

ORNITHOLIDAYS TOUR TO TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
Caribbean Paradise

10 – 23 March 2014



Leader: Mike Witherick

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A Personal Diary

In terms of species per square kilometre, Trinidad and Tobago is claimed to be one of the countries with the highest avian diversity. Not only does this mean seeing well over 200 species during a 13-day tour, but many of those species are encountered more than once. Bird watching from the verandah at the Asa Wright Nature Centre (up in the montane rainforest of Trinidad) remains as one of the world's best and most memorable avian experiences. The verandah also serves its purpose as the venue for the equally-welcome daily issue of rum punch.

Of the day excursions on Trinidad, perhaps the one that will leave a longest-lasting impression was the one to the east coast with its wader-rich mudflats and that ended at Caroni Swamp watching hundreds of Scarlet Ibis coming into roost in the mangrove, along with hundreds of herons and egrets. Undoubtedly our best day on Tobago was that spent up in the rainforest of the central ridge. The speciality birds of this area just kept coming, from Blue-backed Manakin and Red-legged Honeycreeper to Venezuelan Flycatcher and Yellow-legged Thrush, from Great Black Hawk to White-tailed Sabrewing.

Both the Asa Wright Nature Centre and Blue Waters Inn occupy truly stunning locations. Comfort and a leisurely pace continue to be the two hallmarks of this two-base tour. This was my 30th T & T tour, so I do not often see new birds these days. However, I was particularly pleased to see, what for me have been rarely encountered species, Bright-rumped Attila, Rufous Nightjar and Mangrove Cuckoo.

Monday, 10 March

Our British Airways flight left a sunny Gatwick for Port of Spain a little behind schedule. We touched down on the delightful island of St Lucia where about half the passengers disembarked. The onward leg of the journey took only 45 minutes and happily we eventually arrived on Trinidad a little ahead of schedule. The immigration and customs procedures were completed in record-breaking time and it was not long before we had met up with Mahase, our local guide. It is interesting to note that the first bird we saw as we emerged from the terminal building was an Osprey!

We arrived at the Asa Wright Nature Centre a little after 6.30 pm and enjoyed the welcome drink in the form of a rum punch. There was just time for us to be shown to our rooms and to freshen up before assembling in the dining room for a most acceptable supper. Most of the group were tempted to order a Carib (the local beer). After the meal, we walked through to the verandah and were briefed about the routines of the Centre. After that, everyone hurried off to their rooms to catch up on some sleep. It had been a long day, but the long journey had been a good one.

Tuesday, 11 March

We gathered on the veranda around 6.30 am. What a colourful array of birds was attending the feeders. Initially, it was a matter of sorting out the honeycreepers (Purple and Green), 'hummers' (White-chested Emerald, White-necked Jacobin and Copper-rumped) and the tanagers (White-lined, Palm and Silver-beaked). We had distant views of Channel-billed Toucan, Double-toothed Kite, Scaled Pigeon and Bearded Bellbird. Before the breakfast bell rang, we had identified over 20 species of bird. The omelettes cooked by Sharon were delicious. What a start to the day!

After breakfast, we met up with Mahase for a gentle walk down the Discovery Trail. Before setting off, we were shown a sizeable Boa Constrictor that had recently consumed an Agouti. It was estimated to be between three and four metres in length. At the top of the trail, our attention was drawn by 'hummers'. A male Ruby Topaz briefly flashed its amazing colours, whilst a female Tufted Coquette vied for our attention. Further down the trail, we visited the Golden-headed Manakin lek and a male was spotted. Perhaps more impressive in terms of spotting, was Mahase's location of a Common Potoo perched on the end of broken off branch. Bearded Bellbirds were the next focus of attention, and at least two males were seen at close hand

and unusually low down in the forest. At the White-bearded Manakin lek, two males were seen half-heartedly strutting their stuff.

For the return to the main house, we took the Chaconia Trail. Our best sightings were of Crowned Ant Tanager, Streaked Xenops and Golden-crowned Warbler. Two male Bright-rumped Attila could only be heard, despite our carefully scrutiny of the trees in which they were singing. We finished off the excursion in the upper car park where we had good views of a Piratic Flycatcher. The morning session was rounded off on the verandah with a coffee. Birds of note included Lineated Woodpecker, Black-throated Mango and Blue-chinned Sapphire.

Lunch went down well and was accompanied by a discussion about Scottish independence. The early afternoon was declared to be leisure time. We met on the verandah again at 4 pm for tea and then a stroll along the drive. During the break notable sightings from the verandah included Violaceous Trogon, Zone-tailed Hawk and Barred Antshrike. Jacky tentatively tried out her new compact camera. After tea, we went for a walk along the drive with one of the Centre's guides, Leah. The light conditions were not that good, but we did come across two birds on their way to summer in North America, namely American Redstart and Northern Waterthrush. A Plain-brown Woodcreeper showed briefly on the top of a metal pole and later we all had reasonable views of a vocal Cocoa Woodcreeper. A Little Hermit and a pair of Boat-billed Flycatchers showed well, whilst a Little Tinamou called close to the drive, but remained hidden from view.

We enjoyed our rum punch on the verandah and at 7 pm were summonsed to another good buffet meal. The lamb was particularly tasty, and Al bravely opted for a glass of red wine and was pleasantly surprised. It was in fact a Hardy's cabernet sauvignon. Afterwards we climbed up to the mango room and did the checklist there.

Wednesday, 12 March

Before breakfast, whilst Peter was intent upon obtaining definitive shots of male Tufted Coquette, the rest of us divided our time between the verandah and the upper car park. A number of new sightings for the tour were made, namely Great Antshrike, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, and Yellow Oriole. A Black-faced Ant-Thrush was called to the forest edge. Indeed it came so close that only Ellen and I saw it!

