

Cuba, December 3-10, 2019

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I spent a week in Cuba with Daniel Hoops and Michael Patrick Marklevitz. We looked for Cuban solenodons, but by the time we found a good and relatively accessible location, our time was almost up and we had to deal with the consequences of heavy rains and a car break-in. We saw lots of birds (136 spp., including 33 of 39 endemics and near-endemics) and lots of interesting herps, but mammals were scarce, particularly hutias (even more difficult to find/see well than in 2016).

The overall situation on the island has deteriorated since 2016. Roads are falling apart; only the road between Moa and Baracoa has been somewhat improved. Food stores are almost empty, food staples are rationed (since May 2019), and good restaurants are difficult to find in many towns, although some still exist. We had two thefts in two weeks (including a car break-in that cost us a full day), compared to zero in three weeks in 2016. Fuel shortages are frequent, particularly in the east. One problem is that rental cars can only be legally filled with “Especial” gasoline, while in many places only “Regular” is available. If you are planning a trip, I have a letter from a rental company asking gas stations to fill your car with “Regular”, that I can share. Cubans are desperately trying to maintain decent and civilized lifestyle, but with cheap Venezuelan oil gone and the government increasingly senile, it’s becoming nearly impossible.

US citizens no longer need a permit to visit Cuba: just say you are going for zoological research, and have a printed itinerary showing that you are planning to camp in the forest the whole time. Avoid flying via Miami: the airport has Gestapo-style immigration control and security check between flights can take up to 3 hours. Better fly via Cancun.

Site notes, E to W (for more info on many of the locations, see my [2016 trip report](#)).

Viaducto la Farola: no longer worth visiting due to habitat deterioration.

Alturas de Baracoa: west of Baracoa, turn off the N coast road at 20.390861N 74.548927W and drive to 20.326202N 74.675494W. At that point there was a short stretch of the road too bad for our car, but we continued on foot and enjoyed a long night walk through cloud forest at 340-400 m (the road can be walked across a 580-m pass all the way to the S side of the island). We saw a mammal on the ground that escaped before being seen well (probably a **black rat**), and two **Leach’s single-leaf bats** night-roosting in low branches. Driving back before dawn, we found a bunch of **Jamaican fruit** and **Waterhouse’s big-eared bats** roosting under an abandoned concrete bridge section near the road.

Parque Nacional Alejandro de Humboldt: East of Moa, take the road S that starts at 20.609519N 74.837173W. The road ends at a children’s campground, from where a trail continues to abandoned mines (around 20.569531N 74.853320 E) with lots of **Jamaican fruit** and **Waterhouse’s big-eared bats**, a few **Cuban fruit-eating bats**, and apparently a colony of **Cuban lesser funnel-eared bats** and **sooty mustached bats** deep inside (ask the camp guard to walk you there). At 20.604167N 74.844895W a dirt road splits to the left and goes for ~22 km to a couple of remote villages surrounded by prime solenodon habitat. You need a permit (difficult to obtain) to visit these villages, but there is a “bus” (a modified KAMAZ truck) that can give you a ride to the 530-m hilltop at 20.488362N 74.819604W with good mountain rainforest. We spent a few hours there and saw two small hutias (one juvenile **prehensile-tailed** and one possibly the unknown small hutia seen by 2015 expedition to the area), plus one **house mouse** and a few **Cuban fig-eating bats**, despite bad weather; on better nights solenodons should be possible. We hitched a ride on that bus at appr. 3 pm on Friday and late at night walked back to the junction at 20.604167N 74.844895W where we found that our car had been broken into and its battery stolen. Safer parking is available at Campismo Villa Chromita (20.603172N 74.849641W). Inquire in Moa about the bus schedule and departure point (ask about the bus to La Melba). The building at the park office at 20.510737N 74.671678E that had **Wagner’s bonneted bats** in 2016 is now gone.

Punta Gorda: **fierce bonneted** and **least mastiff bats** were hunting around the lights at 20.636212N 74.854976W. A **Cuban red bat** crossed the highway nearby.

