

Trinidad and Tobago: Incredible Birds and Wildlife

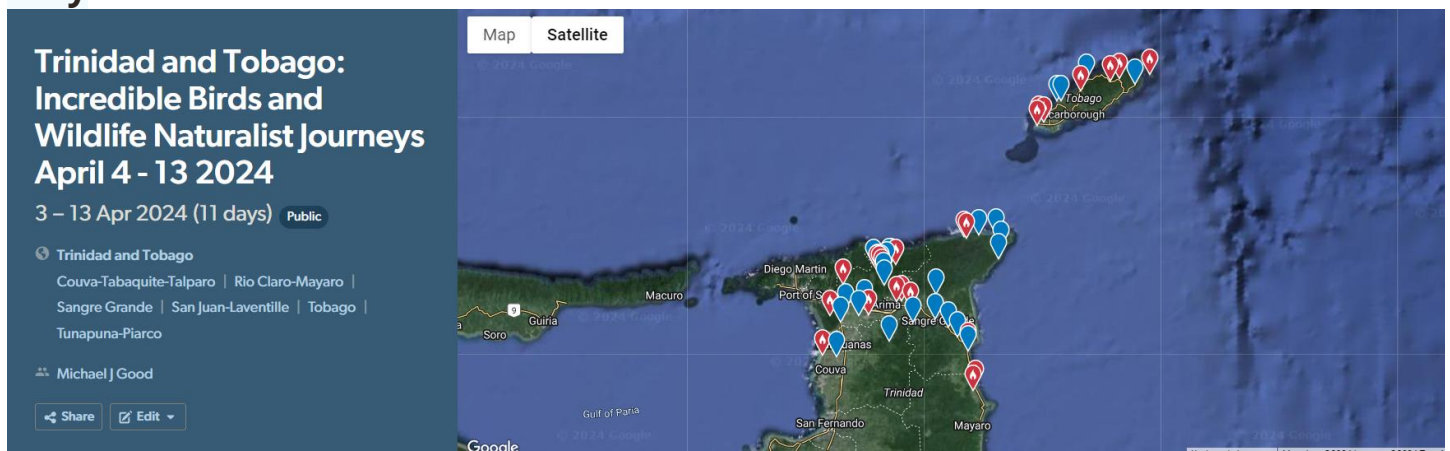
April 4-13 2024

Trip Report

by Michael Good



With local guides Mukesh Ramdass, David Ramlal, Lester Nanan, Jason Radix and Naturalist Journeys guide Michael Good with the Trinidad and Tobago Birders: Steven, Lise, Bill, Kit, Hildy, Lisa, David, Janice, Charlotte, Peter and Amy



Top Three Birds: 1) Scarlet Ibis 2) Oil Bird 3) Barred Antshrike

Top Experience: Dinner with the Scarlet Ibis

eBird Trinidad & Tobago Species Report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/218356>



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Asa Wright Nature Center April 4-6 2024

Thursday, April 4 **Arrival in Trinidad Piarco International Airport | Asa Wright Nature Center**

Today was arrival day for the majority of Naturalist Journeys Birders. The day started out cloudy, after a full day and night of rain, through the evening of April 3. David, Janice and Michael arrived on April 2 and had a little head start on the rest of the group by birding all day on April 3. The three of us acclimated to the rainforest, spent quite a bit of time on the veranda talking with Mukesh, Randell and Elisabeth, the Asa Wright guides, and getting our "ears on" while learning some of the many species of birds we would see during our stay at Asa Wright and in Trinidad and Tobago.

This morning the Palm Tanagers were very active outside of our rooms and the activity of the rain forest began in earnest. Some of our first birds every morning was Palm Tanager, Bananaquit, Streaked Flycatcher, Barred Antshrike, Spectacled Thrush, 6 species of hummingbirds at the veranda feeders and a forest full of strange new songs and calls. The Breaded Bellbird "Bock-ed" explosively and loudly in the distance, Cocoa and White necked Thrush were singing thrushly just before dawn, their similar but different song, the latter faster song phrases and robin like, while the former, slower and melancholier. Occasionally, the descending call of Cocoa Woodcreeper broke out of the silence and in the distance, through my scope, we could see a Channel-billed Toucan sitting in the morning sun as they would over the next two days. Some of the birds seen during the day included Barred Antshrike, Crested Oropendola, White-lined and Streaked Tanager and the beautiful Violaceous Euphonia. Plumaceous Kite, Common Black Hawk and White Hawk all made a pass by while Orange-winged Parrot squawked loudly from the canopy. The diversity at Asa Wright is truly spectacular.

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David, Janice and Michael looked forward to meeting our Naturalist Journeys team members who were all arriving later in the day, and actually got into the Asa Wright Nature Centre in time for dinner around 8 PM, passing the night walk led by Makesh. Steven, Lise, Charlotte, Peter, Amy, Kit, Bill and Hildy had an opportunity to enjoy their first Asa Wright dinner while talking and asking questions about the impending birding and trip itinerary in preparation for our first full day. Lisa, unfortunately, was held up in the US by foul weather and Michael was working with the hotel staff for a pickup the following day. The guides decided that April 5 would be better spent around Asa Wright in a relaxed manner and travel would begin on April 6, switching the itinerary and giving everyone a chance to breath in the sweet air of Trinidad. This proves to be an excellent addition to the itinerary. Everyone agreed that it had been a long day, so we all dispersed to our cabins and our first night's sleep in Trinidad.



