

ORNITHOLIDAYS TOUR TO TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
Caribbean Paradise

11 – 24 March 2013



Leader: Mike Witherick

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A Personal Diary

Monday, 11 March

Given the cold and the accumulating snow, this was certainly a good time to be heading for the Caribbean. The only downside was that our Boeing 777 had to be de-iced before it could fly. This unusual necessity in the UK took the best part of two hours to complete. Eventually, we took to the skies and the next challenge was to pass the next 8 hours until we reached St Lucia. Here we touched down and the aircraft disgorged about half of its passengers. After another 40 minutes in the air, we crossed the western end of Trinidad's Northern Ranges and were touching down at Piarco Airport, Port of Spain. Once we had cleared the immigration and customs procedures, we were greeted by Mahase, our guide and driver for the next week.

The Asa Wright Nature Centre was soon reached and we were welcomed by Anne, the manager. We were quickly taken, along with baggage, to our rooms. A buffet dinner awaited us in the dining room plus an introductory rum punch. Given the lateness of the hour in terms of GMT, we did reasonable justice to the meal. Afterwards, we made a quick visit to the veranda and then hastened to our rooms for some unpacking and sleep.

Tuesday, 12 March

The group gradually gathered on the veranda for an introductory spell of birding. Initially, it was a matter of sorting out the tanagers (Palm, White-lined, Silver-beaked and Blue-grey), the 'hummers' (Black-throated Mango, White-necked Jacobin and White-chested Emerald) and the honeycreepers (Purple and Green). A pair of Grey-headed Kites showed well some way down the valley. We had our first encounters with the likes of Violaceous Euphonia, Tropical Mockingbird, Cocoa Thrush, Bananaquit and Great Kiskadee. Plump Agoutis fed on scraps beneath the feeder trays. Most of us found time to drink a cup of locally-grown coffee – a reminder that the Nature Centre started life as a plantation growing all manner of crops, not just coffee.

After breakfast, Molly took us for a stroll down the Discovery Trail. If anything, the emphasis was on trogons and manakins. As for the former, all three resident species were heard, and of them two were seen – White-tailed and Collared. Both species of manakin were well seen, but there was little by the way of lekking. For me, the star bird was a Black-whiskered Vireo - a rare migrant and the first time I have encountered the species in T and T. Perhaps the highlight for the group were our good views of a male Bearded Bellbird complete with its 'dangly bits' and ear-splitting 'chimes'. A Double-toothed Kite posed well on a bare tree-top. Other sightings of note included Golden-fronted Greenlet, Long-billed Gnat-wren, Streaked Flycatcher, Channel-billed Toucan and White Hawk. Two woodpeckers – Golden-olive and Lineated - were heard, both drumming and calling.

Lunch proved to be a most acceptable meal and afterwards it was agreed that we should take time out until 4 o'clock tea – all part of the strategy to overcome our jet lag! A short spell of birding on the veranda before tea produced sightings of Little and Rufous-breasted Hermits, Blue Dacnis and Ochre-bellied Flycatcher. After a reviving cuppa, we walked along the drive to as far as the road. Birdlife was very quiet. No doubt, many birds had been scared off by the machinery and general disturbance associated with the current resurfacing and, in places, the rebuilding of the drive. The freshwater pool was briefly visited.

Once back at the Centre, there was time for a shower before meeting up for the daily rum punch and the log call. This was followed by another tasty meal. Afterwards, we all hurried off to our rooms in order to be bright eyed and bushy tailed for tomorrow's full day excursion.

Wednesday, 13 March

An hour of pre-breakfast birding was distinguished by two good sightings from the veranda, namely of a Squirrel Cuckoo and a Violaceous Trogon. As we left the Centre for our whole-day excursion we added another new species for the tour – Great Antshrike.

Our first stops down on the so-called savanna were in the grounds of the Aripo Livestock Station. Here new species came thick and fast, from White-winged Swallow and Grey-breasted Martin to Red-breasted Blackbird and Grassland Yellow Finch, from Tropical Kingbird and Carib Grackle to Least and Solitary Sandpipers and Wattle Jacanas. Here we encountered the first of a good number of Savanna Hawks that were to be seen during the course of the day. Perhaps remaining in the memory were our clear sightings of a male Striped Cuckoo singing its plaintive two-note song. Turkey and Black Vultures seemed to be everywhere.

We then drove to our luncheon stop on the beach at Manzanilla. On the way, we enjoyed watching an elegant Plumbeous Kite in flight. The brisk onshore wind and a red flag rather spoilt the wish of some to take a dip before sitting down to a plate of chicken 'pillau' and salad. In the event, only Sue braved the surf.

After lunch, we drove south through the seemingly endless linear coconut plantation which fringes the shores of the bay. Our sightings along this coastal stretch included a Great Egret and a Cocoi Heron, an immature Northern Crested Caracara receiving a food delivery from one of its parents, and a pair of Yellow-headed Caracara feeding on some form of road kill.

A circuit of a small part of a distinctly dry Nariva Swamp added to our bird list with sightings of Grey Hawk, Striated and Little Blue Herons as well as Yellow Oriole and Yellow-chinned Spinetail. Margaret made a good spot when she drew our attention to a 'hummer' feeding along a hedge of red flowers – it turned out to be a White-tailed Goldenthrout. I cannot recall ever having better views of this uncommon species. We then started our return drive to the Centre, but made two brief stops along the margins of the mangrove fringing the Nariva River. Here we saw a male Black-crested Antshrike and a male Green Kingfisher. A little way on we saw Common Black Hawk.