At 8.30 am, we left the Centre and headed down the valley, around Arima and then eastwards to the Aripo Livestock Station where new species came thick and fast. We started with Grey-breasted Martin, Striped Cuckoo (vocal and posed in a nearby bush), Green-rumped Parrotlet, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Savanna Hawk and Red-breasted Blackbird. Sightings of Pied Water-Tyrant and White-headed Marsh-Tyrant followed. But perhaps best of all were our sightings of Ruddy-breasted Seedeater (nearly extirpated) and Grassland Yellow Finches - only added to the Trinidad list in 2004 (thanks to the keen eyes of Mahase). A Striated Heron perched obligingly on a fence post.

After leaving the Livestock Station, we made a comfort stop at a bar in Valencia. On reaching Sangre Grande, the main road was closed and we were forced to take evasive action through the suburban back streets. Eventually, we reached the east coast of Trinidad at Manzanilla where we stopped to consume our tuna bake lunch. The onshore breeze was most welcome. Brown Pelicans actively fishing offshore provided some entertainment. So too did the Carib Grackles.

After lunch, we drove south paralleling the coast and passing through an amazingly long coconut plantation. We glimpsed several Yellow-headed Caracaras, but the star bird on this leg of the itinerary was a Cocoli Heron which was briefly seen perched on a small bush. Having crossed the Nariva River, we made a couple of stops in the mangrove. After a slow start, the stops proved to be increasingly productive. An American Pygmy Kingfisher showed well, so too its larger cousin, the Green Kingfisher. A Silvered Antbird, a Black-crested Antshrike and a pair of Bicolored Conebill were spotted.

Soon we reached Nariva Swamp and proceeded to complete a circular route through it. Our run of good fortune continued with sightings of both morphs of the Long-winged Harrier, a flock of Yellow-hooded Blackbirds, a Yellow-chinned Spinetail, two Limpkin and best of all, a Pinnated Bittern seen at a range of less than 10 metres.

Well satisfied with our haul of birds on Nariva Swamp, we then retraced our tracks to as far as the old US air base at Wallerfield. We had three species in mind - Moriche Oriole, Sulphury Flycatcher and Fork-tailed Palm Swift. We were successful with the first two, but only had glimpses of the last. However, our enjoyment of the occasion was aided by a glass of rum punch and a freshly-baked pastry.

We arrived back at the Centre with about 20 minutes to spare before the bell rang summoning us to supper. Al broke new ground by ordering a rum punch to accompany her meal. The rest of us remained in our Carib beer rut. Afterwards we did the checklist and tomorrow's itinerary was outlined.

Thursday, 13 March

Most of the party were out and about before breakfast, but no new sightings for the tour were reported. Several of us watched a pair of Great Antshrike. The breakfast omelettes were delicious.

After breakfast, we drove up the Blanchisseuse Road and then climbed up the track leading to the TSTT satellite station occupying one of the peaks of the Northern Ranges (around 2,000 feet above sea level). Here we were able to identify two species of swift - White-collared and Chapman's. Returning to the trans-island road, we then walked and bird watched along a number of stretches. Our morning haul of new species included Red-rumped Woodpecker, Collared Trogon, Stripe-breasted Spinetail, Rufous-breasted Wren and Black-faced Ant-Thrush, Euler's Flycatcher and Long-billed Gnatwren. Hans spotted a Swallow-tailed Kite. Eventually, we reached the sleepy village of Brasso Secco and here we ate our chicken pilau lunch in a bar complete with tiled tables and benches.

After lunch, we made our way along the northern slopes of the Northern Ranges to the small village of Morne Lacroix. Our first stop provided us with views of Black-tailed Tityra and Golden-olive Woodpecker. We also observed large numbers of Grey-breasted Martins lined long a power cable. Here, because they were at times flying below us, we were able to distinguish between Band-tailed and Grey-rumped Swifts.

The next stop allowed us to admire an Olive-sided Flycatcher as it posed on the top of a tree. We were baffled to think why the species was so named! Only some of the party could see the distinctive blue heads of two Blue-headed Parrots through my scope. But at least the distinguishing plumage of several Scaled Pigeons perched in the same distance tree as the parrots could be made out.

A third stop was made on the outskirts of Morne Lacroix and here we watched a relatively new nesting colony of Yellow-rumped Caciques. A male Rufous-tailed Jacamar, constantly on the look-out for a meal, posed well in a small tree. A red bird that was initially thought to be a female Silver-beaked Tanager was subsequently confirmed as a male Hepatic Tanager. Four Blue-headed Parrots were seen much closer to hand than previously. A slice of cake and some fruit juice proved most welcome.

The last stop of the day was at the look-out close to the TSTT station. Here we watched two pairs of Red-legged Honeycreepers - what smart birds! But there was one more new bird to be added just when we were near the entrance to the Centre - a Grey Hawk.

Whilst we waited on the verandah for our daily issue of rum punch, a White Hawk was seen circling along the valley side. We did the checklist before supper, so that after the meal those who wanted could attend a talk about bats given by two members of a team currently investigating the bat population of the Centre's grounds. Apparently, no less than 68 bat species have been identified in Trinidad. It was particularly interesting to be shown some five different species that had been caught earlier in the evening.

Friday, 14 March

One new bird for the tour list was seen from the verandah before breakfast - an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher seen in the young Tremor tree. Today's birding had a distinct nocturnal feel about it. In the morning, with Leah as our guide, we visited the so-called 'Oilbird caves' to see this most unusual species. The colony of some 150 birds is reckoned to be the most accessible in the world. Even so, there were a few in the party who felt that the physical challenge was more than enough! On the way there and back, our avian sightings included Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Golden-olive Woodpecker, White Hawk and White-flanked Antwren. Philip and I, bringing up the rear, had a fairly close encounter with a Black-faced Ant-Thrush. We made it back to the verandah in time for a coffee and some relaxation. Peter and I went down the Discovery Trail to

revisit and photograph the Common Potoo seen three days ago. Luckily it was still roosting on the same perch.

The early afternoon was declared as leisure time. We reassembled at 3.30 pm for tea and 30 minutes later were being driven down the valley to Arima. Initially we drove on to Cumuto in the hope of picking up news of recent sightings of Red-bellied Macaws. Unfortunately, there was none so we decided to revisit the ex-air base at Wallerfield. Our first sightings here were of two Merlin, one busily plucking a recently taken dove. A Ringed Kingfisher called loudly as it flew by. A stop in the vicinity of the Moriche palms produced views of Moriche Oriole and Sulphury Flycatcher. We also saw Short-tailed Swift, Fork-tailed Palm-Swift and a Red-legged Honeycreeper.