Friday, April 5 Trails of Asa Wright Nature Center | Oilbirds of Dunston Cave

Spending the morning on the veranda was spent around the Asa Wright Center with an easy day learning all of the new species of birds, plants, animals, reptiles, butterflies and familiarizing ourselves with the Trinidadian Rainforest. Charlotte was the first to the veranda at daybreak, which became the classroom, with nectar feeders attracting all of the possible hummingbird species including Copper-rumped and Ruby-Topaz Hummingbirds, White-chested Emerald, Black-throated Mango, White-necked Jacobin, Blue-chinned Sapphire and Green Hermit, several tanagers like Green Honeycreeper, Bananaquit and the occasional Barred Antshrike were part of the rich mixture of birds. After breakfast, we had a chance to meet David Ramal, the local expert birding guide for our time in Trinidad. David talked about the itinerary, took questions and prepared us for our first full day on the road tomorrow. We all spent the rest of the morning walking with Mukesh, our expert Asa Wright guide. This part of the trip was meant to get us all in physical shape for the rest of the trip by walking the gentle hills and trails at Asa Wright which have a bit of

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topography. The excitement of all the new birds made the morning go by quickly. Mukesh gave us a great overview, introduced us to the songs and calls of all the birds we recorded, and got everyone on the same page with respect to the plants, mammals and reptiles we might see during our time in Trinidad and Tobago. We were all impressed with the local guides. Their friendly and pleasant manners were appreciated by everyone.

After lunch, around two o'clock, we had an amazing visit with a leisurely walk to see the famous Dunstan Cave Oilbird's. We learned about the amazing history of protection for these birds, which was an exciting special treat for everyone's life list! Not only did we see the birds and photograph them, but we also heard their haunting screams, snarls and clucks as well as their inflight echo-location clicks as one bird flew about the cave for Peter and Charlotte. The afternoon ended on the famous Asa Wright veranda, where a Green Honeycreeper turned briefly into a Bay-headed Tanager and became a good joke for the rest of the trip and a second day mistake I was not sure I was ever forgiven for! We ended this day another classic Asa Wright dinner, a night walk with Elisabeth, a few snakes, and many insects before a restful night in preparation for our road trip with David Ramal.



Saturday, April 6 Birding the Northern Ridge | Blanchisseuse Road | Brasso Seco Village

Today was focused on the diversity of birds found in the Northern Range. Our drive along the Blanchisseuse Road through the mountains to Brasso Seco was memorable. We saw all the Trogon's, Green-backed, Collard and Guianan, and learned so many new things about this place. The birding mysteries of the rainforest were methodically revealed to us by David's expert understanding of where to find Trinidad's birds. One of the best examples of David's expertise was finding the Red-crowned Ant Tanager (above), a difficult to find species that attends army ant

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swarms, using them to forage on the fleeing insects. Brasso Seco, the small farming community in the valley was our destination for lunch. The moto here is : “Experience the Valley of Life”. After a wonderful lunch, we learned about the chocolate making process. Our speaker, told us about the picking and extraction of the purple cocoa bean, and the 7-9 days of the fermentation process. They then cook the beans to help loosen the seed cover and finally blow the covers off with a hair dryer. The beans then are grounded into powder and the powder is mixed with coffee or brown sugar. This sure gave us all a deeper understanding of the lives and culture of this isolated Trinidadian village and its people.

After this educational lesson, we started birding right at the Brasso Seco Visitor Center with our first Carib Grackle and Ruddy Ground Dove and we finished up the afternoon with Rufous-tailed Jacamar and a great ride from Morne La Croix back to Asa Wright through the mountains of the Northern Range. These mountains begin in the Chaguaramas peninsula on the west coast to Toco in the east and make up about 25 percent of the land area in Trinidad. Later in the trip we drove through Toco on our way to Grande Riviere. This will be our last night at Asa Wright and its amazing hummingbird veranda!



Hacienda Jacana April 7-8 2024

Sunday, April 7 Nariva Swamp | Trinidad's Atlantic Coast | Night Birds after Dinner

After our final breakfast and birding on the Asa Wright veranda, we started our day with an 8:15 departure for the Nariva Swamp and our drive through “coconut alley” along the eastern beaches. This was our first “big day” on Trinidad! We met our driver Paul and David Ramal and started down the Blanchisseuse Road back toward Arima. We did not get far, in fact, we stopped and birded at the gate of Asa Wright, where we took our group picture. Here we found White-winged Becard, Bay-headed and Turquoise Tanager. Several stops were made along the Blanchisseuse Road for Great and Barred Antshrike, Long-billed Gnatwren, Northern Tropical Pewee, White-

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flanked Antwren and a distant Common Black Hawk. We made a quick stop at David's community, Temple Village where 5 generations of the Ramal family have lived. Looking for raptors, we made a quick stop at the Aripo Livestock Research Station on our way to the Mexico Road where we picked up our last Antshrike...Black-crested. It was a female and she is beautifully brown-crested, which took nothing away from her distinct beauty and hairdo. A Pied Water-Tyrant was found with the Wattled Jacana, and Striated Heron in the small farm pond.