After a short comfort stop at Manzanilla, we then made all speed for the US World War II airbase which is currently being converted into a science and industrial park. As we drove down the old runway, a very dark Osprey was seen carrying a small fish. We parked underneath some moriche palms, and armed with a rum punch and a piece of cake, we embarked on a spell of birding aimed at some target species. We succeeded in seeing three of the four – Sulphury Flycatcher, Moriche Oriole and Fork-tailed Palm Swift. We missed out on Red-bellied Macaw but were compensated by the sighting of a Yellow-crowned Parrot. As we made our way to leave the airfield, we saw a Merlin fly over one of the large new buildings. A few hundred metres later we saw another, but longer-legged falcon feeding in a bare tree on a luckless Ruddy Ground-Dove. Close scrutiny through the scopes showed it to be an immature male Aplomado Falcon. But our avian joy did not end there, for we then saw a pair of Crimson-crested Woodpeckers fly into the base of the same tree. The male worked its way up the trunk and soon reached the falcon – the woodpecker showed little surprise or interest in the falcon, while the falcon carried on tearing its prey into strips. What a sight to end the field part of our day!

We arrived back at the Centre with just enough time for a much-needed shower before dinner. After the meal we retired to the sitting area adjoin Rosanna and Sue's rooms where we did the checklist. Given the earliness of tomorrow's start, we quickly retired to our rooms.

Thursday, 14 March

We had an early breakfast at 6 am and left the Centre 40 minutes later. On the way down the Arima Valley, we made a number of stops at which we added two new species to our list, namely Scaled Pigeon, White-tipped Dove and Sooty Grassquit. The views of the last were excellent as a male posed and sang in a small open bush for a number of minutes. So close was the bird that we could see down into its open pinky-red mouth as it sang. Two Plumbeous Kites were seen in a dead tree.

Much of the early part of the morning was spent in the Aripo Livestock Centre. Here we saw our first Piratic Flycatchers, but more unusually they were keeping hunting company with a Fork-tailed Flycatcher. This migrant species normally does not arrive in Trinidad until April. Nearby, we also gained quite good views of a Masked Yellowthroat. A little further along our circuit of the Station, we were able to admire a pair of Green-rumped Parrotlets.

Mid-morning we moved on to the straggling settlement of Cumuto – our destination was a sizeable colony of Yellow-rumped Caciques and their hanging-basket nests. There were some good photo opportunities. Eventually, we tore ourselves away and made a stop to fill up with diesel. In the event, no sooner had we returned to the road and the minibus began to splutter, belching a whitish exhaust and losing power. Clearly there was something amiss with the new fuel. We stopped at a vehicle workshop and the engineer diagnosed that ‘water’ had somehow got into the fuel. We subsequently learnt that it was not a mixture of diesel and water that had caused the problem, but rather a mixture of diesel and petrol – a case of a delivery tanker discharging petrol into a diesel tank! Because of this difficulty, we did not visit the edge of Arena Forest as had been our intention. And to cap our run of bad luck, due to work on the drive, we had to leave our vehicle at the entrance to the Centre’s estate and walk the rest of the way. At least the exercise sharpened our appetites for lunch, which turned out to be yet another excellent meal.

Much of the afternoon was spent on the veranda indulging in some fairly relaxed birding. Notable sightings included Red-legged Honeycreeper, White-tailed Trogon, Lineated and Golden-olive Woodpeckers, Bearded Bellbird and Channel-billed Toucan. John, Margaret and I paid a short visit to the upper car park where we saw Southern Rough-winged Swallow and two more Piratic Flycatchers. We did the checklist in the same venue as yesterday and then went into the main house for our daily issue of rum punch. This was followed by yet another highly acceptable meal with a distinctly Chinese taste to it!

Friday, 15 March

Today’s hour of pre-breakfast birding was aimed at one of the smallest birds in the world – Tufted Coquette. Happily, I can report that we were successful in that all of the group had good views of a female as she fed in the vervane. John and Margaret stayed behind a little and were rewarded with the appearance of a male on the same plants.

At 8.30 am we assembled on the veranda and along with four other guests at the Centre met up with Caleb, who was to be our guide for a visit to the so-called ‘Oilbird caves’. After some introductory remarks about this remarkable species, we wound our way, in the rain, to where some 150 of these nocturnal, fruit-eating birds spend the daylight hours. In pairs, we moved into the mouth of the ravine to see some of the birds at close hand. It has to be said that other species of bird were in exceptional short supply during the whole of the excursion. However, some did catch glimpses of Stripe-breasted Spinetail, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet and Collared Trogon.

For the remainder of the morning and between lunch and tea, the group maintained a presence on the veranda. Here was another chance to consolidate the identification of some 20 plus species of bird. The only new species seen by some of the group was Turquoise Tanager; a Rufous-browed Peppershrike called persistently, but remained largely hidden from view.

After tea on the veranda, we set off for a session of ‘night birding’. On the way down the Arima valley, we stopped to see a Broad-winged Hawk. Down on the Aripo savanna, Mahase spotted the nest of a Pearl Kite complete with sitting bird showing just its head above the rim of the nest. We then entered the grounds of the Aripo Livestock Station and watched three species of sandpiper (Least, Spotted and Solitary) on the muddy edge of a pool occupied by water buffalo.

We consumed our rum punch and then our evening meal in a workman’s shed. Over the next two hours, we drove around in search of nocturnal birds and our tally at the close of play included Barn and Tropical Screech Owls (the latter heard but not seen by all) and Ferruginous Pygmy Owl (heard only), Common Potoo, Pauraque and White-tailed Nightjar. A juvenile of the last species was seen at close hand, with its dotting parents keeping guard nearby. We arrived back at the Centre a little before 9 pm, did the checklist and then retired.

Saturday, 16 March

Before breakfast, some of us went in search of Tufted Coquette again. We were successful, but the male put in only the briefest of appearances. But by way of compensation, both Trinidad Motmot and Northern Waterthrush showed well.

After breakfast, we boarded our maxi bus and, at the drive entrance, turned left and climbed towards the summit of the Northern Ranges. Our first produced glimpsed sightings of Rufous-breasted Wren and Golden-crowned Warbler. The second stop was at the TSTT satellite station located on one of the highest points of the Northern Ranges. Sadly, we were shrouded in low cloud and could scarcely discern the Highland Hepatic Tanagers that were calling from a nearby tree. Once over the watershed and on the early part of the descent towards the northern coast, we located a Collared Trogon. The next stop further down produced probably the best sighting of the day – two Variegated Flycatchers – perched on some telegraph wires. We might have wished for better views in that they were seen against the light. However, John came to the rescue with some shots which confirmed the sighting along with the distinctive call.