We then drove to the Aripo Livestock Station where we enjoyed our daily issue of rum punch and an early supper - both consumed in a lowly cattle shed. As the light began to fail, we heard nearby the call of a Tropical Screech-Owl (most un-screech-like). A drive along a section of the Centre's perimeter road gave us the opportunity to see in the spotlight a good number of Common Pauraque and White-tailed Nightjar. However, we were also lucky enough to hear and see Rufous Nightjar - species I have not seen here for quite a number of years.

We arrived back at the Centre a little before 9 pm. It was decided that, given tomorrow's 6 am breakfast, that we should call a double checklist tomorrow evening.

Saturday, 15 March

It was impressive that everyone was down for breakfast before the appointed hour of 6 am. Al was not in attendance as she had decided last evening to have a quiet day. It was to be said that the field part of our day did not start too well. We made a number of stops on the way down the valley mainly in search of two highly localised species - Sooty Grassquit and Trinidad Euphonia. We failed on both counts. However, our luck changed when we started to birdwatch down in the Aripo savanna. It started with a pale Peregrine perched in a tree and during the course of the morning we put together an impressive list of raptors. Perhaps most memorable was the diminutive Pearl Kite, but others in the frame included Zone-tailed Hawk, Plumbeous Kite, Short-tailed Hawk (Hans was not convinced about this one!), Savanna Hawk, Yellow-headed Caracara and Merlin.

Another feature of the morning's birding was adding new species of flycatcher - Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, Forest Elaenia and White-winged Becard. A male Ruby Topaz and a Long-billed Starthroat were seen in combat. Two Greyish Saltator were spotted in a palm tree. A Masked Yellowthroat posed well; two Yellow Warblers were less obliging. In Arena Forest, two, possibly three, Green-backed Trogons were seen in the same area. A White-bellied Antbird called, but could not be tempted to show itself.

We had lunch back at the Centre - the main course involved a tasty fried fish. The afternoon was declared as leisure time - some read, some took a siesta, some continued to birdwatch or photograph. Two species of hermit - Green and Rufous-breasted - were seen at the feeders. The group reassembled at the two critical times of 4 pm for tea and 6 pm for rum punch. After the latter, and before supper, we did a double checklist in the dining room. After the meal, I went on the internet to check the rugby and football results for interested clients.

Sunday, 16 March

We breakfasted at the normal time today and so were able to enjoy a freshly-cooked omelette. We left the Centre at 8.30 am and spent the morning birding along the Lalaja Trace, which links the neighbouring Arima and Aripo valleys. Driving up and down the Trace required great skill on the part of Mahase and Gerry, particularly the latter with his low-slung car. The Trace passes through some lovely tracts of forest, but sadly for us that forest was rather quiet today in terms of bird life. Basically, we added two new species for the tour - White-bellied Antbird and Tropical Pewee. Two species were converted from 'heards' to 'seens' - Chivi Vireo and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. We were also able to enjoy 'second helpings' of species previously seen, namely White-flanked Antwren, Euler's and Yellow-breasted Flycatchers. A freshly-dead, small snake was found on the track and was both inspected and photographed. Philip was rather noncommittal about cause of death! We returned to the Centre for lunch.

Although the afternoon was declared as leisure time, the party maintained a sort of changing presence on the verandah. As a result, reported sightings included Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Black-tailed Tityra, Broad-winged Hawk and Bright-rumped Attila. We all met up again at 6 pm for the daily rum punch. We did the checklist in the lounge area before being summonsed to supper. Conversation during the meal seemed to dwell rather on 'close encounters' (of the dangerous kind) with wildlife.

Monday, 17 March

No new sightings were recorded before breakfast. Afterwards, we headed down the Arima valley again, but stopped at couple of places in the hope of finding Trinidad Euphonia. We were sort of successful at the latter, stop where a pair was seen in rather indifferent light. A Double-toothed Kite flew over.

Our next stop was at the Trincity sewage ponds. Here we spotted Common Gallinule and American Purple Gallinule, together with good numbers of Yellow-hooded Blackbirds. An Osprey flew over. From there we made the long drive to the east coast at Waterloo. The tide was well out exposing huge areas of muddy foreshore - silt deputed by the great rivers of nearby Venezuela. In the murky distance we could just make out the mainland. At our first coastal stop, Black Skimmers went about their business close to the shore. Also feeding on the mud, there were Little, Great Blue and Tricoloured Herons. Snowy Egrets, Hudsonian Whimbrel and Greater Yellowlegs. At the second stop, there were good numbers of Laughing Gull and Royal Tern roosting on the mud. In amongst them there were a few Large-billed Terns and a lone Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Our next coastal stop was at the Orange Valley jetty where there was a roost of upwards of 5,000 Laughing Gulls. The volume of their collective calls was quite impressive. In amongst them there were a few Scarlet Ibis - the intensity of their colour was stunning and, there were also more Black Skimmers. On the wader front, there were Willet, Ruddy Turnstone, Southern Lapwing, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Plover and Western Sandpiper. A Yellow-crowned Night-Heron crept out of the mangrove. By now, we were beginning to feel the heat of the day and so carried on down the coast to a public park area previously known as the Brickfields, but now recently renamed Calvi Bay. Just before we reached this lunch-time stop, we were lucky to come across a few Common Ground Doves (NOT a common species in T & T) and a flock of Saffron Finches.

The vehicles were parked in the shade of some trees and we ate our lunch - chicken pilau again - what had happened to the promised shepherds' pie? After lunch we drove to the Caroni Visitor Centre. A short walk along the edge of the mangrove produced good sightings of a pair of Clapper Rail, three Greater Ani and a Silky Anteater curled up asleep. We relaxed in the cool of the centre for nearly an hour before boarding our flat-bottomed boat for the 'Caroni Cruise', with Shaun as our skipper and guide. Happily, Janet was able to join us for this, one of the highlights of the tour. The first part of the cruise involved locating and looking at some of the specialties of the Caroni Swamp. These included close encounters with three Cook's Tree Boas coiled around mangrove branches, together with good views of Short-tailed Hawk, Green-throated Mango, Tropical Screech-Owl, Common Potoo and Straight-billed Woodcreeper. Spotted Sandpipers seemed to be everywhere.