Today, our destination goal was Nariva Swamp, so we drove through the countryside until our first bathroom break. While standing on the Eastern Main Road, I noticed a smaller hawk mixed in with the ubiquitous Black Vultures. It was our first and only, Short-tailed Hawk, (*Buteo brachyurus*) soaring reasonably close initially, then soaring away on the populated thermal of many Black Vultures. Not too far from this location, we all had a chance to see our first Yellow-rumped Cacique, missed a Squirrel Cuckoo and heard a very close by Ferruginous Owl. Our next important stop was the first wetland habitat associated with Nariva Swamp where we picked up our only Snail Kite which I put in my scope, watched our first Long-winged Harrier and had a wonderful fly-by of a Yellow-headed Caracara for excellent in-flight photos.

The Nariva River Mouth proved to be one of our best stops of the morning with many Sanderling, Black-bellied Plover and our best looks at a Southern Lapwing. Little Cuckoo gave us a little trouble in the Red Mangrove, but David showed us a Silvered Antbird and one of my favorites, American Pygmy Kingfisher, first pointed out by eagle-eye Lise Hicks, who proved to be an incredible asset for spotting birds during our trip. A Common Black Hawk flew right over our location, giving only a few high pitched "spinking" calls to warn us of its approach. Most everyone saw the broad black and white banding on its tail.

Our last stop before dinner with the night birds of Eteck Park at Waller Field, was along the Kernaham Trail (Melon Patch), where we watched Yellow-headed Caracara, Savanna and Gray-lined Hawk, Long-winged Harrier and a ton of Black Vulture. Blue and Yellow Macaw were briefly and distantly seen flying over Nariva Swamp, a true re-introduction success story of Trinidad. The best birds along this road were the Blue-black Grassquit, our theatrical Yellow-chinned Spinetail, close-ups of Pied Water Tyrant and the wild hairdo of the Yellow-bellied Elaenia.

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Our last unique experience in Trinidad on this day was our evening meal on Waller Airfield. Here we finished out the day with an excellent catered dinner by Gale Nana and the night walk for White-tailed Nighthawk, Common Pauraque, a Southern Lapwing and good vocals from Tropical Screech Owl. Our long day trip ended at Hacienda Jacana where Michael, Peter, Charlotte and Amy were personally serenaded by the local Common Pauraque outside my unscreened windows at the House on the Hill. Overall, it was an amazing day and I hope you all enjoyed it!



Monday, April 8 Cultural sites | Yerette Hummingbirds | Scarlet Ibis of Caroni National Park

Waking up early, I found Charlotte and Peter were already hard at it listening and chronicling the birds at House on the Hill. The Common Pauraque had us all awake at about 4:45 am, so we were ready to go when the sun finally rose. Down below us near the pond, Janice, Lise and Steve were birding, listening to the loud cackling calls of the Gray-necked Wood Rail, which was poorly recorded from the House on the Hill. Lise and Steve ended up at the House on the Hill where we found a pair of Black-tailed Tityra initially seen by Charlotte. We all saw the Red-bellied Macaw fly over and a few distant photos were taken, showing the importance of a camera for birding. We ended our morning with a great breakfast and 41 species of birds, including a Sooty Grassquit, which Michael photographed at House on the Hill. (Since I processed this bird at home, this became species 206 for the trip!) Guide David Ramlal pointed out a Gray-headed Kite and we had brief looks at Plumbeous Kite, Gray-lined Hawk, 250 Black Vulture and one lone Turkey Vulture from the breakfast veranda of Hacienda Jacana.

After breakfast, we departed for Caroni Swamp and our first Scarlett Ibis adventure. We traveled along the Caroni South Bank Road to the Southern Main Road where we stopped for the beautiful Red-breasted Meadowlark foraging on insects in the littered field, along with a Crested Caracara and a Southern Lapwing. At the end of the Southern Main Road, we ended up at our first cultural site, Temple by the Sea

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known as the Sewdass Sadhu Shiva Mandir in Waterloo, Carapichaima. The Temple is a testament to the love of Hinduism by Sewdass Sadhu, who was an indentured laborer from India, who was forced to build the island one bucket at a time in the Gulf of Paria, because he was forbidden to build it on the land. Surely this was a labor of love! We found our first seabirds here including Laughing Gull, Black Skimmer, Long-billed Tern and Neotropic Cormorant. There were many shorebirds including Black-bellied Plover, Whimbrel, Semipalmated Plover and our only Willet. Our next stop was at the Hanuman Mandir Temple for a bathroom stop. We added Safron Finch to our list and we mesmerized by the giant monkey god statue. This 85-foot statue of the Hindu god, Lord Hanuman is located in the village of Carapichaima. And is the largest Hanuman murti outside of India. The statue surrounded by blue sky was truly beautiful.

