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Embracing the unexpected pleasures of stupidity while birding

By Bob Duchesne,
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I've come to enjoy the excitement of feeling stupid. Stupidity opens up a world of pleasant surprises. For instance, I just returned from vacationing in Hilton Head, South Carolina.

Although there was little likelihood of finding a bird that was new to me, I had a wonderful week encountering old friends in new ways.

Nothing surprised me more than the Red-throated Loons. Loyal readers know I enjoy the challenge of finding these unusual loons in Maine. They are smaller and skinnier than our common loons, with a snakier appearance. A fair number winter along our coastline, but they are tricky to spot.

It was a short walk to the beach on my first day down south. I had barely curled my toes in the sand when I spotted a loon — a Red-throated Loon. Excitedly, I directed the attention of my friends to this uncommon bird. While guiding their gaze to the correct spot, I noticed another nearby. And another. And another. OMG, the ocean is full of Red-throated Loons!

I felt stupid, a victim of my own

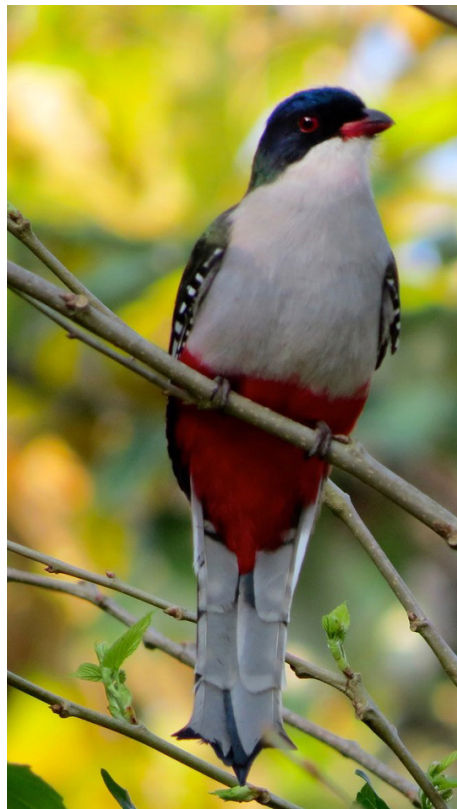
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Time Travel to 1960

Eileen Schwinn

Miss a major snow storm, get on a plane in Miami, arrive in the 1960's — That's just what I did this past February! A long-dreamed of Birding Trip to Cuba! Along with 14 other time-travelers, part of MassAudubon and the Caribbean Conservation Trust, we spent 12 days exploring the western two-thirds of this 780 mile-long island, located just 93 miles from the Florida Keys! No Internet, cell phone service, or credit cards (!!). We visited all the major National Parks, and a number of lesser know birding spots, along the north and south coasts, and in the interior of the country.

Cuban Trogon – the National Bird of Cuba



Mangrove Cuckoo

Of the 25 endemic species of birds in Cuba, we were able to get good looks at 23 of them, along with a great number of Neotropical beauties and wintering "familiar old friends". One astounding discovery we made, was a flock of over 500 American Avocets, feeding along side over a thousand American Flamingos. Little did we know, that the Avocets are rare visitors to the island, and the leading field guide author of the *Birds of Cuba*, Orlando Garrido, has only seen three of the species in his lifetime!

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