The second part of the cruise involved mooring the boat on the margins of open stretch of water. A few hundred metres away, on an island of mangrove, some Scarlet Ibis had already come into roost. Over the next 30 minutes of so, there were joined by hundreds more, gradually making the island look like a huge rhododendron bush in full flower. Also joining them were large numbers of Tricoloured Herons and lesser numbers of Snowy and Great Egrets. The quality of the light early on was excellent for photography. The mood of the occasion was also helped by a glass of rum punch and a piece of cake.

We returned to the landing stage by 6.30 pm and a little over an an hour later we arrived back at the Centre just in time for supper - or what was left of it! After the meal, the plans for tomorrow's transfer to Tobago were run through. It was decided to postpone the checklist until tomorrow, as packing and sleep (it has been a long day) were regarded as the top priorities.

Tuesday, 18 March

Packing took priority over pre-breakfast birding today. With room accounts settled and cases collected from

outside our rooms, we said farewell to AUNC at 8.45 am and headed for the airport. Because of the earliness of our check-in, we were offered seats on the 10.15 am flight to Tobago. It seemed a good idea at the time, but no sooner had we said 'yes' than we were told that the flight would be delayed until 11 am. However, whilst we were queuing up for a coffee to occupy some of that time, we were rounded up and told that the flight was now boarding (10.15 am). We were the last on the aircraft, but then it went 'technical' and we eventually transferred to another aircraft. This left shortly after 11 am and in next to no time we were touching down at Crownpoint airport. Gladwyn was there to meet us, and with all our baggage loaded on board his bus, we drove the short distance to the Store Bay Facility where we ate our sandwiches under a canopy and with memorable views of a wonderful blue sea.

With lunch and an ice cream behind us, we spent the next couple of hours birding at the west end of the island. Not only did we open a new island list, but we also added a fair number of new sightings to our overall tour list. These ranged from White-cheeked Pintail and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck to Fork-tailed and Brown-crested Flycatchers, from Least Grebe and Solitary Sandpiper to Caribbean Martin and Black-faced Grassquit. But for me the best sighting was of a Mangrove Cuckoo.

It was around 3 pm when we started the winding drive to Blue Waters Inn, up at the east end of the island. It took us about 90 minutes to complete the 20 mile drive. After completing the check-in formalities, we enjoyed a welcome drink in the form of a rum punch in the shore-side bar. After that, we were shown to our rooms and then enjoyed some time to settle in. It was around 6.30 pm when we began to reassemble in the bar. It being Ellen's birthday, the drinks were kindly provided by Jardine. Here was our first opportunity to try the Inn's famous rum-based cocktails.

We ate our substantial evening meal out on the bar terrace and then retired to the Games Room to deal with yesterday's and today's checklist. After that we retired to our rooms hopefully to be lulled to sleep by the sound of the waves.

Wednesday, 19 March

Today was intended to be a lazy day and we started the day well with an 8 am breakfast. As for the remainder of the morning, the choice was between relaxing and perhaps swimming at the hotel or walking into Speyside. Five of us opted for the latter. The birdlife was fairly muted; our sightings were limited to Black-throated Mango, Tropical and Grey Kingbirds, Black-faced Grassquit, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Caribbean Martin, Broad-winged Hawk and plenty of Rufous-vented Chachalaca. Perhaps the more memorable part of the excursion was the cold beer at Frank's Birdwatchers' Bar and meeting Frank himself - a local entrepreneur.

Once back at the hotel, we gathered for a relaxed lunch. After a short period of R & R, we met on the jetty for our excursion to Little Tobago in Frank's glass-bottomed boat. From the look-out, it was the Red-billed Tropicbirds that were the centre of attention - what elegant and agile birds. One was seen at close hand on its nest. During our time at the lookout, we identified the three morphs of the Red-footed Booby. Brown Booby was also seen along with some menacing Magnificent Frigatebirds. Zolani also found us an occupied Audubon's Shearwater's nesting burrow and a White-tailed Nightjar at roost on a plank of wood. Other species seen during our visit included Trinidad Motmot, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Peregrine, White-tipped Dove and Pale-vented Pigeon. Philip struggled manfully with the climb and descent and declared that the effort had been well worth it.

We returned to the hotel around 5.30 pm and an hour later assembled in the bar to try out some more of the rum-based cocktails. At dinner, five of the group were prepared to pay the supplement for the pleasure of eating a grilled lobster tail. We did the checklist at the table and the plans for tomorrow were outlined.

Thursday, 20 March

Our day started with a slightly earlier than usual breakfast - at 7.30 am rather than 8 am. Gladwyn came to collect us and while he drove us to Roxborough a video was shown illustrating the range of Tobago's birds. At Roxborough, we turned north and climbed up into the rainforest-clad range of hills that provide the island's backbone. We made a couple of stops which yielded no new birds of note. However, the third stop at a bridge over a small stream proved altogether more productive. A Venezuelan Flycatcher gave good views

and so did Red-legged Honeycreepers feeding on a tree full of ripe Parrot Apples. Blue-backed Manakin were vocal but reluctant to show themselves.

Having made a brief stop at the Bloody Bay Lookout to use the facilities, we started our walk down the Gilpin Trace. We might have wished to have had the Trace to ourselves, but this was not to be the case. However, over the next two and a half hours, we put together an impressive list of birds. On the downhill leg, we saw more Blue-backed Manakins, Fuscous and Ochre-bellied Flycatchers, Stripe-breasted Spinetail and Rufous-breasted Wren. Yellow-legged Thrushes were singing their best, and were reasonably visible. On the uphill return leg, we saw a male Plain Antvireo and enjoyed, by the standards of the species, good views of a White-throated Spadebill. One of our target species, White-tailed Sabrewing, did not show well until we had virtually returned to the start of the Trace. During the course of the morning, Gladwyn pointed out various bird nests.