It was just over midday when we eventually reached the Caribbean coast at Blanchisseuse. We ate our picnic lunch of tuna bake, salad and banana by the shore. Brown Pelicans patrolled the inshore waters in search of a meal. After our meal, we strolled along the beach to the point where the Marianne River struggles to enter the sea. Before retracing our steps back over the Northern Ranges, we paid a quick visit to the new bridge over the river. Here we saw our first Magnificent Frigatebird and some Red-legged Honeycreepers.

We made three stops on the return journey. At the first, a very vocal Ferruginous Pygmy Owl was prepared to give only flight views as it crossed the road several times. The second 'tea-time' stop was very productive. In the same two neighbouring trees we saw Blue-headed Parrot, Greyish Saltator and Tropical Parula. Nearby we saw our first Tropical Pewee, and not far away was a sizeable Yellow-rumped Cacique colony. The third stop was close to the summit area and allowed us to see a Red-rumped Woodpecker and the nest of a White-chested Emerald, complete with a sitting bird.

We arrived back at the Centre around 4.45 pm and this allowed us a good hour of R and R before meeting up to do the checklist. After this we retired to the veranda for our daily issue of rum punch, followed by evening meal. Margaret was the only member of the group to go on the night walk with Elsa.

Sunday, 17 March

Time before breakfast was spent enjoying an early coffee and checking out birds to be seen from the veranda. No new species were seen, but it was encouraging to see a marked improvement in the recognition and identification of those birds.

The morning was spent birding along the Lalaja Trace which runs up the interfluvium separating the Arima and Aripo valleys. The road passes through some fine stretches of forest which are host to quite a rich avifauna. The weather was kinder than yesterday, and there were only some light flurries of drizzle. Probably the sighting that all of us will remember was of a pair of Ferruginous Pygmy Owls posing out in the open on a bare branch. But we also encountered a number of new species which ranged between those that were seen well and those that were glimpsed. The total list included White-flanked Ant-wren, White-bellied Antbird, Trinidad Euphonia and Euler's Flycatcher. It was strange that none of the group could remember seeing a Slaty-capped Flycatcher, although one was clearly pointed out by Mahase using his laser pen. The raptor list included White and Common Black Hawks and Plumbeous Kite.

We arrived back at the Centre just after midday and were soon sitting down to an excellent Sunday lunch. The afternoon was declared as a period of leisure time – some walked; some photographed, and some spent time on the veranda socialising. We met up again at 6 pm for log call followed by rum punch, followed by evening meal.

Monday, 18 March

There were no new sightings before breakfast, but immediately afterwards and before leaving for the day's excursion, a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl and a Lineated Woodpecker gave good views from the veranda.

The first stop of the day was at the Trincity sewage ponds, now largely defunct and overgrown by water hyacinth, but host to Yellow-hooded Blackbirds and Purple Gallinules. A Peregrine was seen hunting close to the ground. From there we drove to the west coast at Waterloo – the tide was high and the waters distinctly muddied by the silt brought down by the rivers of nearby Venezuela. Our first coastal stop was more one for comfort purposes, but the posts just offshore were occupied by both Royal Terns and White-winged Swallows. At the next stop, close to the Temple in the Sea, we saw Large-billed Terns, Neotropic

Cormorant and the first of a quite a good number of Ospreys that were to be seen during the course of the day.

We then drove some way south to the jetty at Orange Valley. Roosting on the mud was a flock of over 1,000 Laughing Gulls. In amongst them we spotted two adult and three immature Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Also keeping company with the gulls were some fifty Black Skimmers. Much to Margaret's delight, several took to the wing and demonstrated their typical and intriguing feeding behaviour. Also spotted on the muddy shore were a few Scarlet Ibis, Willets, Hudsonian Whimbrel, Short-billed Dowitcher and Ruddy Turnstone. Both Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons were seen; so too a Greater Ani.

By now the heat of the day was considerable, so we boarded the bus and continued south to the Brickfields park close by one of the oil refineries. Here we ate our lunch – a tasty cottage pie – and then indulged in a little bird watching which gave us views of Yellow-headed Caracara, Yellow Warbler and Saffron Finch. With time in hand before our 4 pm Caroni cruise, we returned to the jetty at Orange Valley, but not before Sue had bought an ice cream. Two more wader species were spotted on the mudflats – Black-bellied Plover and Greater Yellowlegs. The photographers were kept busy right up until the time came for us to drive north to Caroni.

From the bridge over the highway, we scanned the Caroni ricefields. Soon we spotted the bird we sought – Long-winged Harrier. Much to our delight, it made a kill quite near to us and the bird was seen well tearing its prey apart on the ground. Also seen for a short while was a Ringed Kingfisher. From there we drove the short distance to the Caroni Swamp Visitor Centre where we took advantage of the loos and then chilled out for a short time whilst we waited for our boat to be prepared for the cruise. During this time, two Rufous-browed Peppershrikes were seen and two Clapper Rails heard.

Before mooring up to watch the Scarlet Ibis roost, our route through the mangrove swamp produced a sequence of good sightings – a pair of Masked Cardinals, two Greater Ani, a Straight-billed Woodcreeper, two Common Potoos, several Bicoloured Conebills, a flock of Blue-winged Teal, a pair of Green-throated Mango, a Green Kingfisher and marvellous views of a perched Pygmy Kingfisher. Two mature Cook's Tree Boas were seen entwined along a mangrove branch.

By the standards of this avian spectacular, tonight's roosting of Scarlet Ibis was a very good one. The conditions were calm and the light good. Scarlet Ibis seen against a green mangrove backcloth is a vivid sight to remember. But the roost also involves other species, most notably Great and Snowy Egrets, Tricoloured Herons and Neotropic Cormorants. A glass or two of rum punch and a slice of chocolate cake added to the pleasures of the moments spent watching the island of green mangrove gradually blossoming into a drapery of scarlet 'flowers'.