Yerette Hummingbird retreat was the next birding and cultural event where we had the pleasure of listening to Professor emeritus at the University of West Indies, Theo Ferguson. This was one of David Ramlal's professors. Theo told us that there are 360 species of Hummingbirds in the world and all of them are in the America's. There are none in Asia, England, Hawaii. Trinidad has 19 species and only one in Tobago, the White-tailed Sabrewing Hummingbird. At the Yerette gardens, there are 15 species and maybe as many as a few hundred per day! We were told that the human hearts beat at 40 to 100 beats per minute. A perched hummingbird's heart beats 500 beats per minute and an active hummer around 1200-1500 beats per minute! Amazing! A hummingbird can live 15 years, and most live about 10 years or so. Hummingbirds burn about 150000 calories per day and process them at a high rate. Nectar is their most common food but they also eat insects, mosquitoes and eat twice their body weight in food each day! They have been in the fossil record for 15 million years. Quite the evolution. White sugar should only be used. Never Brown sugar because of the impurities. Make sure you clean your feeders every day. Alcohol forms when nectar ferments which is bad for the hummingbirds. Never keep nectar around as it goes bad, especially in warm climates. Hummingbirds are hungry all the time, so they get "Hangry" and this is one reason why they are always so aggressive and such fierce fighters! Hummingbirds have one of the longest migrations of over 4000 miles, many travel over 600 miles over the Gulf of Mexico! The Hummingbird is Sacred....IERE....is the Trinidad Island name after the Hummingbird. Yerette is an Amerindian word that means Hummingbird and this place is the Home of the Hummingbirds. We found a total of 9 hummingbird, a Gray-headed Kite and then

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had a delicious lunch prepared by Theo's wife. We said our goodbyes and were off to Caroni National Park for our Dinner on the Caroni Swamp with Scarlet Ibis. This event was ranked the number one event of Trinidad Tobago trip. Dinner with Scarlett Ibis. Amazing really!

The boat ride to the Scarlet started with loading the broad boats prepared with our dinner table in the center. It was sunny, dry with very little wind. Perfect conditions for birding along the canals of the Caroni Swamp with Nana Tours. We slowly and leisurely made our way through the Rhizophora mangle or Red Mangrove forests, and learned about the viviparous seeds called propagules, fully mature plants, that drop off into the water and are dispersed by the water until they eventually embed in the shallow mud. Lester Nana told us that there is 40 square miles of Red mangrove habitat and it is the #1 storage of Carbon. We saw Tree Climbing Crabs which are numerous in the Caroni. There are 185 different species that utilize the Caroni Swamp. 100 mammal species of which 70 species of Bats, are found in Trinidad. There are 70 species of snakes and over 700 species of Butterflies. We had an opportunity to see Brazilian Long-nosed Bats on a tree along the canal.

Lester's grandfather was the first game warden for the swamp, specifically to protect the Scarlett Ibis from the millinery trade. He was killed trying to protect the swamp, beaten and died from his injuries. Lester's father carried on the tradition and is the third generation continuing the legacy. On April 22 2015, the anniversary of Lester's grandfathers' death, 200 American Flamingo's came to the island and they have stayed ever since. At this location, there have been from 5000 to 7000 Scarlett Ibis and there are between 20 to 30,000 Scarlet Ibis in the entire Caroni Swamp.

The evening was complete with a fine meal and over 2200 Scarlet Ibis added to our life lists. Clearly a memorable experience for everyone along with the sunset.



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Tuesday, April 9 Aripo Savannah | El Suzanne Rainforest Lunch | Grand Riviere

The Common Pauraque Alarm went off at 4:45 am, starting our day whether we wanted to or not, it was declared by Mr. Pauraque that it was time to start our day for Charlotte, Amy and Peter too. After recording this sweet call, it was amazing to doze off to the far-carrying whistle “ker-whee-oo, which sounds like “Who-are-You” over and over, until it will always have a place in our brains!

Today we are off to Grande Riviere to witness our first Leatherback Turtles laying eggs on the beach. We had a leisurely morning to bird around the Hacienda Jacana property so we took advantage of a good breakfast and a walk around the property without David. We started with the nest of the Rufous-tailed Jacamar that was shown to us by the staff. As we wandered up the western hill, we found our first good sighting of two Ferruginous Pygmy Owls and captured a few photographs while the Tropical Mockingbird harassed them. We found 13 species before heading off in the bus at 9:30. Everyone enjoyed their stay at Hacienda Jacana, but it was time to move to the northeast corner of Trinidad for Leatherback Turtles.

Along the way to Grande Riviere, we had lunch at Manor Del Suzanne, saw an amazing display of migratory Swallow-tailed Kites along the Valencia Road and Bat Falcon roosting in a tall tree on the Paria Maine Road in Monte Video before arriving at the Mt. Plaisir Estate Hotel. Thankfully, because we saw the Trinidad Piping-Guans, our hotel rooms were not quite ready, so we ventured up the hill to the Monte Video Road and found our target species!

The endemic Trinidad Piping-Guan were found on the Monte Video Road outside of Grande Riviere. This is the entrance to the Matura National Park, which protects 9,000 hectares of one of the many important watersheds supplying fresh water for the people of Trinidad. It also protects the endemic Trinidad Piping-Guan, a turkey sized member of the Cracidae family, who inhabit dense forests and thick shrubs of this rainforest. These birds feed on seeds and fruits found in trees and on the ground. We scored big when we came to the viewing station and found two birds right off the bat lurking in the enormous Kapok tree and adding a new endemic and life bird to everyone’s list. We then walked in Matura National Park where we found our third Piping-Guan sitting in a large tree. One of the favorite pictures of the trip is everyone with their binoculars and cameras looking into the tree with the endemic Piping-Guan.... that they had found without David or myself! Another great bird was

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the Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, heard and found by David, and one of the 16 members of the Tyrannidae family we saw during our trip. Everyone got amazing views and pictures of White-bellied Antbird, we heard a few Little Tinamou and were hoping that one might come walking out into the open, but no way! This secretive bird was only heard not seen. The walk into the park capped a great stop and now it was time to go back to the hotel, relax, have dinner and get ready for our night walk to the leatherback Turtles.