It was around 1 pm when we reached the shelter at the start of the Trace and here we ate our picnic lunch. The meal was interrupted when an adult Great Black Hawk circled around for a few minutes. After lunch, we drove back up to the Lookout. It was here that Gladwyn discovered a deflating front tyre and quickly proceeded to replace the wheel. From there, we drove back down the road to as far as the bridge by which we had stopped in the morning. We were rewarded by a glimpse of a fast-flying Green Kingfisher, and just as we had re-boarded the bus, an Olivaceous Woodcreeper showed briefly. Still further down the road, we made a stop to admire a Trinidad Motmot.

Driving back to the hotel, we stopped at the Speyside Lookout and admired the view out towards Little Tobago. Whilst there, we were shown another Black-throated Mango nest. A fast-moving Merlin flashed by and flight views of a Giant Cowbird brought the excursion to an end. We reached the hotel at 4 pm and then enjoyed a spell of R & R - some even swam!

As has become the custom, we met in the bar at 6.30 pm and extended our cocktail experience. A relaxed meal was followed by the checklist.

Friday, 21 March

Some of us opted for a spell of pre-breakfast birding aimed at finding two Tobago speciality species, namely White-fringed Antwren and Scrub Greenlet. We had not walked far when Al spotted a splendid male of the former species. Just beyond the Lookout, several representatives of the latter species were seen and heard. A Trinidad Motmot showed well, and the Red-crowned Woodpecker was again seen disappearing into its nesting hole.

At 9 am Heston collected us in his maxibus and transported us to the top of Flagstaff Hill which afforded us some wonderful views out to St Giles Island to the east and over Charlotteville and the Caribbean to the north. The walk back down to the main road was partly run as an end of tour bird ID test. Luckily, the windy conditions limited the number of birds spotted! Interestingly, the frequency of sightings seemed to decrease with the decrease in altitude. At the main road, we reboarded the bus and descended to Charlotteville where we had to chance to enjoy the ambience and sights of this sleepy fishing village. One notable sighting was of a White-winged Swallow - an uncommon bird on Tobago. We rounded off the morning with a visit to a local bar where we consumed cold Caribs or Sorrel Shandy.

We lunched back at the hotel and then enjoyed a couple of hours of relaxation before Heston came to collect us once again, this time transporting us to the Hummingbird Gallery in Speyside. Here we simply enjoyed the close proximity of four different species of hummer, the stars being, of course, the male Ruby Topaz. Jardine and Peter struggled to take the definitive images, being somewhat thwarted by the poor light associated with an overcast sky.

As on previous evenings, we gathered in the bar. The good news tonight was that we all qualified for a rum punch on the house. The evening meal was a barbecue with an accompaniment of steel pan music. We did the checklist and the plans for tomorrow's homeward journey were run through. Eventually, thanks to access to the hotel manager's computer, I was able to complete the on-line check-ins and print our boarding passes for tomorrow.

Saturday, 22 March

Breakfast was a fairly relaxed affair and orders were placed for our early lunch. The unanimous decision was not to do anything between now and then, other than to pack, settle room accounts and enjoy our last few hours in this lovely location.

After an early lunch, we were picked up by Gladwyn and driven to Crownpoint Airport where we enjoyed a speedy check-in. The shuttle flight to Piarco Airport left on time and soon we were checking-in again - this time for our BA flight to London Gatwick via St Lucia. The flight left early, but with only a small number of passengers aboard. However, at St Lucia all seats became occupied.

Sunday 23 March

Due to favourable winds, our flight arrived into Gatwick nearly an hour ahead of schedule. Whilst Jardine and Ellen transited to their onward flight to Edinburgh, the remainder of the party disbanded in the Baggage Reclaim. Sadly, the tour was at an end.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Mahase (our guide in Trinidad), Gladwyn (our guide on Tobago) and to support drivers Gerry, Bush and Heston. As is customary on this tour, the friendly and helpful staff at Asa Wright Nature Centre and Blue Waters Inn made us feel most welcome. Thank you too to all of you for your good company and humour. I do so hope that you enjoyed the T & T 'experience'. The photographs that illustrate this report have been kindly provided by Peter - thank you.

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May 2014



Trinidad Motmot



White-tailed Nightjar

Itinerary and Weather

Monday, 10 March	London Gatwick > St Lucia > Port of Spain > Arima
Tuesday, 11 March	The grounds of AWNC Warm, becoming cloudy 26°C
Wednesday, 12 March	Aripo Livestock Station > Manzanilla > Nariva mangrove & swamp > Wallerfield Mainly sunny; some cloud & sea breeze 29°C
Thursday, 13 March	Northern Ranges (Morne Bleu > Brasso Sec > Morne Lacroix) Sunny periods 30°C
Friday, 14 March	am: Oilbirds pm: Night birding (Aripo) Some rain showers in afternoon 28°C
Saturday, 15 March	am: Aripo > Wallerfield > Areal Forest pm: At leisure Mainly cloudy 28°C
Sunday, 16 March	am: Lalaja Trace pm: At leisure Mainly sunny 29°C
Monday, 17 March	Trincity sewage ponds > Waterloo > Orange Valley > Calvi Bay > Caroni Swamp Hot & sunny 33°C
Tuesday, 18 March	Port of Spain > Crownpoint > west end of island > Speyside Hot & sunny 34°C
Wednesday, 19 March	am: Speyside pm: Little Tobago Sunny, but windy 28°C
Thursday, 20 March	Rainforest along Roxborough - Bloody Bay road & Gilpin Trace Cool breeze 26°C
Friday, 21 March	am: The Lookout, Flagstaff Hill & Charlotteville pm: Hummingbird Gallery, Speyside Becoming overcast 28°C
Saturday, 22 March	> Crownpoint > Piarco > St Lucia > Sunny periods 28°C
Sunday, 23 March	> London Gatwick Bright but chilly 7°C