It took us just over an hour to reach the Centre. Another excellent meal awaited us. Afterwards we did the checklist and the plans for tomorrow's transfer to Tobago were run through.

Tuesday, 19 March

As this was to be our transfer to Tobago day, there was no pre-breakfast birding as such. After breakfast, room accounts were settled and there was a little time to watch the veranda birds for the last time. Mahase arrived at 9.30 am. With our baggage loaded and farewells said to the staff, we ran the gauntlet of the driveway workers and their machines and headed down to Piarco Airport. We caught the shuttle to Tobago which left at 11.40 am. Meanwhile, Gladwyn (our driver and guide of Tobago) had been expecting us to arrive at 1.10 pm. A phone call brought him to Crownpoint some 20 minutes after we had landed.

We did an hour or so of birding near the airport, mainly of a wetland nature, and opened our Tobago list with waders and herons, as well as with the likes of some of Tobago's specialities such as Caribbean Martin, Eared Dove, Scrub Greenlet and Brown-crested Flycatcher. Eventually, we ate the remainder of our AWNC cheese sandwich at the Grafton copra house. During the break, we were entertained by a heated dispute over a nesting hole between a Red-crowned and a Red-rumped Woodpecker. Afterwards, we took a short walk down one of the trails and saw more new species such as Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, White-fringed Antwren and Yellow-breasted Flycatcher. Some Trinidad Motmot gave excellent photo opportunities, as I promised back on Trinidad!

Our final stop at the east end of the island was at the large pond by the Tobago Plantation hotel. Here we saw a sizeable Spectacled Cayman sleeping on the shore. Anhingas intrigued us with their looks and behaviour. We also saw both species of Night Heron, Least Grebes and a rarity for Tobago – a Little Egret all the way from the other side of the Atlantic! Our onward drive to our hotel took us about 90 minutes. Soon we were being delivered to our smart rooms adjacent to the shores of Batteaux Bay.

We met in the bar around 6.30 pm for our welcome drink and some 30 minutes later were sitting down to a very acceptable three-course meal. Revised plans for tomorrow were laid and we met the Hotel Manager, Jason Radix, who started his career as a guide at the AWNC. We did a double-column checklist and then retired to our rooms to be lulled to sleep by the sound of the breaking waves.

Wednesday, 20 March

A few of us took a stroll round the hotel grounds before our 8 am breakfast which was served by a welcoming and cheerful Erica. Just after 9am, Heston turned up in his maxi bus to drive us up to Flagstaff Hill where we marvelled at the panoramic view – westwards to St Giles Island, eastwards along the beautifully forested Main Ridge and northwards down to sleepy Charlotteville tucked in its sandy Caribbean bay. Out towards St Giles Island, we could make out the dark shapes of Magnificent Frigatebirds interspersed with and contrasting with the white shapes of Red-billed Tropicbirds.

From Flagstaff Hill we walked back down the metalled track as far as the main road. We did not come across any new birds for the tour, but the walk did give us the chance to consolidate our bird ID skills, such as distinguishing the ‘black’ birds (Carib Grackle, Shiny and Giant Cowbirds) and distinguishing between Tropical and Grey Kingbirds. Perhaps there were two sightings that stick most in the mind. The first was of over 100 Caribbean Martins strung out along three power lines, and the second was of a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars.

At the main road, we boarded Heston’s bus again and drove down to Charlotteville. First he took us to the recently completed Charlotteville Lookout located on the site of the old Fort Clarendon. The two canons bearing GR inscriptions were a reminder of the former British military presence in the area. The views from this new facility were most photogenic. We were then driven into the centre of the settlement. A Green Heron was well seen on the bed of a small stream. A catch of large kingfish had recently been landed and were now being gutted and sold. There was a very heated argument between two of the fish merchants. Since both were wielding their fish knives, we thought it better that we did not tarry! Instead we hastened on to the elevated terrace of Sharon’s bar where we enjoyed the view and Heston joined us for a reviving cold drink.

We were back at the hotel around 12.45 pm and met up shortly afterwards for lunch on the bar terrace. Margaret was a little late turning up and on her own as John had suffered a painful fall. Happily, by the time we had finished the meal, John was spied sitting outside. A dish of ice cream carried from the bar seemed to help his recovery.

After lunch, there was time for a siesta and a swim. At 4 pm some of us met for a gentle walk over to the watermill, where we indulged in a little industrial archaeology. First we focused on the crushing, treatment and shipment of sugar which continued here up until the turn of the 19th century. We then looked at some of the remains of the Bird of Paradise Hotel which did business here during the first 65 years of the 20th century.

Around 6.30 pm we reassembled in the bar for a drink followed by evening meal and the checklist. The plans for tomorrow’s day trip were outlined.

Thursday, 21 March

We had an early breakfast at 7 am and an hour later left the hotel in Gladwyn’s bus for the Gilpin Trace. Sadly, because of John’s injury he and Margaret decided to stay behind. Having turned south out of Roxborough, we climbed up the forested slopes of the Main Ridge. Once we had passed the sign announcing we were entering the Tobago Forest Reserve (created remarkably early, namely in the year 1767), we started

our birding. Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Trinidad Motmot and Red-rumped Woodpecker were seen well. A little further up, a Broad-winged Hawk flew by.

Before starting the walk along the Gilpin Trace, we visited the new Bloody Bay Lookout and made use of the facilities there. A Venezuelan Flycatcher was heard but could not be spotted. I was pleasantly surprised how dry the Trace was this year – it is normally very wet, muddy and slippery at this time of year. As it turned out, our two hours or so walking down and up the Trace was very much about spotting hummingbird nests. In all we saw several nests of three species – Copper-rumped, Rufous-breasted Hermit and White-tailed Sabre-wing – some were occupied by sitting birds, others were empty. Sightings of other species included Plain Brown Woodcreeper, Plain Antvireo, a female Blue-backed Manakin, Red-legged Honeycreeper and American Redstart. Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Red-eyed (Chivi) Vireo and Streaked Flycatcher were heard. A Red-tailed Squirrel was seen carrying and then eating a parrot apple.