The evening group walk to the watch Leatherback Turtles surpassed everyone's expectations. A lumbering 700-pound female was found and observed for over an hour. We watched her lay eggs in the sand while in her hypnotic state, watched in awe as she methodically covered and pressed the sand into place, as they have for millions of years. These reptilian relics are the only remaining member of a family of turtles that traces its roots back 100 million years. Stunningly awesome!



Mt. Plaisir Estate Hotel April 9 2024

Wednesday, April 10 Leatherback Turtles on the beach | travel to Cuffie River Nature Retreat

A bright blue-sky dawn started early for Michael, who ventured off at sunrise to witness his first ever Leatherback Turtle return to the sea after laying and hiding her eggs in the sand, just as the group saw last evening. No words can describe my elation as I checked off a life goal with a video and many photos to show the rest of the group. Later that morning, there was one last turtle on the beach, on the other side of a deep channel with a raging current. Lisa made the wet crossing and had the opportunity to witness this evolutionary wonder. When walking back to my room, a local man handed me a hatchling Leatherback he had saved from the freshwater lagoon. I quickly ran out to the Peter, Charlotte, Amy and Janice to show them the hatchling. Totally flabbergasted, we placed the hatchling near the water and watched

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as its tiny flippers pushed the hatchling into the ocean to hopefully return in 25 to 50 years from today! We can only hope that it beats the odds of 1000 to 1. Live long and prosper little hatchling! The rest of the group arrive many minutes after we released the hatchling

After breakfast at Mt Plaisir Estate, we drove back to the Piarco International Airport. With a little time to spend birding, we went around the Trincity Milenium Park picking up White-headed Marsh Tyrant, Semipalmated and Stilt Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and our first Black-necked Stilt. We also saw our best looks at several Fork-tailed Swift flitting about the Park. We stretched out our stay on Trinidad as long as we could, but it was time to fly to Tobago and say goodbye to Paul, our excellent driver and David Ramlal. We ended out Trinidad birding with 162 species, amazing memories and an enduring desire to return in the future.

Tobago

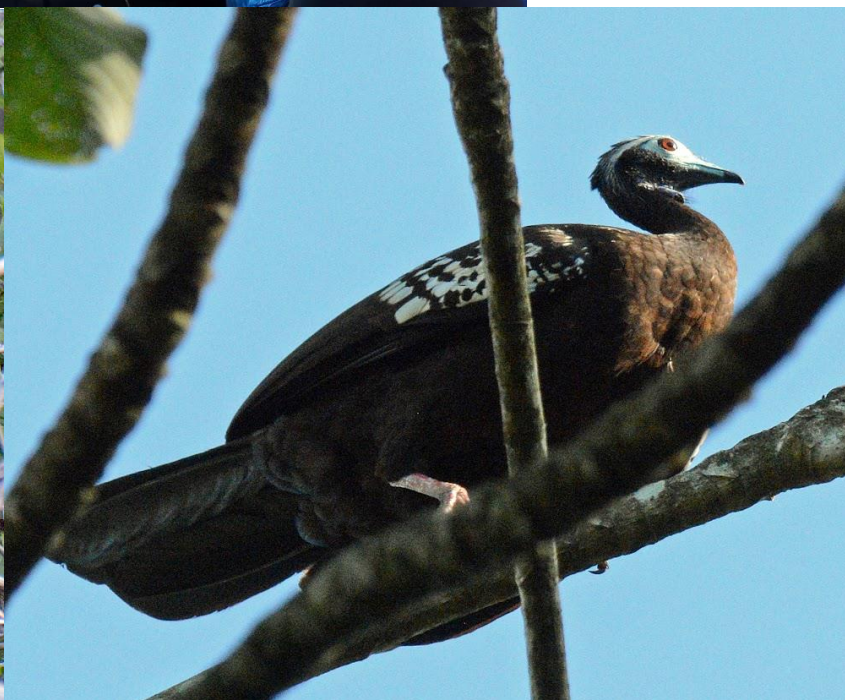
The Trinidad Tobago birders left Piarco International Airport at 14:25 and land on time at A.N.R Robinson international Airport located on the Southwest tip of the Island of Tobago. The first Tobago bird we saw was a Brown Pelican as we came in over the water.

