

Montserrat - “The Other Emerald Isle”



Island Summary:

One of the region's best-kept secrets, the charmingly tiny island of Montserrat, fondly known as “The Other Emerald Isle”, is a botanist's dream and a paradise for those who love to lose themselves in nature. With plant life fuelled by incredibly rich volcanic soil, Montserrat's vast swathes of ancient forest (it is possible to walk across the entire island and never abandon the solitude afforded by such serene habitat) reveal flowering plants and towering emergents unknown on many other islands. The south of the island is largely an exclusion zone around the Soufrière Hills volcano, however the inhabitable north is characterised by black-sand beaches, coral reefs, sea cliffs, shoreline caves - and all are yours to discover.



The king of hide-and-seek, the Montserrat Oriole (photo © Gary Chapin - Birding the Islands client); Montserrat provides some of the best views of thrashers along the island chain, like this obliging Pearly-eyed Thrasher (photo © Faraaz Abdool - Birding the Islands)

Highlights:

Despite its size, Montserrat is home to an impressive array of avifauna - the most sought after of which is often the once critically endangered **Montserrat Oriole**. Following predation by invasive species, and the tragic eruption of the Soufrière Hills volcano in 1995, efforts were made to rebuild the population of this dwindling species. Now, with over 500 adult birds successfully breeding on the island, chances are that in the company of our knowledgeable local guide, you will be able to catch a glimpse of this resilient endemic. Dwelling within the heart of the island's primary forest, are a host of other inhabitants including the melodic **Forest Thrush**, resplendent **Bridled Quail Dove**, **Lesser Antillean Euphonia**, **Brown Tumbler**, cautious **Scaly-naped Pigeon** and both species of thrasher found in the region (**Pearly-eyed** and **Scaly-breasted**). But the treasures to be encountered in these mature forests are not exclusively feathered. The utterly minuscule Dwarf Gecko and fabulous Montserrat Racer, along with a host of other reptiles and invertebrates including *Anolis* lizards, Tree Runners, Centipedes, Millipedes, and Lesser Antillean Whistling Frogs are all possible amongst moist leaf litter and swaying moss-lined limbs. The island's quiet elevated coastlines are ideal for views of **Red-billed Tropicbirds** and **Royal Terns** pursuing

flying fish, while diving **Brown Pelicans** as well as **Brown** and **Red-footed Boobies** can also often be spotted.



A Red-billed Tropicbird, its tail streamers billowing in the wind, glides past us on its foray for flying fish (photo © Keith Clarkson - Birding the Islands client); Brown Pelicans are a regular fixture just off the coast of Montserrat (photo © Steve Borgwald - Birding the Islands client)

Other things to do on Montserrat:

- Visit the Soufrière Hills volcano and the nation's nearby capital city - the only one in the world with a population of zero!
- Tingle your taste buds with a sample of Montserrat's very own version of moonshine: "Bush" rum.
- Visit the Montserrat Volcano Observatory and be treated to breathtaking views of the smouldering Soufrière Hills Volcano.
- Hike numerous forest trails in some of the most untouched forest in the region.