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

No of days recorded	Location	Abundance Scale (max seen on one 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 (T)	- 6h	T	1	<i>Crypturellus soui</i>
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	1	To	1	<i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>
White-cheeked Pintail	1	To	1	<i>Anas bahamensis</i>
Blue-winged Teal	2		3	<i>Anas discors</i>
Rufous-vented Chachalaca (To)	5	To	3	<i>Ortalis ruficauda</i>
Least Grebe	1	To	1	<i>Tachybaptus dominicus</i>
Audubon's Shearwater (To)	1	To	1	<i>Puffinus lherminieri</i>
Red-billed Tropicbird (To)	2	To	4	<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>
Brown Pelican	5		3	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>
Red-footed Booby (To)	1	To	3	<i>Sula sula</i>
Brown Booby (To)	3	To	2	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>
Neotropic Cormorant	2		2	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>
Anhinga	1	To	2	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>
Magnificent Frigatebird	7		3	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>
Pinnated Bittern (T)	1	T	1	<i>Botaurus pinnatus</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	1	To	1	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Yellow-crowned Night Heron	2		1	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>
Green Heron	2	To	1	<i>Butorides virescens</i>
Striated Heron	1	T	1	<i>Butorides striata</i>
Cattle Egret	6		4	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Great Blue Heron	2		2	<i>Ardea herodias</i>
Cocoi (White-necked) Heron	1	T	1	<i>Ardea cocoi</i>
Great Egret	3		3	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Tricoloured Heron	2		4	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>
Snowy Egret	1	T	3	<i>Egretta thula</i>
Little Blue Heron	3		3	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>
Scarlet Ibis	1	T	4	<i>Eudocimus ruber</i>
Turkey Vulture	6	T	4	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
(American) Black Vulture	8	T	5	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>
Osprey	3	T	1	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
(American) Swallow-tailed Kite	1	T	1	<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>
Pearl Kite (T)	1	T	1	<i>Gampsonyx swainsonii</i>
Double-toothed Kite (T)	2	T	1	<i>Harpagus bidentatus</i>
Plumbeous Kite (T)	2	T	1	<i>Ictinia plumbea</i>
Long-winged Harrier (T)	2	T	1	<i>Circus buffoni</i>
White Hawk (T)	2	T	1	<i>Leucopternis albicollis</i>
Gray (-lined) Hawk	1	T	1	<i>Asturina nitida</i>
Common Black Hawk (T)	5	T	2	<i>Buteogallus anthracinus</i>
Great Black Hawk	1	To	1	<i>Buteogallus urubitinga</i>
Savanna Hawk (T)	3	T	1	<i>Buteogallus meridionalis</i>
Broad-winged Hawk	4		1	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>
Short-tailed Hawk	2	T	1	<i>Buteo brachyurus</i>
Zone-tailed Hawk (T)	3	T	1	<i>Buteo albonotatus</i>
Black Hawk-Eagle	1	T	1	<i>Spizaetus tyrannus</i>
Yellow-headed Caracara (T)	3	T	2	<i>Milvago chimachima</i>
Merlin	3		1	<i>Falco columbarius</i>
Peregrine Falcon	3		1	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Limpkin (T)	1	T	1	<i>Aramus guarauna</i>
Clapper Rail (T)	1	T	1	<i>Rallus longirostris</i>
Common Gallinule	2		1	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>

American Purple Gallinule	2			1	<i>Porphyrio martinica</i>
Southern Lapwing	7			3	<i>Vanellus chilensis</i>
Semipalmated Plover	1		T	1	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>
(Hudsonian) Whimbrel	1		T	1	<i>Numenius (phaeopus) hudsonicus</i>
Spotted Sandpiper	2			3	<i>Actitis macularius</i>
Greater Yellowlegs	1		T	1	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>
Lesser Yellowlegs	2			1	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>
Solitary Sandpiper	1		To	1	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>
Willet	1		T	3	<i>Catoptrophorus semipalmatus</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	6			3	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Western Sandpiper	1		T	2	<i>Calidris mauri</i>
Wattled Jacana	4			2	<i>Jacana jacana</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1		T	1	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Laughing Gull	4			5	<i>Larus atricilla</i>
Large-billed Tern (T)	1		T	1	<i>Phaetusa simplex</i>
Royal Tern	2			3	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>
Black Skimmer	1		T	4	<i>Rynchops niger</i>
Rock (Feral) Pigeon	5		T	3	<i>Columbia livia</i>
Scaled Pigeon (T)	6	1	T	2	<i>Patagioenas speciosa</i>
Pale-vented Pigeon	4			1	<i>Patagioenas cayennensis</i>
Common Ground Dove (T)	1		T	1	<i>Columbina passerina</i>
Ruddy Ground-dove	7			3	<i>Columbina talpacoti</i>
Eared Dove	3			2	<i>Zenaida auriculata</i>
White-tipped Dove	3			1	<i>Leptotila verreauxi</i>
Grey-fronted Dove (T)	6	1h	To	1	<i>Leptotila rufaxilla</i>
Green-rumped Parrotlet	4			1	<i>Forpus passerinus</i>
Blue-headed Parrot (T)	1		T	2	<i>Pionus menstruus</i>
Yellow-crowned Amazon	11			3	<i>Amazona ochrocephala</i>
Mangrove Cuckoo	1		To	1	<i>Coccyzus minor</i>
Squirrel Cuckoo (T)	1		T	1	<i>Piaya cayana</i>
Striped Cuckoo (T)	1	2h	T	1	<i>Tapera naevia</i>
Greater Ani (T)	1		T	2	<i>Crotophaga major</i>
Smooth-billed Ani	7			3	<i>Crotophaga ani</i>
Tropical Screech Owl (T)	2	1h	T	1	<i>Megascops choliba</i>
Ferruginous Pygmy Owl (T)	1	5h	T	1	<i>Glaucidium brasilianum</i>
Oilbird (T)	1		T	3	<i>Steatornis caripensis</i>
Common Potoo	4		T	1	<i>Nyctibius griseus</i>
Common Pauraque (T)	1		T	2	<i>Nyctidromus albicollis</i>
Rufous Nightjar (T)	1		T	1	<i>Caprimulgus rufus</i>
White-tailed Nightjar	2			2	<i>Caprimulgus cayennensis</i>
White-collared Swift (T)	1		T	2	<i>Streptoprocne zonaris</i>
Band-rumped Swift (T)	1		T	3	<i>Chaetura spinicaudus</i>
Grey-rumped Swift	2		T	2	<i>Chaetura cinereiventris</i>
Chapman's Swift (T)	1		T	1	<i>Chaetura chapmani</i>
Short-tailed Swift	4			2	<i>Chaetura brachyura</i>
Fork-tailed Palm Swift (T)	2		T	1	<i>Tachornis squamata</i>
Rufous-breasted Hermit	8			2	<i>Glaucis hirsutus</i>
Little Hermit (T)	3		T	1	<i>Phaethornis longuemareus</i>
Green Hermit (T)	4		T	1	<i>Phaethornis guy</i>
White-tailed Sabrewing (To)	1		To	1	<i>Campylopterus ensipennis</i>
White-necked Jacobin	10			3	<i>Florisuga mellivora</i>
Green-throated Mango (T)	1		T	1	<i>Anthracothorax viridigula</i>
Black-throated Mango	11			2	<i>Anthracothorax nigricollis</i>
Ruby Topaz	10			2	<i>Chrysolampis mosquitus</i>
Tufted Coquette (T)	8		T	1	<i>Lophornis ornatus</i>
Blue-chinned Sapphire	7		T	1	<i>Chlorestes notata</i>
White-chested Emerald (T)	8		T	2	<i>Amazilia chionopectus</i>
Copper-rumped Hummingbird	9		T	2	<i>Amazilia tobaci</i>
Long-billed Starthroat	1		T	1	<i>Heliomaster longirostris</i>
Amazonian White-tailed Trogon	2		T	1	<i>Trogon viridis</i>
Amazonian Violaceous Trogon	2		T	1	<i>Trogon violaceus</i>
Collared Trogon	2			1	<i>Trogon collaris</i>
Ringed Kingfisher (T)	1		T	1	<i>Megaceryle torquata</i>
Green Kingfisher	2			1	<i>Chloroceryle americana</i>