While we were walking the Trace, Sue (in company with one of the local guides) saw a Great Black Hawk as she waited under the shelter for our return. In fact, we ate our picnic lunches under the same shelter. A short session of birding after lunch proved to be much more profitable. At last, we were able to enjoy good views of a cooperative male Blue-backed Manakin. Much to our surprise, we then came across a fairly confiding Upland Sandpiper busily feeding on the roadside grassy verge. Its status is described as ‘a very rare visitor to T and T’. It was only the second time that Gladwin had come across the species. To round off the field part of the day, we saw another White-tailed Sabre-wing and found a male Collared Trogon.

On the way back to the hotel, we stopped briefly at the Speyside Lookout and it was here that Gladwyn pointed out the nest of a fourth species of ‘hummer’, that of a Black-throated Mango. We arrived back at base at 3 pm and I was delighted to find John sitting out on this balcony and claiming to feel much more comfortable. During the next few hours, before meeting in the bar, there was a certain amount of swimming and chilling out.

Friday, 22 March

It was breakfast at the normal time of 8 am. Just over an hour later, we boarded Frank’s glass-bottom boat for a visit to Little Tobago. This is now a protected bird sanctuary, being previously known as ‘Bird of Paradise Island’, due to the fact that a one-time owner, an Englishman, had in the early 20th century introduced and released here Greater Birds of Paradise from Papua New Guinea. Hurricane Flora in 1963 signalled the end of the introduction and, except for a handful of free-range hens, the island today is occupied only by native species

As we walked up to the Lookout, Zolani drew our attention to some of the birds (Trinidad Motmot, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Red-eyed (Chivi) Vireo and ‘hummers’) and plants, particularly those that have traditionally served practical purposes, as for example the silver-backed palm. We spent an hour at the Lookout, admiring the wonderful seascape out to St Giles Island, as well as the flying skills of aerobic Red-billed Tropicbirds and the menacing Magnificent Frigatebirds constantly tailing them. The photographic challenge of the morning was to obtain a full-frame image of one of the former species in flight. The nests of Brown and Red-footed Booby were well-filled with large chicks almost ready for their first flights. Clearly, the breeding season for all the seabird species present was coming to an end.

On our way back to the hotel, we drifted over some stretches of coral reef and were impressed by the different forms of coral and the diversity of colourful fish. The excursion certainly sharpened our appetite and thirsts, both of which were satisfied by a leisurely lunch.

It was around 4.30 pm when we were picked up by Newton George and transported the short distance to the Hummingbird Gallery in his garden in Speyside. Here we watched four different species at the many feeders strung around the garden – Copper-rumped, Black-throated Mango, White-necked Jacobin and Ruby-topaz. The males of the last species were the unchallenged show-stealers flashing their red crowns and gold throats. Other species also showed well on the feeder trays, namely Trinidad Motmot, Barred Antshrike and White-tipped Dove. It needs to be recorded that as we were climbing the hotel drive, we stopped to marvel at the diminutive nest of a fifth ‘hummer’, Ruby-topaz, filled to the brim by two chicks.

We returned to the hotel around 6 pm and met up a little later for a drink and an excellent barbeque meal – the pork ribs were delicious. As we ate, we listened to the music provided by a talented three-piece pan band. Surely, there could be no more pleasant and appropriate way in which to end our last evening together at Blue Waters Inn.

Saturday, 23 March

The morning was set aside for packing and leisure as a preamble to our homeward journey. Sue swam; John read; Rosanna indulged in turtle watching from the hotel beach. Margaret and I did a walk along the Starwood Trace as far as the point where we could look down into the next bay. We logged some 15 bird species and saw a Leatherback Turtle in the clear waters of Anse Brisant.

We took an early lunch at noon, and because of Gladwyn's slightly delayed arrival to pick us up (he had been shopping Charlotteville for fish); we were able to round off the meal with ice cream. We were seen off by Jason, the hotel manager, at 12.45 pm and just over 90 minutes later we were dropped off at Crownpoint Airport. Our Caribbean Airlines shuttle flight to Trinidad was on schedule. Checking in for our onward British Airways flight to Gatwick was fairly straightforward, but we already knew that its departure might be delayed by just over an hour, thanks to adverse weather in the UK earlier in the day. Our flight schedule involved a stop-down on St Lucia where the aircraft filled to capacity.

Sunday 24 March

We arrived into Gatwick exactly on schedule having made up for our delayed departure from Piarco Airport. The weather that 'welcomed' us came as something of a shock – overcast, light snow flurries and the temperature stuck fast at freezing point. On reflection, the conditions were exactly the same as when we had left the UK nearly two weeks ago. Within an hour of landing, we were saying our farewells in the Baggage Reclaim and hoping that nothing would impede our homeward travel.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Mahase (our driver and guide in Trinidad) and Gladwyn (our driver and guide on Tobago). The friendly staff at both the Asa Wright Nature Centre and at Blue waters Inn made us feel most welcome. Thank you too for coming on the tour. I do so hope that you enjoyed the T & T 'experience' and that we might meet up again on another Ornitholiday in the near future. Thanks to John for the photographs included in this report.