A birding trip is not complete without a stop at a Sewage Lagoon! And so, starts our Tobago birding adventure with Jason Radix, our Tobago guide and host for the next three days. We gathered our gear into the bus and took off for Bon Accord Sewage Treatment Ponds only minutes from the airport. We were immediately into the birds, in fact, one of the first birds we saw was our Cuffie River Trails retreat alarm clock, Rufous-vented Chachalaca, sitting in some dead trees on the west end of the treatment ponds. This was our first, but clearly, not our last encounter with this turkey-sized noise maker! Walking along the road to the ponds, we get some of our best looks at Ochre-lore Flatbill and Scrub Greenlet. Red-crowned Woodpecker sat in an apple tree for all to see well. A Shiny Cowbird was foraging with a small flock of Carib Grackle and we get our first looks at Eared Dove, the Mourning Dove look-a-like. A couple of Whimbrel added to our shorebird list for the trip, as well as, Spotted Sandpiper, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs. Our first ducks of the trip included Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Blue-winged Teal and White-cheeked Pintail. Our first stop produced 40 species and we were on to the Center Street Ponds only minutes away. We added Ring-necked Duck, a rarer species that is not commonly found on Tobago.

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Many White-cheeked Pintail and Least Grebe were on the water and the edges were littered with about 20 Black-crowned Night Heron. After another long day, we found ourselves in the comfort of the Cuffie River Nature Retreat and added 2 White-tailed Nightjar sitting on the road as we turned into the driveway. We ended our first day on Tobago with about 50 species.



Tuesday, April 11 Cuffie River Nature Retreat | Adventure Farm |

Our day started with the most ruckus CACOPHONY of raspy bellowing “chachalaca, chachalaca, chachalaca, CHACHALACA, CHACHALACA, CHACHALACA, CHACHALACA! I calculated around 125 Rufous -vented Chachalaca began calling and continued for 5 to 7 minutes unabated, reverberating throughout the forest , with two to five loud birds near the Cuffie Retreat. I'll take a Common Pauraque any morning over this amazingly jarring sound! It was comical and abruptly woke everyone out of our deep sleeps! This was followed by the morning chorus including Streaked and Piratic

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Flycatcher, Tropical and Gray Kingbird, and our friendly Tropical Mockingbird. What a memorable and great way to wake up.

With breakfast at 7:30, we birded from the comfort of a cup of coffee and the veranda overlooking the nectar feeders. We had our first good looks at the Trinidad, aka Tobago Motmot, and then started adding birds we were becoming familiar with like, Copper-rumped Hummingbird and Rufous-breasted Hermit. There are no Brown Violetears on Tobago. We analyzed the difference between Streaked and Piratic Flycatcher, hearing and seeing both near the Retreat. Overall, it was a great start to our first morning on Tobago, and an ecstatic burst of energy from the Rufous-vented Chachalaca!

Desmond Wright led some of the group on a two-hour tour of the Cuffie River Road. It was hot and dry but we added Blue-backed Manakin, Northern White-fringed Antwren, Chivi Vireo and nailed down the call of Pale-vented Pigeon and White-tipped Dove. We saw a few Trinidad Motmot nests and found out just how much sap runs from a Rubber Tree. Desmond did a great job and it was a pleasure to be in the field with him and his insights.

Jason met us after lunch at Cuffie and took us to the Adventure Farm on the Arnos vale Road in Plymouth. With the ring of a bell, we were treated to a menagerie of birds coming to the nectar and fruit feeders. This was our closest encounters with all the birds we had come to know. Trinidad Motmot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Shiny Cowbird, Blue-gray and Palm Tanager, and a quartet of hummingbirds, Ruby-topaz and Copper-rumped, Black-throated Mango and great looks at Rufous-breasted Hermit. Our walk gave us good looks at Northern White-fringed Antbird, Scrub Greenlet and some excellent moments with Trinidad Motmot. To finish out the afternoon, we ventured off to the western coast and Fort James, on Shelbourne Street in Plymouth. We had great comparisons in the scope between Sandwich Tern and the Cayenne Tern. Morphologically similar, the Cayenne subspecies is distinguished from the northern Sandwich Tern by bill color, which is bright yellow, as we saw clearly in my scope. There were at least 85 Black Skimmer, 385 Laughing Gull and many Royal Tern mixed together on the long pier. The Courland Monument documents the history of this point of land in Tobago. The site is the oldest fort and town in Tobago. The Dutch town of Nieuw Vlissingen and Nieuw Walcheren (1628-1630) were twice destroyed by the Spanish and Caribs. It was restored to the Couronians by the English and remained a point of attraction to

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the French, Dutch, British and Carib, invaders for the next 160 years. This location has a long history of occupation with the Spanish, Dutch, French, Carib and English as documented at the Courland Monument not far from Fort James. Under the benevolent rule (with interruptions, from 1390-1693) of the dukes of Courland in Latvia, the Germans, Latvians, Scandinavians, Dutch, British, French, Caribs, and Gambians from Africa, formed an international settlement of Free Men at the great Courland Bay engaged in trade with North America, Brazil, Europe, and Africa. Other Couronian settlements were located at Black Roack (Fort Bennet), Mount Irvine (Little Courland Bay, Fort Monick, Fort Schmoll, Fort Casimir), King Peter Bay (Kalpi Bay) and Castara Bay (Corese Bay, Kursu Lics). (From the Courland Monument April 11 2024). We drove back to Cuffie in time for dinner and prepared for another early wakeup call from the bird world of Cuffie River.