Parque Nacional la Mensura: hutias have apparently been hunted out around Salto del Guayabo waterfall; the new owners have cats, but **black rats** still occur along the access road. The main road through the park has deteriorated a lot. Watch for **feral cattle** along that road.

Parque Nacional Cayo Saetia: said to be good for Desmarest's hutia, but you have to enter during daytime or have a hotel booked; we said we did have it, but were denied entrance because one of us had had his passport stolen from the car.

Parque Nacional Cienaga de Zapata: **pug-nosed mastiff bats** were hunting over ponds at Criadero de Cocodrilos (watch for **black rats** in trees there). There were **greater fishing** and **Jamaican fruit bats** at night at the first of the cenotes at Playa Giron (trailhead at 22.075849N 81.056810W; watch for crocodiles). We took a tour to Sta. Tomas in the interior of the park, starting at 4 am for a chance to see hutias along the road, but even with a thermal scope I found only two **Desmarest's hutias**, and they were too shy to get a good view. There were old droppings of the same species at the platform used to watch Zapata sparrows and wrens. A **Cuban yellow bat** was flying near Sta. Tomas ranger station.

Parque Escaleras de Jaruco: **Waterhouse's big-eared bats** still night-roost in abandoned buildings along the side road that starts at 23.0351N, 82.0717W. A **Macleay's mustached bat** was flying along a side trail. A couple hundred meters down that road (where it becomes worse) we saw a stream of **Mexican freetails** crossing the road at dawn, obviously on their way to a cave roost, but they stopped flying before I could track them to the roost. Prehensile-tailed hutias appear to have been hunted out. I was surprised to see an **eastern cottontail** at the turnoff late at night. We didn't have time to check the bat caves in the park.

Native species list

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| 1. Greater fishing bat <i>Noctilio leporinus mastivus</i> | PN Cienaga de Zapata |
| 2. Waterhouse's leaf-nosed bat <i>Macrotus waterhousii minor</i> | ubiquitous |
| 3. Leach's single-leaf bat <i>Monophyllus redmani</i> | Alturas de Baracoa |
| 4. Cuban fruit-eating bat <i>Brachyphylla nana</i> | PN Alejandro de Humboldt |
| 5. Jamaican fruit-eating bat <i>Artibeus jamaicensis parvipes</i> | ubiquitous |
| 6. Cuban fig-eating bat <i>Phyllops falcatus falcatus</i> | PN Alejandro de Humboldt |
| 7. Sooty mustached bat <i>Pteronotus quadridens quadridens</i> | PN Alejandro de Humboldt |
| 8. Macleay's mustached bat <i>P. macleayii macleayii</i> | Parque Escaleras de Jaruco |
| 9. Cuban lesser funnel-eared bat <i>Chilonatalus macer</i> | PN Alejandro de Humboldt |
| 10. Pfeiffer's red bat <i>Lasiurus pfeifferi</i> | Punta Gorda |
| 11. Cuban yellow bat <i>L. insularis</i> | PN Cienaga de Zapata |
| 12. Fierce bonneted bat <i>Eumops ferox</i> | Punta Gorda |
| 13. Least mastiff bat <i>Mormopterus minutus</i> | Punta Gorda |
| 14. Pug-nosed mastiff bat <i>Molossus milleri</i> | PN Cienaga de Zapata |
| 15. Mexican freetail <i>Tadarida brasiliensis muscula</i> | Parque Escaleras de Jaruco |
| 16. Desmarest's hutia <i>Capromys pilorides pilorides</i> | PN Cienaga de Zapata |
| 17. Prehensile-tailed hutia <i>Mysateles prehensilis</i> | PN Alejandro de Humboldt |



Waterhouse's leaf-nosed bats (*Macrotus waterhousii minor*)



Jamaican fruit-eating bats (*Artibeus jamaicensis parvipes*)



Cuban fruit-eating bat (*Brachyphylla nana*) among Jamaican fruit-eating bats