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May 2013

Itinerary and Weather

Monday, 11 March	London Gatwick > St Lucia > Port of Spain > Asa Wright Nature Centre
Tuesday, 12 March	The grounds of AWNC Overcast & humid 27°C
Wednesday, 13 March	> Aripo Livestock Station > Manzanilla > Nariva swamp & mangrove > Wallerfield Hot & humid 30°C
Thursday, 14 March	am: Aripo savanna > Livestock Station > Cumuto pm: AWNC Overcast; some drizzle 25°C
Friday, 15 March	am: Oilbirds pm: Night birding at Aripo Livestock Station Overcast; some light showers 26°C
Saturday, 16 March	> Blanchisseuse via Morne Bleu Sunny periods & some light drizzle 25°C
Sunday, 17 March	am: Lalaja Trace pm: at leisure Mainly dry with sunny periods 28°C
Monday, 18 March	> Trincity sewage ponds > Caroni ricefields > Waterloo > Orange Valley jetty > Brickfields > Caroni ricefields & swamp Overcast with sunny periods 30°C
Tuesday, 19 March	am: transfer to Tobago pm: >Bon Accord > Grafton > Tobago Plantation pool > Blue Waters Inn Fine 28°C
Wednesday, 20 March	am: Flagstaff Hill & Charlotteville pm: Watermill Mainly dry & breezy 26°C
Thursday, 21 March	> Gilpin Trace & Roxborough - Bloody Bay road Partially overcast & breezy 26°C
Friday, 22 March	am: Little Tobago pm: Hummingbird Gallery Fine, but humid 28°C
Saturday, 23 March	am: at leisure pm: Crownpoint > Port of Spain > St Lucia > Hot & sunny 32°C
Sunday, 24 March	> London Gatwick Very cold 0°C

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

No of days recorded	Location	Abundance Scale (no. seen on best day)
1 2h means seen on 1 day and heard on 2 other days	T = Trinidad only To = Tobago only	1 = 1 - 4 2 = 5 - 9 3 = 10 - 100 4 = > 100

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Location	Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Little Tinamou	- 2h	T	1	<i>Crypturellus soui</i>
White-cheeked Pintail	1	To	1	<i>Anas bahamensis</i>
Blue-winged Teal	1	T	3	<i>Anas discors</i>
Rufous-vented Chachalaca	5	To	3	<i>Ortalis ruficauda</i>
Least Grebe	1	To	1	<i>Podiceps dominicus</i>
Red-billed Tropicbird	3	To	3	<i>Phaeton aethereus</i>
Brown Pelican	5		3	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>
Red-footed Booby	1	To	3	<i>Sula sula</i>
Brown Booby	1	To	3	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>
Neotropic Cormorant	2		1	<i>Phalacrocorax olivaceus</i>
Anhinga	2		1	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>
Magnificent Frigatebird	6		3	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	2		1	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Yellow-crowned Night Heron	4		2	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>
Green Heron	2	To	1	<i>Butorides virescens</i>
Striated Heron	3	T	1	<i>Butorides striatus</i>
Cattle Egret	6		4	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Cocoi (White-necked) Heron	1	T	1	<i>Ardea cocoi</i>
Great Egret	3		3	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
Tricolored (Louisiana) Heron	2		3	<i>Hydranassa tricolor</i>
Little Egret	1	To	1	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Snowy Egret	2		3	<i>Egretta thula</i>
Little Blue Heron	6		3	<i>Florida caerulea</i>
Scarlet Ibis	1	T	4	<i>Eudocimus ruber</i>
Turkey Vulture	8	T	3	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
(American) Black Vulture	7	T	4	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>
Osprey	2	T	2	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Grey-headed Kite	1	T	1	<i>Leptodon cayanensis</i>
Pearl Kite	1	T	1	<i>Gampsonyx swainsonii</i>
Double-toothed Kite	3	T	1	<i>Harpagus bidentatus</i>
Plumbeous Kite	4	T	1	<i>Ictinia plumbea</i>
Long-winged Harrier	1	T	1	<i>Circus buffoni</i>
White Hawk	4	T	1	<i>Leucopternis albicollis</i>
Grey (-lined) Hawk	1	T	1	<i>Asturina nitida</i>
Common Black Hawk	6	T	2	<i>Buteogallus anthracinus</i>
Great Black Hawk	1	To	1	<i>Buteogallus urubitinga</i>
Savannah Hawk	4	T	2	<i>Buteogallus meridionalis</i>
Broad-winged Hawk	2		1	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>
Short-tailed Hawk	1	T	1	<i>Buteo brachyurus</i>
Northern Crested Caracara	1	T	1	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>
Yellow-headed Caracara	2		1	<i>Milvago chimachima</i>
Aplomado Falcon	1	T	1	<i>Falco femoralis</i>
Merlin	2		1	<i>Falco columbarius</i>
Peregrine Falcon	3		1	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Clapper Rail	- 1h	T	1	<i>Rallus longirostris</i>
Common Gallinule (Moorhen)	1	To	1	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
American Purple Gallinule	1	T	1	<i>Porphyria martinica</i>
Southern Lapwing	8		2	<i>Vanellus chilensis</i>
Black-bellied (Grey) Plover	1	T	1	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>

