto Cape Moule a Chique where you can overlook the Maria Islands Nature Reserve. Mid afternoon visited the coastal scrub near Dennery before returning to the hotel around 15.30.

Highlights; **Des Cartier Trail**, Scaly-necked Pigeon (15), St Lucia Parrot (15+), Black Swift (4), Lesser Antillean Swift, Purple-throated Carib (3), Antillean Crested Hummingbird (3), Caribbean Elaenia (3), St Lucia Pewee, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher (2), Rufous-throated Solitaire, Bare-eyed Thrush, Grey Trembler, Pearly-eyed Thrasher (2), Lesser Antillean Euphonia (2) & St Lucia Black Finch. **Cape Moule a Chique**, Red-billed Tropicbird, Brown Noddy & Eared Dove.

Maria Islands, Sooty Tern (50+). **Vieux Fort**, Snowy Egret (10), Green Heron, Greater Yellowlegs (3) & Caribbean Martin (4). **Dennery**, St Lucia Pewee, White-breasted Thrasher (2), Lesser Antillean Saltator, St Lucia Oriole (2) & St Lucia Warbler.

19th June. Collected from the hotel by Adams at 13.00 then spent the rest of the afternoon until well after dark at Grande Anse returning to the hotel around 20.30.

Highlights; **Grande Anse**, Green Heron, Scaly-necked Pigeon (2), Ruddy Quail Dove, Mangrove Cuckoo, Rufous Nightjar (hd), Green-throated Carib (2), Caribbean Elaenia (2), St Lucia Pewee (3), St Lucia Wren (2), St Lucia Warbler (5), Lesser Antillean Saltator & St Lucia Oriole (2).

20th June. Mid afternoon walked from the hotel to Vigie Lighthouse.

Highlights; **Vigie Lighthouse**, Yellow-crowned Night Heron (3), Mangrove Cuckoo, Green-throated Carib, Antillean Crested Hummingbird & Bare-eyed Thrush (3).

21st June. Mid morning took a taxi to the Forestiere Rainforest Trail at Piton Flore. Walked up to the view point before returning to Castries then onto the hotel by 'dollar bus'.

Highlights; **Forestiere Rainforest Trail**, Ruddy Quail Dove (2), Lesser Antillean Swift (6), Purple-throated Carib (2), Antillean Crested Hummingbird (3), St Lucia Pewee, Lesser Antillean Flycatcher, Pearly-eyed Thrasher (2), Grey Trembler, St Lucia Warbler (3) & St Lucia Oriole.

22nd June. Caught an early morning 'dollar bus' to Union. Walked both the Hillside & Garden Trails before returning by 'dollar bus' mid morning to the hotel. Collected mid afternoon from the hotel by minibus and transferred to Hewanorra International Airport for an overnight flight via Antigua back to Gatwick.

Highlights; **Union**, Ruddy Quail Dove, Caribbean Elaenia & Bare-eyed Thrush (2).

Castries to Hewanorra, Scaly-necked Pigeon (6) & Caribbean Martin (10).

Systematic list

Red-billed Tropicbird

A single bird seen at Cape Moule a Chique on 18th. The birds breed on these cliffs and if access can be arranged excellent views can be obtained.

Brown Booby

Off the Rendezvous Hotel, 2 seen on 14th, 19th and 21st whilst on 15th, 4 were on rocks at the end of the airport at St Vincent. On 16th at least six were sitting on Burgot Rock, Pigeon Island NP with a further 24 seen flying past.

Magnificent Frigatebird

Seen daily with a maximum of 15 on St Vincent on 15th and 20 on St Lucia on 16th.

Snowy Egret

On flooded fields at the end of Hewanorra International Airport ten were present on 18th.

Little Blue Heron

Seen almost daily at the Rendezvous Hotel/Vigie Beach, max 5 on 14th. On 17th, 6 were around the mouth of the Choc River and there were 2 seen with the Snowy Egrets on 18th.

Cattle Egret

Common around the west & south coasts, maximum 100 on the St Lucia Golf course on 17th.

Green Heron

Two in the mangroves adjacent to the Rendezvous Hotel on 13th and one on 21st. 3 seen around Kingstown, St Vincent on 15th, 2 at the St Lucia Golf course on 17th, 1 at the Snowy Egret site on 18th, 1 at Grande Anse on 19th and 1 in Castries Harbour on 21st.

Yellow-crowned Night Heron

One in the mangroves adjacent to the Rendezvous Hotel on 13th & two flew past the hotel on 14th. On 17th two were seen in flight just before Union, one was seen at the St Lucia Golf course, one flew over the road near Pigeon Island NP and two showed well at Choc Bay. On 20th, three showed well amongst the trees beside the cemetery and near Vigie Lighthouse.

Osprey

One flew over the hotel on 13th.

Common Black Hawk

On St Vincent on 15th, 3 were seen at the Vermont Nature trail viewpoint and one showed very well in the Kingstown Botanical Gardens.

