

Trinidad & Tobago: Incredible Birds and Wildlife | Jan. 19 – 28, 2024 | Trip Report | by James P. Smith



With host guide James P. Smith and local guides Dave Ramlal and Jason Radix and a wonderful group of travelers; Deb & Lou, Peter & Mary, George & Peggy, Linda, Melissa, Barb and Liz.



Fri., Jan. 19 Arrivals | Hacienda Jacana

Early arrivals got to know one and other a little at the Pax Guest House, a site dramatically located on Mount St Benedict overlooking the famous 'Northern Range'. We learned, with some envy, of the incredible variety and numbers of hummingbirds seen off the Pax balcony including two key species; Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird, and Tufted Coquette! In early afternoon we met up with our driver trusty Paul and his equally trusty coaster bus. We were soon on our way stopping briefly at the Trincity Mall for beverages and supplies. The later arrivals, George, Peggy, and Melissa were met by our local guide Dave at Piarco International Airport who welcomed them not only with a big smile but also with a Pearl Kite perched



on roadside wires. Dave suggested that it might be the only Pearl Kite of the whole tour, and how right he was! We received a very warm welcome from Joanne at Hacienda Jacana and soon settled into our cozy accommodation before gathering for a delicious catered supper. It was warm, humid and good to be back in the tropics aside from the local Common Pauragues who did their best to deprive some of us a good night's sleep!

Sat., Jan. 20 | Hacienda Jacana | Aripo Savannah | Manzanilla Beach | Nariva Swamp and fields | Night Birding at Waller Field

The group met for a lovely buffet breakfast served at Hacienda's dining area though at times it was difficult to focus on food with distractions all around! George spotted a perched Gray-headed Kite, a Crimson-crested Woodpecker performed right by the dining area, Peter managed to photograph a Green Kingfisher and the verbena beds outside the main office were full of hummingbirds including Copper-rumped and Ruby-Topaz Hummingbirds, Blue-chinned Sapphire and a Tufted Coquette! Dave and Paul picked us up after breakfast and we drove down to the tropical lowlands and agricultural areas where some of the highlights included a Savanna Hawk, Barred and Black-crested Antshrikes, Yellow-hooded Blackbird and a nice group of beautifully camouflaged Southern Lapwings. On the 'wish list' for some in our party, White-headed Marsh-tyrant and Pied Water-tyrant were both welcome additions on the first morning of the tour. A nearby livestock field appeared to be loaded with Yellow-headed Caracaras and Dave got pretty excited about a newly arrived Piratic Flycatcher singing across the road – it was his first of the year!

After a great morning we drove east to a beach front park on the coast at Manzanilla. Dave and Paul prepared a fine picnic lunch while Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans patrolled overhead, and the local Carib Grackles pestered us for scraps. After lunch we drove south towards Nariva Swamp along Coconut Alley, the huge palms swaying dramatically in the coastal breeze. It was the weekend and the local vendors were out and about but by carefully picking our own spots along the coast road we found some very good birds in the mangroves; a close Common Black Hawk, exceptional views of American Pygmy Kingfisher, Bicolored Conebill, and a stunning close encounter with a singing Silvered Antbird!

We then drove a myriad of farm tracks around the Nariva Swamp and fields. It was very birdy indeed as Long-winged Harriers appeared over the pasture and Gray-lined Hawks could be found around the farm buildings. Gray Kingbirds, Gray-breasted Martins and White-winged Swallow perched on roadside wires and Dave got pretty animated when he heard a pair of Blue-and-yellow Macaws calling as they flew past the bus! We marveled at a Pied Water-tyrant building its delicate domed nest right by the road and had good views of skulkers such as Yellow-chinned Spinetail and Olive-gray Saltator. By



late afternoon the heat of the day was kicking in and Dave stopped the bus by one of the vendors to buy and share some fresh-sliced watermelon from the roadside – it was sweet, welcome and delicious! One last stop to use the restrooms at Manzanilla beach inadvertently turned up an immature Snail Kite perched by the road which was duly photographed and documented as it's a pretty scarce bird in Trinidad. From there we embarked on the long drive to Waller Field (an abandoned airfield) for some night birding. First though, dinner was on the agenda and Lester and his wife Gail set up a wonderfully catered meal in what seemed to be in the middle nowhere! The group toasted the day with rum punch and a remarkably rich and varied meal, and there was even chocolate cake for dessert! After dinner, Dave geared up with spotlight and headlamp at the ready as we drove along the taxiways of the airfield for a while looking for crepuscular species. Common Pauragues appeared to be plentiful but the handful of White-tailed Nightjars on site proved to be rather skittish. We headed back to Hacienda Jacana for a solid night's rest after a long but truly exceptional first full day in Trinidad.