Short-billed Dowitcher	1		T	1	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>
Hudsonian Whimbrel	1		T	1	<i>Numenius hudsonicus</i>
Upland Sandpiper	1		To	1	<i>Bartramia longicauda</i>
Spotted Sandpiper	5			2	<i>Actitis macularia</i>
Solitary Sandpiper	3			1	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>
Greater Yellowlegs	2			1	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>
Lesser Yellowlegs	1		To	1	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>
Willet	1		T	3	<i>Catoptrophorus semipalmatus</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	5			3	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Least Sandpiper	3		T	1	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>
Wattled Jacana	5			3	<i>Jacana jacana</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1		T	1	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Laughing Gull	5			4	<i>Larus atricilla</i>
Large-billed Tern	1		T	2	<i>Phaetusa simplex</i>
Royal Tern	1		T	1	<i>Sterna maxima</i>
Black Skimmer	1		T	3	<i>Rynchops nigra</i>
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	8			3	<i>Columba livia</i>
Scaled Pigeon	1	1h	T	1	<i>Patagioenas speciosa</i>
Pale-vented Pigeon	4		To	2	<i>Patagioenas cayennensis</i>
Ruddy Ground-Dove	6			3	<i>Columbina talpacoti</i>
Eared Dove	2		To	1	<i>Zenaida auriculata</i>
White-tipped Dove	5	1h		1	<i>Leptotila verreauxi</i>
Grey-fronted Dove	4	3h	T	1	<i>Leptotila rufaxilla</i>
Green-rumped Parrotlet	1		T	1	<i>Forpus passerinus</i>
Blue-headed Parrot	1		T	2	<i>Pionus menstruus</i>
Yellow-crowned Amazon	1		T	1	<i>Amazona ochrocephala</i>
Orange-winged Amazon	12			3	<i>Amazona amazonica</i>
Squirrel Cuckoo	2	1h	T	1	<i>Piaya cayana</i>
Striped Cuckoo	2		T	1	<i>Tapera naevia</i>
Greater Ani	1		T	1	<i>Crotophaga major</i>
Smooth-billed Ani	6			3	<i>Crotophaga ani</i>
Tropical Screech Owl	1		T	1	<i>Megascops choliba</i>
Ferruginous Pygmy Owl	3	4h	T	1	<i>Glaucidium brasilianum</i>
Oilbird	1		T	3	<i>Steatornis caripensis</i>
Common Potoo	2		T	1	<i>Nyctibius griseus</i>
Common Pauraque	1		T	2	<i>Nyctidromus albicollis</i>
White-tailed Nightjar	1			2	<i>Caprimulgus cayennensis</i>
Grey-rumped Swift	1		T	2	<i>Chaetura cinereiventris</i>
Short-tailed Swift	3			3	<i>Chaetura brachyura</i>
Fork-tailed Palm-Swift	3		T	2	<i>Reinarda squamata</i>
Rufous-breasted Hermit	7			1	<i>Glaucis hirsuta</i>
Little Hermit	4		T	1	<i>Phaethornis longuemareus</i>
Green Hermit	1		T	1	<i>Phaethornis guy</i>
White-tailed Sabrewing	1		To	1	<i>Campylopterus ensipennis</i>
White-necked Jacobin	10			2	<i>Florisuga mellivora</i>
Green-throated Mango	1		T	1	<i>Anthracothorax viridigula</i>
Black-throated Mango	10			2	<i>Anthracothorax nigricollis</i>
Ruby Topaz	5		To	3	<i>Chrysolampis mosquitus</i>
Tufted Coquette	2		T	1	<i>Lophornis ornata</i>
Blue-chinned Sapphire	7		T	1	<i>Chlorestes notatus</i>
White-chested Emerald	8		T	2	<i>Amazilia chionopectus</i>
Copper-rumped Hummingbird	9			1	<i>Amazilia tobaci</i>
Green-backed (White-tailed) Trogon	1		T	1	<i>Trogon viridis</i>
Guianan (Violaceous) Trogon	3	1h	T	1	<i>Trogon violaceus</i>
Collared Trogon	4			1	<i>Trogon collaris</i>
Ringed Kingfisher	1		T	1	<i>Megaceryle torquata</i>
Green Kingfisher	2		T	1	<i>Chloroceryle americana</i>
American Pygmy Kingfisher	1		T	1	<i>Chloroceryle aenea</i>
Trinidad (Blue-crowned) Motmot	7	1h		1	<i>Momotus bahamensis</i>
Rufous-tailed Jacamar	5			1	<i>Galbula ruficauda</i>
Channel-billed Toucan	5		T	1	<i>Ramphastos vitellinus</i>
Red-crowned Woodpecker	1		To	1	<i>Melanerpes rubricapillus</i>
Red-rumped Woodpecker	4			1	<i>Veniliornis kirkii</i>