Broad-winged Hawk

1 at Union on 14th, 4 at Vermont Nature Trail, St Vincent on 15th, at least 6 in the air between Gros Piton & Petit Piton from the Ladera Hotel on 17th and two over the forest at the Des Cartier Trail on 18th.

American Kestrel

1 at the Rendezvous Hotel on 13th, 1 at Union on 14th, 2 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th, 3 between Soufriere & Castries on 17th, 2 at Moule a Chique on 18th and 1 at Vigie Lighthouse area on 20th.

Common Moorhen

15 on the various ponds at St Lucia Golf Club on 17th, 4 at the wetlands at Vieux Fort on 18th and 3 on the pond at Grande Anse on 19th.

Greater Yellowlegs

3 at the Vieux Fort wetlands on 18th.

Laughing Gull

Seen daily. At least 10 at Antigua Airport on 12th, 20 in Kingstown Harbour, St Vincent on 15th, 10 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th, 4 in Choc Bay on 17th and 1 at Vieux Fort on 18th. Max 5 at Vigie Beach on 13th & 14th.

Sandwich Tern

2 at Vigie Beach on 14th and 1 on 20th with 4 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th.

Royal Tern

1 at Vigie Beach on 13th, 14th & 20th, 10 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th & 1 at Choc Bay on 17th.

Common Tern

1 at Rendezvous Hotel on 14th & 1 at Castries Harbour on 22nd.

Bridled Tern

At Pigeon Island NP, 20 on 16th & 6 on 17th.

Sooty Tern

50+ seen distantly over the Maria Islands from Moule a Chique on 18th.

Brown Noddy

1 flew past Pigeon Island NP on 17th and 4 flew past Moule a Chique on 18th.

Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon

Seen daily around Castries Airport/town.

White-crowned Pigeon

Two seen around the airport buildings on Antigua during the stop over on 12th.

Scaly-necked Pigeon

25 seen at Vermont Trail, St Vincent on 15th. 12 from the Ladera Hotel on 17th, 15 from the Des Cartier Trail on 18th, 2 at Grande Anse on 19th & 6 from the minibus to the airport on 22nd.

Zenaida Dove

Seen daily on St Lucia but not seen on St Vincent. Common around most of the coast, especially the hotel, max. 15 on 13th.

Eared Dove

Four around the airport terminal on St Vincent on 15th and 1 on the way up to Moule a Chique on 18th.

Common Ground Dove

4 around the airport terminal on St Vincent on 15th, 2 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th and 4 there next day with 5 on the way up to Moule a Chique on 18th.

Ruddy Quail Dove

One flew over the track at Grand Anse on 19th, 2 along the Forestiere Rainforest Trail on 21st & 1 at Union on 22nd.

St Lucia Parrot

At least 15 but probably up to 25 at Des Cartier Trail including several perched birds on 18th.

St Vincent Parrot

At least 20 in flight, usually in pairs, at Vermont Nature Trail, St Vincent on 15th.

Mangrove Cuckoo

One at Grande Anse on 19th and 1 below Vigie Lighthouse on 20th.

Rufous Nightjar

One heard calling from thick scrub after dark but not seen at Grande Anse on 19th.

Black Swift

4 along the approach road to Union on 17th and 4 at Des Cartier Trail lookout on 18th.

Lesser Antillean Swift

8 over the fields next to the hotel on 13th showed very well. 1 with the Black Swifts at Des Cartier Trail lookout on 18th and 6 at Forestiere Trail on 21st.

Purple-throated Carib

Seen almost daily around the hotel gardens maximum 4 on 13th. 2 at Union on 14th, 1 at Vermont Trail, St Vincent on 15th, 2 at Toraille Waterfall on 17th, 3 along Des Cartier Trail on 18th and 2 at Forestiere Trail on 21st.

Green-throated Carib

Tended to favour more open areas than the previous species. 1 next to the hotel on 13th, 2 at Union on 14th, 1 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th, 1 at Choc Bay on 17th, 2 at Grande Anse on 19th and 1 at Vigie Lighthouse on 20th.

Antillean Crested Hummingbird

Tended to overlap habitats with both of the previous species. 2 at the hotel on 13th, 2 at Union on 14th, 2 along Vermont Trail, St Vincent on 15th, 2 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th, 2 at Toraille Waterfall on 17th, 3 at Des Cartier Trail on 18th, 1 at Vigie Lighthouse on 20th and 3 along Forestiere Trail on 21st.

Caribbean Elaenia

2 at Union on 14th and 1 on 22nd, 1 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th, 1 at Toraille Waterfall on 17th, 3 at Des Cartier Trail on 18th, 2 at Grande Anse on 19th and 1 at the entrance to Forestiere Trail on 21st.

St Lucia Pewee

3 around the nursery garden at Union on 14th and 1 there on 17th, 1 at Des Cartier Trail and 1 at Dennery on 18th, 3 at Grande Anse on 19th and 1 at Forestiere Trail on 21st.