Friday, April 12 Gilpin Trace Main Ridge Preserve | Little Tobago Island from Blue Waters Inn

This crisp cool morning started again with Gray Kingbird and Tropical Mockingbird giving us their perspective at 5:45 am. Peter, Charlotte and I birded a little way up the Cuffie road and then behind the Annex. After breakfast, the group headed out with Jason to Tobago's Main Ridge Preserve making a couple of stops to look over the northern coastline and bays that are found along the coastline of Tobago. Upon reaching the Main Ridge Preserve, we got out of the bus and the first bird we saw was target species, White-tailed Sabrewing. The Sabrewing is found on Tobago, absent from Trinidad and localized within two parts of Venezuela. During the occurrence of Hurricane Flora 60 years ago in 1963, it was thought that this species was extirpated. However, since the early 2000's, the population began to slowly recover. Today, it is a species reliably seen within and around the Main Ridge Forest Reserve. We did not observe this species at Cuffie, but it is seen between November and May. We found Steve's nemesis bird, Red-legged Honeycreeper, had good looks

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and photos of Cocoa Woodcreeper and excellent moments with Venezuelan Flycatcher, another member of the Myiarchus genus of Flycatchers.

Our wonderings brought us to the Tobago House of Assembly and the Forestry Section of the Main Ridge Reserve, The Bloody Bay Recreation Site. We had an opportunity to talk to the staff and suggested a Birding Festival, as a way to educate the public about the Birds of Tobago. The staff and members of the community were celebrating the 248th year of the Main Ridge Reserve. All those years ago, the leaders of the community recognized the importance of maintaining healthy ecological systems for Water Quality! The world could have been so different if these concepts were adopted everywhere. Jason showed us the topographic map in the center and talked about the Tobago landscape. We finished up and it was time to go to the Gilpin Trace and bird the Forestry Section of the Reserve, which is the oldest and most prestigious trail in the western hemisphere. The UNESCO listed Tobago Main Ridge Forest Preserve is the oldest nature reserve in the western hemisphere and is a great location for our birdwatching adventure.

Once on the Gilpin Trace, we found a Rufous-breasted Hermit on a nest, and then flittering around a vine was a White-tailed Sabrewing which was seen by everyone as it preened on a branch. This sighting was the final hummingbird species for our trip. The glistening glossy blue and green plumage of this species was shockingly beautiful. We located the nest of the Yellow-legged Thrush and heard the male's musical song from a high perch and the occasional Jay-like scolding call. Not long after this, Jason got very animated about the song of the Olivaceous Woodcreeper making its way up the trees, just like our Brown Creeper. This was followed by many long good observations of Plain Antvireo building a nest and then the male was found foraging on a moth it found along the trail. Strip-breasted Spinetail was initially briefly seen, then later many got excellent views of this streak-chested bird as it foraged on the forest floor for insects and spiders in the leaf litter. There were many species in the forest that were difficult to see, despite the best efforts of Jason and Michael. The only photos we got were of its long-graduated tail and its dark undertail coverts. The red-crowned, Blue-backed Manakin was heard and seen well on its lek. It would have been great to spend more time on this classic lower montane rainforest trail, but we had tides to worry about and an appointment for the glass-bottomed boat and birds of Little Tobago.

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After a satisfying afternoon, we traveled through many vibrantly colored coastal villages to the docks of the Blue Waters Inn, where Jason once worked. Our last adventure of this trip is with Zolani (Zee) Frank, our guide on the glass bottomed boat and the hike to the top of Little Tobago Island. Little Tobago is surrounded by many smaller islands like Goat Island which is owned by Tobago government, as is Little Tobago. Also known as Bird of Paradise Island, Little Tobago is located about 3 km (1.5 mi) off of the coast of the village of Speyside, Tobago. This mountainous little island was a cotton plantation in the late 1700s known for yielding more cotton per acre than anywhere else in Tobago. In 1898 when Sir William Ingram purchased the island, he imported and introduced a colony of 24 pairs of Birds of Paradise (*Paradisaea apoda*) from Aru Island, New Guinea in 1909, where they stayed until 1963. That year a massive hurricane wiped out much of the population and the last Bird of Paradise was seen in 1982. After Sir William passed away, his heirs returned the island to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago on the condition that it be maintained as a bird sanctuary.