Golden-olive Woodpecker	4	1h		1	<i>Piculus rubiginosus</i>
Lineated Woodpecker	2	1h	T	1	<i>Dryocopus lineatus</i>
Crimson-crested Woodpecker	1		T	1	<i>Campephilus melanoleucos</i>
Stripe-breasted Spinetail	1		To	1	<i>Synallaxis cinnamomea</i>
Yellow-chinned Spinetail	1		T	1	<i>Certhiaxis cinnamomea</i>
Plain-brown Woodcreeper	1		To	1	<i>Dendrocincla fuliginosa</i>
Olivaceous Woodcreeper	-	1h	To	1	<i>Sittasomus griseicapillus</i>
Straight-billed Woodcreeper	1		T	1	<i>Xiphorhynchus picus</i>
Cocoa Woodcreeper	-	6h		1	<i>Xiphorhynchus susurrans</i>
Great Antshrike	1		T	1	<i>Taraba major</i>
Black-crested Antshrike	3		T	1	<i>Sakesphorus canadensis</i>
Barred Antshrike	9	1h		2	<i>Thamnophilus doliatus</i>
Plain Antvireo	1		To	1	<i>Dysithamnus mentalis</i>
White-flanked Antwren	1		T	1	<i>Myrmotherula axillaris</i>
White-fringed Antwren	1		To	1	<i>Formicivora grisea</i>
White-bellied Antbird	1	1h	T	1	<i>Myrmeciza longipes</i>
Black-faced Ant-Thrush	-	1h	T	1	<i>Formicarius grisea</i>
Forest Elaenia	2		T	1	<i>Myiopagis gaimardii</i>
Yellow-bellied Elaenia	5			2	<i>Elaenia flavogaster</i>
Ochre-bellied Flycatcher	7			1	<i>Mionectes oleaginea</i>
Slaty-capped Flycatcher	1		T	1	<i>Leptopogon superciliaris</i>
Yellow-breasted Flycatcher	1		To	1	<i>Tolmomyias flaviventris</i>
Euler's Flycatcher	1		T	1	<i>Empidonax euleri</i>
Tropical Pewee	1	1h	T	1	<i>Contopus cinereus</i>
Pied Water-Tyrant	3		T	1	<i>Fluvicola pica</i>
White-headed Marsh-Tyrant	3		T	1	<i>Arundinicola leucocephala</i>
Piratic Flycatcher	3		T	1	<i>Legatus leucophaius</i>
Great Kiskadee	8		T	2	<i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>
Streaked Flycatcher	3	1h		1	<i>Myiodynastes maculatus</i>
Boat-billed Flycatcher	1		T	1	<i>Megarhynchus pitangua</i>
Variiegated Flycatcher	1		T	1	<i>Empidonomus varius</i>
Sulphury Flycatcher	1		T	1	<i>Tyrannopsis sulphurea</i>
Tropical Kingbird	10			2	<i>Tyrannus melancholicus</i>
Grey Kingbird	4			1	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>
Venezuelan Flycatcher	-	1h	To	1	<i>Myiarchus venezuelensis</i>
Brown-crested Flycatcher	4		To	1	<i>Myiarchus tyrannulus</i>
Bearded Bellbird	3	4h	T	1	<i>Procnias averano</i>
White-bearded Manakin	4		T	2	<i>Manacus manacus</i>
Blue-backed Manakin	2		To	1	<i>Chiroxiphia pareola</i>
Golden-headed Manakin	4		T	1	<i>Pipra erythrocephala</i>
Rufous-browed Peppershrike	3	4h	T	1	<i>Cyclarhis gujanensis</i>
Red-eyed (Chivi) Vireo	1	3h		1	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>
Black-whiskered Vireo	1		T	1	<i>Vireo altiloquus</i>
Golden-fronted Greenlet	3		T	1	<i>Hylophilus aurantiifrons</i>
Scrub Greenlet	3	1h	To	1	<i>Hylophilus flavipes</i>
White-winged Swallow	4			2	<i>Tachycineta albiventer</i>
Caribbean Martin	4		To	4	<i>Progne dominicensis</i>
Grey-breasted Martin	5		T	3	<i>Progne chalybea</i>
Southern Rough-winged Swallow	4		T	1	<i>Stelgidopteryx ruficollis</i>
Southern House Wren	9	2h		1	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>
Rufous-breasted Wren	2		T	1	<i>Thryothorus rutilus</i>
Long-billed Gnat-wren	4	2h	T	1	<i>Ramphocaenus melanurus</i>
Yellow-legged Thrush	1		To	2	<i>Turdus flavipes</i>
Cocoa Thrush	7		T	1	<i>Turdus fumigatus</i>
Spectacled (Bare-eyed) Thrush	10			1	<i>Turdus nudigenis</i>
White-necked Thrush	6			1	<i>Turdus albicollis</i>
Tropical Mockingbird	12			2	<i>Mimus gilvus</i>
White-lined Tanager	9			2	<i>Tachyphonus rufus</i>
Silver-beaked Tanager	8		T	2	<i>Ramphocelus carbo</i>
Blue-grey Tanager	12			2	<i>Thraupis episcopus</i>
Palm Tanager	12			3	<i>Thraupis palmarum</i>
Turquoise Tanager	3		T	1	<i>Tangara mexicana</i>
Bay-headed Tanager	4		T	1	<i>Tangara gyrola</i>

Blue Dacnis	3	T	1	<i>Dacnis cayana</i>
Purple Honeycreeper	8	T	3	<i>Cyanerpes caeruleus</i>
Red-legged Honeycreeper	4		1	<i>Cyanerpes cyaneus</i>
Green Honeycreeper	8	T	3	<i>Chlorophanes spiza</i>
Bicolored Conebill	1	T	1	<i>Conirostrum bicolor</i>
Bananaquit	12		3	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>
Black-faced Grassquit	4	To	1	<i>Tiaris bicolor</i>
Saffron Finch	1	T	1	<i>Sicalis flaveola</i>
Grassland Yellow Finch	1	T	2	<i>Sicalis luteola</i>
Blue-black Grassquit	4		1	<i>Volatinia jacarina</i>
Masked (Red-capped) Cardinal	1	T	1	<i>Paroaria nigrigenis</i>
Greyish Saltator	1	T	1	<i>Saltator coerulescens</i>
Highland Hepatic Tanager	1	T	1	<i>Piranga (flava) lutea</i>
Tropical Parula	1	T	1	<i>Parula pitayumi</i>
American Redstart	1	To	1	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>
Yellow Warbler	2	T	1	<i>Dendroica petechia</i>
Northern Waterthrush	1	T	1	<i>Seiurus noveboracensis</i>
Masked Yellowthroat	1	T	1	<i>Geothlypis aequinoctialis</i>
Golden-crowned Warbler	2	T	1	<i>Basileuterus culicivorus</i>
Crested Oropendola	11		3	<i>Psarocolius decumanus</i>
Yellow-rumped Cacique	2	T	3	<i>Cacicus cela</i>
Moriche Oriole	1	T	1	<i>Icterus chryscephalus</i>
Yellow Oriole	2	T	1	<i>Icterus nigrogularis</i>
Yellow-hooded Blackbird	1	T	2	<i>Agelaius icterocephalus</i>
Giant Cowbird	3		1	<i>Scaphidura oryzivora</i>
Shiny Cowbird	11		3	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>
Carib Grackle	7		3	<i>Quiscalus lugubris</i>
Red-breasted Blackbird	3	T	1	<i>Leistes militaris</i>
Trinidad Euphonia	1	T	1	<i>Euphonia trinitatis</i>
Violaceous Euphonia	8	T	1	<i>Euphonia violacea</i>

OTHER ANIMALS

Red-tailed Squirrel	Brown Agouti	White-lined Sac-wing Bat	Spectacled Cayman
Tegu Lizard	Ameiva Lizard	Ground Lizard	House Gecko
Green Iguana	Cook's Tree Boa	Blue Crab	Land Crab
Fiddler Crab	Four-eyed Fish	Whistling Frog	

This list represents those birds and other animals seen by party members of this tour.



Savannah Hawk



Grey Hawk



Oilbird



Crested Oropendola



Yellow-crowned Night Heron and Scarlet Ibis



Red-rumped Woodpecker



Laughing Gulls



Red-billed Tropicbird



Ruby Topaz



Golden-headed Manakin



Barred Antshrike (female)



Barred Antshrike (male)



White-bearded Manakin



Collared Trogon



Violaceous Euphonia



Green Heron

Front cover: Scarlet Ibis

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