Grenada Flycatcher

3 in the grounds of Kingstown Botanical Gardens, St Vincent on 15th.

Lesser Antillean Flycatcher

2 at Des Cartier Trail on 18th & 1 at Forestiere Trail on 21st.

Grey Kingbird

Seen every day. Common around the coasts and habitation, less so inland except along roadside wires. Maximum counts, 20 on Antigua on 12th, 10 on St Vincent on 15th & 20 on St Lucia on 17th.

Caribbean Martin

First birds were 4 around Kingstown Harbour on St Vincent on 15th. On St Lucia, 4 along the approach road to Pigeon Island on 16th and 6 next day, 4 at Vieux Fort on 18th, 12 around Castries Harbour on 21st & 10 on the drive from the hotel to the airport on 22nd.

St Lucia House Wren

The taxonomic status of this and the next species appears to be in a state of flux moving between a subspecies of House Wren or even Southern House Wren and full specific status.

2 separate birds were seen well on 19th at Grande Anse.

St Vincent House Wren

2 near the entrance of the Vermont Nature Trail, St Vincent on 15th.

Rufous-throated Solitaire

One at the view point, Des Cartier Trail, on 18th.

Cocoa Thrush

At least 8 along the Vermont Nature Trail, St Vincent on 15th.

Bare-eyed Thrush

At the hotel, 1 on 12th, 21st & 22nd, 4 at Union on 14th & 2 on 22nd, 4 at the Kingstown Botanical Gardens, St Vincent on 15th, 6 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th, 1 at Des Cartier Trail on 18th & 3 below Vigie Lighthouse on 20th.

Tropical Mockingbird

Seen daily except 18th. Fairly common on west coast, max. 12 on 13th and 10 at Pigeon Island on 16th. Only a single seen on St Vincent.

White-breasted Thrasher

Two singles in the coastal scrub south of Dennery on 18th.

Scaly-breasted Thrasher

Seen almost daily at the hotel, max. 6 on 13th. 10 at Union on 14th with 2 on 17th & 4 on 22nd, 6 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th, 4 at Choc Bay on 17th, 4 at Des Cartier Trail on 18th, 3 at Grande Anse on 19th, 2 at Vigie Lighthouse area on 20th & 6 at Forestiere Trail on 21st.

Pearly-eyed Thrasher

2 at Des Cartier Trail on 18th and 2 at Forestiere Rainforest Trail on 21st.

Grey Trembler

2 adults and a recently fledged youngster in the hotel garden on 12th with 2 still present the next day. 2 at Union on 14th, 1 in the cemetery between the hotel and airport on 15th, 1 at Choc Bay on 17th, 1 at Des Cartier Trail on 18th and 1 at Forestiere Trail on 21st.

House Sparrow

A single bird seen around Kingstown Harbour, St Vincent on 15th.

Black-whiskered Vireo

2 at the hotel on 13th, 6 at Union on 14th & 2 there on 22nd, 4 along the Vermont Nature Trail on St Vincent on 15th, 1 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th, 2 at Choc Bay on 17th, 4 at Dennery on 18th and 2 at Grande Anse on 19th.

Yellow Warbler

2 in mangroves next to the hotel on 13th, 8 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th and 1 on 19th at Grande Anse.

St Lucia Warbler

2 at Union on 14th, 1 at Dennery on 18th, 5 at Grande Anse on 19th & 3 at Forestiere Trail on 21st.

Whistling Warbler

Two at the Vermont Nature Trail, St Vincent on 15th.

Bananaquit

Seen daily, very common in all habitats, max 30 on 13th. 20 seen on St Vincent of which nearly all were the melanic form.

Antillean Euphonia

2 individuals at the Des Cartier Trail on 18th.

Lesser Antillean Tanager

3 together at the Vermont Trail lookout, St Vincent on 18th.

Black-faced Grassquit

Seen daily from 13th onwards, max 12 around the hotel area on 13th.

St Lucia Black Finch

A single bird at the Des Cartier Trail lookout on 18th.

Lesser Antillean Bullfinch

Common & widespread in all habitats. Seen daily, max 20 on 14th.

Lesser Antillean Saltator

Singles seen at the hotel on 13th, Pigeon Island NP on 16th, Choc Bay on 17th, Dennery on 18th & Grande Anse on 19th.

Carib Grackle

Common around the coasts and habitation on St Lucia, max 100+ on 13th. Only 2 seen on St Vincent on 15th.

Shiny Cowbird

10 in fields next to the hotel on 13th, 2 at Union on 14th, 2 at Pigeon Island NP on 16th, 15 on the fairways at St Lucia Golf Club on 17th, 4 in the cemetery next to the hotel on 20th and possibly the same birds in front of the hotel on 22nd.

St Lucia Oriole

Two at Dennery on 18th, 2 at Grande Anse on 19th and one at Forestiere Trail lookout on 21st.

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