American Pygmy Kingfisher (T)	1		T	1	<i>Chloroceryle aenea</i>
Trinidad (Blue-crowned) Motmot	6	2h		1	<i>Momotus bahamensis</i>
Rufous-tailed Jacamar	4			1	<i>Galbula ruficauda</i>
Channel-billed Toucan (T)	8		T	1	<i>Ramphastos vitellinus</i>
Red-crowned Woodpecker (To)	4		To	1	<i>Melanerpes rubricapillus</i>
Red-rumped Woodpecker	1		T	1	<i>Veniliornis kirkii</i>
Golden-olive Woodpecker	3			2	<i>Piculus rubiginosus</i>
Lineated Woodpecker (T)	6		T	1	<i>Dryocopus lineatus</i>
Stripe-breasted Spinetail	2			1	<i>Synallaxis cinnamomea</i>
Yellow-chinned Spinetail (T)	1		T	1	<i>Certhiaxis cinnamomeus</i>
Streaked Xenops (T)	1		T	1	<i>Xenops rutilans</i>
Plain-brown Woodcreeper	3			1	<i>Dendrocincla fuliginosa</i>
Olivaceous Woodcreeper (To)	1		To	1	<i>Sittasomus griseicapillus</i>
Straight-billed Woodcreeper (T)	1		T	1	<i>Xiphorhynchus picus</i>
Cocoa Woodcreeper	1	2h		1	<i>Xiphorhynchus susurrans</i>
Great Antshrike (T)	5		T	1	<i>Taraba major</i>
Black-crested Antshrike (T)	1		T	1	<i>Sakesphorus canadensis</i>
Barred Antshrike	8			1	<i>Thamnophilus doliiatus</i>
Plain Antvireo	1		To	1	<i>Dysithamnus mentalis</i>
White-flanked Antwren (T)	2		T	1	<i>Myrmotherula axillaris</i>
White-fringed Antwren (To)	1		To	1	<i>Formicivora grisea</i>
Silvered Antbird (T)	1		T	1	<i>Sclateria naevia</i>
White-bellied Antbird (T)	1		T	1	<i>Myrmeciza longipes</i>
Black-faced Ant-thrush (T)	3	2h	T	1	<i>Formicarius analis</i>
Forest Elaenia (T)	2		T	1	<i>Myiopagis gaimardii</i>
Yellow-bellied Elaenia	6			2	<i>Elaenia flavogaster</i>
Southern Beardless Tyrannulet (T)	1		T	1	<i>Camptostoma obsoletum</i>
Ochre-bellied Flycatcher	3			1	<i>Mionectes oleagineus</i>
Yellow-breasted Flycatcher	3		T	1	<i>Tolmomyias flaviventris</i>
White-throated Spadebill	1		To	1	<i>Platyrinchus mystaceus</i>
Euler's Flycatcher (T)	2		T	1	<i>Lathrotriccus eulerei</i>
Fuscous Flycatcher	1		To	1	<i>Cnemotriccus fuscatus</i>
Olive-sided Flycatcher (T)	1		T	1	<i>Contopus cooperi</i>
Tropical Pewee (T)	1		T	1	<i>Contopus cinereus</i>
Fork-tailed Flycatcher	1		To	1	<i>Tyrannus savana</i>
Pied Water-tyrant (T)	2		T	1	<i>Fluvicola pica</i>
White-headed Marsh-tyrant (T)	1		T	1	<i>Arundinicola leucocephala</i>
Piratic Flycatcher	8		T	1	<i>Legatus leucophaius</i>
Great Kiskadee (T)	8		T	3	<i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>
Streaked Flycatcher	2		T	1	<i>Myiodynastes maculatus</i>
Boat-billed Flycatcher (T)	1		T	1	<i>Megarhynchus pitangua</i>
Sulphury Flycatcher (T)	2		T	2	<i>Tyrannopsis sulphurea</i>
Tropical Kingbird	10			2	<i>Tyrannus melancholicus</i>
Grey Kingbird	7			1	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>
Venezuelan Flycatcher (To)	1		To	1	<i>Myiarchus venezuelensis</i>
Brown-crested Flycatcher	3		To	1	<i>Myiarchus tyrannulus</i>
Bright-rumped Attila (T)	1	2h	T	1	<i>Attila spadiceus</i>
Bearded Bellbird (T)	5	2h	T	1	<i>Procnias averano</i>
White-bearded Manakin (T)	5		T	1	<i>Manacus manacus</i>
Blue-backed Manakin (To)	1		To	2	<i>Chiroxiphia pareola</i>
Golden-headed Manakin (T)	4		T	1	<i>Pipra erythrocephala</i>
Black-tailed Tityra (T)	2		T	1	<i>Tityra cayana</i>
White-winged Becard	1		T	1	<i>Pachyrhamphus polychopterus</i>
Rufous-browed Peppershrike (T)	4	3h	T	1	<i>Cyclarhis gujanensis</i>
Red-eyed (Chivi) Vireo	2	3		1	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>
Golden-fronted Greenlet (T)	3		T	1	<i>Hylophilus aurantiifrons</i>
Scrub Greenlet (To)	1		To	1	<i>Hylophilus flavipes</i>
White-winged Swallow	6			2	<i>Tachycineta albiventer</i>
Caribbean Martin (To)	4			3	<i>Progne dominicensis</i>
Grey-breasted Martin	6		T	3	<i>Progne chalybea</i>
Southern Rough-winged Swallow	5		T	2	<i>Stelgidopteryx ruficollis</i>
Southern House Wren	9			1	<i>Troglodytes musculus</i>
Rufous-breasted Wren	3	1		1	<i>Thryothorus rutilus</i>
Long-billed Gnat-wren (T)	3	4		1	<i>Ramphocaenus melanurus</i>