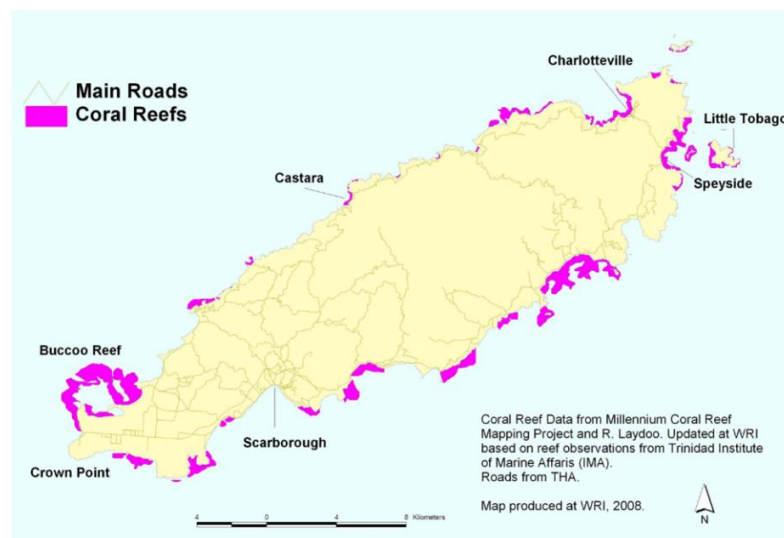
The travel weary Naturalist Journeys team boarded the glass-bottomed boat for a ride to Little Tobago Island. We had an interesting high tide disembarkation at the pier, and managed to get everyone on board and to the trail head of Little Tobago. Hildy decided that it was better to stay on the boat and she had an opportunity to see the rich coral reef and enjoy a little time with the crew. After a short presentation by Zee, we ventured up the trail of Tobago's most significant wildlife sanctuaries. We only traveled about 40 feet to our first life bird, an Audubon's Shearwater chick sitting contently in its tree cavity nest. Another 40 feet brought us to one of the many water tubes scattered along the trail top provide water to the animals on this dry island. This is where an animated Zee and a quick-with-the-scope Michael, gave everyone an opportunity to see the relatively rare Scaly-naped Pigeon, and everyone managed to see its scaly nape very well in the scope. There was also a Brown-crested Flycatcher, several Tanagers and, of course, the ubiquitous BQ, Bananaquit. The short walk to the leaside overlooks gave us amazing views of Red-billed Tropicbirds gliding along the cliff face at the look-out point. The Tropicbirds look for an opportunity to "crash land" into the understory where their nests are safely out to the reach of most predator birds like the ever-present Magnificent Friggin-bird (Frigatebird), so many it was hard to calculate accurately without more time. Because of the tide, we only had a short time to spend on this amazing precipice located on the lee-side of Little Tobago, a classic Tropical Dry Forest or xerophytic rainforest.

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We were taken to a Tropicbird nest site by Zee and saw a family close-up and personal with a chick in the nest. This was a classically cool moment of the trip. Red-footed Booby were openly nesting across the cliff face and many chicks were seen well in the scope. What an astonishingly beautiful overlook on the Atlantic Ocean and a delightful way to end our Island adventure with the hope that these nesting birds survive to continue the tradition.

Leaving the island, and safely back on the boat with the intrepid Hildy, we took time to look at the multitude of colorful fish and the formal coral garden off of Goat Island. Our guide Zee said that there is significant coral bleaching on the Atlantic side, so snorkeling is not what it used to be, partially due to over use by the diving public and bleaching events like a massive one in 2010. Note the purple in the map below showing the major coral reefs around Tobago. The second largest coral reef after Buccoo to the west, is located off the village of Speyside and home to the largest Brain Coral in the world (over 16 ft wide and 10 ft high). All this is threatened by climate change and the issues mentioned above.



Map of coral reefs of Tobago.

After another long and eventful day, we returned to the comforts and another delicious meal at Cuffie River Nature Retreat. We enjoyed our farewell meal and talked about our top three favorite birds and the best experience of the journey. We all agreed that Scarlet Ibis, Oilbird and Barred Antshrike were the top three birds and the best experience was Dinner with Scarlet Ibis. Incredible Trinidad and Tobago!

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Friday, April 12 Departures from Trinidad

Alas, our time in Tobago came to an end today, albeit at various times throughout the day. David and Janice stayed at Cuffie for a few more days and told me afterwards they had a marvelous time. The rest of our group departed with Jason at different times for the trip to Trinidad, where we all met up at the airport for our departures home. After so many amazingly good experiences, a fantastic overview of the birds, delicious meals and getting to know wonderful people, we had to say goodbye to the beautiful, incredible birds and wildlife of Trinidad and Tobago.

After writing this report, I want to thank Amy, Peter, Charlotte, Lisa, Hildy, Janice, David, Kit, Bill, Lise and Steven for their patience and great attitudes during the Trinidad and Tobago: Incredible Birds and Wildlife adventure. I also must thank David Ramlal and Jason Radix for their deep understanding of Trinidad and Tobago birds and ecology. It was a pleasure working with and learning from both men. I greatly enjoyed meeting and birding with you all. Thank you so much for the experience of being with all of you. It was inspirational and full of life lessons.

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Photo Credits: Janice Fisk (JF) White-necked Jacobin, Michael Good (MG) Maine Ridge Preserve, (JF) Palm Tanager, (JF) Tufted Coquette, (JF) Tufted Coquette, (MG) Red-crowned Ant Tanager, (MG) Bay-headed Tanager, (MG) Gray-lined Hawk, (JF) Purple Honeycreeper, (JF) Lisa crossing the tidal stream, (MG) Black-crested Antshrike, (JF) American Pygmy Kingfisher, (MG) Swallow-tailed Kite, (JF) White-bearded Manakin, (JF) Metallic Blue-Green Sweat Bee (*Augochloropsis trinitatis*), (MG) Leatherback Turtle hatchling, (MG) NJ Team looking at Piping Guan, (MG) Rufous-vented Chachalaca, (MG) Piping Guan, (MG) Red-billed Tropicbird, (JF) Red-billed Tropicbird, (MG) Group photo from Little Tobago, (MG) Hildy Morgan on the glass bottomed boat. (JF) Common Potoo, (MG) Dinner at Waller airfield, (MG) Walking the Gilpin Trail