Yellow-legged Thrush	1	To	1	<i>Turdus flavipes</i>
Cocoa Thrush (T)	8	T	2	<i>Turdus fumigatus</i>
Bare-eyed Thrush	11		2	<i>Turdus nudigenis</i>
White-necked Thrush	2		1	<i>Turdus albicollis</i>
Tropical Mockingbird	11		2	<i>Mimus gilvus</i>
White-lined Tanager	10		3	<i>Tachyphonus rufus</i>
Silver-beaked Tanager (T)	8	T	3	<i>Ramphocelus carbo</i>
Blue-grey Tanager	11		2	<i>Thraupis episcopus</i>
Palm Tanager	11		3	<i>Thraupis palmarum</i>
Turquoise Tanager (T)	3	T	1	<i>Tangara mexicana</i>
Bay-headed Tanager (T)	6	T	1	<i>Tangara gyrola</i>
Blue Dacnis (T)	1	T	1	<i>Dacnis cayana</i>
Purple Honeycreeper	8	T	3	<i>Cyanerpes caeruleus</i>
Red-legged Honeycreeper	5		3	<i>Cyanerpes cyaneus</i>
Green Honeycreeper (T)	8	T	3	<i>Chlorophanes spiza</i>
Bicolored Conebill (T)	1	T	1	<i>Conirostrum bicolor</i>
Bananaquit	11		3	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>
Black-faced Grassquit (To)	4	To	2	<i>Tiaris bicolor</i>
Saffron Finch (T)	1	T	3	<i>Sicalis flaveola</i>
Grassland Yellow Finch	1	T	2	<i>Sicalis luteola</i>
Blue-black Grassquit	4	T	3	<i>Volatinia jacarina</i>
Ruddy-breasted Seedeater	1	T	1	<i>Sporophila minuta</i>
Grayish Saltator (T)	1	T	1	<i>Saltator coerulescens</i>
Highland Hepatic Tanager (T)	1	T	1	<i>Piranga (flava) lutea</i>
Crowned Ant Tanager (T)	2	T	1	<i>Habia rubica</i>
Yellow Warbler	1	T	1	<i>Dendroica petechia</i>
American Redstart	3		1	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>
Northern Waterthrush	3	T	1	<i>Seiurus noveboracensis</i>
Masked Yellowthroat (T)	1	T	1	<i>Geothlypis aequinoctialis</i>
Golden-crowned Warbler	3	T	1	<i>Basileuterus culicivorus</i>
Crested Oropendola	11		3	<i>Psarocolius decumanus</i>
Yellow-rumped Cacique (T)	2	T	2	<i>Cacicus cela</i>
Moriche Oriole	2	T	1	<i>Icterus chrysiocephalus</i>
Yellow Oriole (T)	6	T	1	<i>Icterus nigrogularis</i>
Yellow-hooded Blackbird (T)	3	T	3	<i>Chrysomus icterocephalus</i>
Giant Cowbird	2	To	2	<i>Molothrus oryzivorus</i>
Shiny Cowbird	7		3	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>
Carib Grackle	11		2	<i>Quiscalus lugubris</i>
Red-breasted Blackbird	1	T	1	<i>Sturnella militaris</i>
Trinidad Euphonia (T)	1	T	1	<i>Euphonia trinitatis</i>
Violaceous Euphonia	9		3	<i>Euphonia violacea</i>

MAMMALS

White-lined Sac-winged Bat	<i>Saccopteryx canescens</i>
Red-tailed Squirrel	<i>Sciurus granatensis</i>
Brown Agouti	<i>Dasyprocta variegata</i>
Silky Anteater	<i>Cyclopes didactylus</i>
Black-eared Opossum	<i>Didelphis marsupialis</i>
Indian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>

REPTILES

Cook's Tree Boa	<i>Corallus ruschenbergerii</i>
Boa Constrictor	<i>Boa constrictus constrictus</i>
Tegu Lizard	<i>Tapinambus tequixin</i>
Green Iguana	<i>Iguana iguana</i>
Spectacled Caiman	<i>Caiman crocodilus</i>
Green Turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>

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



White-necked Jacobin



Blue-chinned Sapphire



Tufted Coquette



Purple Honeycreeper



Red-billed Tropicbird



Magnificent Frigatebird



Scarlet Ibis



Blue-grey Tanager

Front cover: Ruby-topaz Hummingbird

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