Sun., Jan. 21 | Hacienda Jacana | San Rafael | Trincity Mall and Holiday Inn area | Orange Grove | Hanuman Temple | Temple by the Sea | Caroni Swamp National Park

Joanne and the team once again served a delicious buffet breakfast at Hacienda Jacana while distractions again came to the fore with Wattleed Jacana, Purple Gallinule, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Crested Oropendula and Green-backed Trogon all on view as we ate. After meeting with Dave and Paul we drove the relatively short distance to San Rafael to pick up the lunches, cold drinks and ice for the cooler. We had a few minutes to kill before the lunches arrived and used the time well finding Short-tailed Swifts, a couple of Rufous-browed Peppershrikes and a handsome Gray-headed Kite! Soon afterwards we headed towards the Trincity Mall and Millennium Lakes Golf Course finding a Red-breasted Meadowlark in the short grass by the Holiday Inn and a fantastic feeding flock of Fork-tailed Palm Swifts giving exceptional views. Although it was forbidden to actually enter the golf course, a shallow canal around the perimeter was clearly visible from the roadside and appeared to be full of shore birds; Black-necked Stilts, Southern Lapwings, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and no less than five Stilt Sandpipers, rare in Trinidad in mid-winter! A giant Ringed Kingfisher put in an appearance to bolster the ever-improving kingfisher list. We spent a little time dodging the downpours and birded the fields of Orange Grove Agricultural area which just happened to be very good for raptors producing fine views of Savanna and Short-tailed Hawks as well as a quick, fly-by Merlin. Common Waxbills and Tricolored Munias were present in the weedy meadows, both exotic in Trinidad but we did have fine views of a native Masked Yellowthroat.



At Carapichaima we visited a spectacular 85-foot statue of Lord Hanuman, a Hindu God associated with courage and strength. A variety of birds around the parking area included Green-rumped Parrotlets and Yellow Oriole, with White-winged Swallows and Blue-gray Tanagers inside the temple itself. On the drive out Paul did well to pause the bus on a narrow side street for us to observe a couple of Saffron Finches, a welcome stop since it was the only sighting of the species on the whole tour. The next stop was the Temple by The Sea, a beautiful Hindu Temple originally built on a man-made pier in the early 1950's that fell into disrepair but was rebuilt in 1995. Several old wooden boats and many prayer flags were along the shoreline near the temple, an event was clearly taking place so we didn't get too close. Laughing Gulls flew along shoreline as did a tight flock of about 20 Black Skimmers and a couple of shorebirds included a Ruddy Turnstone and a Spotted Sandpiper. Afterwards we drove the short distance to the entrance to Caroni National Park where we had a delicious buffet lunch by the dock at Caroni Swamp and then had the delight of meeting Rachel who brought along some beautiful hand-crafted products for purchase - Naturalist Journeys had given everyone a \$25 credit and we walked away with some fine souvenirs for the folks back home.

After lunch we walked the mangrove habitat alongside the creek. Dave worked his magic once again somehow rustling up two roosting Tropical Screech-Owls, and who would have believed that the local Masked Cardinals had developed a taste for McVities Digestive Biscuits?! Well, Dave seemed confident in his work and sure enough, with biscuits duly crumbled and spread under the mangroves, a fine male cardinal came into view and put on a show, and a what stunner it was! In the same moment, as if by magic, Martyn Kenefick suddenly appeared, a man who's something of a legend when it comes to Trinidad birds having co-authored three versions of the 'Birds of Trinidad & Tobago'.

We soon met up with Lester Nanan who'd set up the boat with a table (with red tablecloth) in the middle. We pushed back 20 minutes earlier than scheduled with Martyn Kenefick on board for the ride. Things got off to a great start too with a perched Green-throated Mango, an Eared Dove flying down the channel and a couple of calling Trinidad Euphonias. As we cruised down the river Little Blue Herons appeared and we had good views of a Straight-billed Woodcreeper foraging in the Red Mangroves. A Ruschenberger's Tree Boa was a nice spot by Dave coiled around a mangrove limb right above the water, and we had reasonable views of several Ochre-ored Flatbills, formerly called Yellow-breasted Flycatcher as Martyn talked us through the taxonomy that inspired the name change.

Lester knew the swamp inside out and brought us to a spot where he'd seen a Common Potoo resting. He also knew how to maneuver the boat to ensure that everyone on board had decent looks as it was roosting high up in the mangroves. The rest of the evening belonged to long-legged wading birds as we cruised around the marsh, through the mangroves and lagoons finding hundreds of herons and American Flamingos. Some were distant but Lester knew the perfect spot to moor the boat with the setting sun behind us. And then they came, as few tens at first but building up into hundreds and



hundreds of Scarlet Ibises, herons and flamingos flying toward their respective nightly roosts and lighting up the mangroves like Christmas decorations. It was a mesmerizing sight, a memory to treasure forever. Could things get any better?! Well they did as Lester served up a three-course dinner laced with Indian and Caribbean influence while simultaneously taking us through his family heritage and history that ultimately helped establish the Caroni Swamp as a fully protected wildlife sanctuary.

We cruised back to the docking area in semi-darkness with calling Tropical Screech-Owls in the background and a Gray-cowled Wood-Rail spotlighted by Lester. Then back to Hacienda Jacana for one final, rather short night.

Mon., Jan. 22 | Grand Riviere | El Suzanne Rain Forest Lodge | ASA Wright Nature Center

Despite the late finish the previous evening, almost everyone was primed and ready to meet at 3:30 a.m. and travel with Dave and Paul to Trinidad’s extreme northeast corner at Grand Riviere. Seeing the endemic Trinidad Piping-Guan was a goal for many on the trip and Dave felt that getting there early would increase our chances significantly. Mary, George and Peggy chose the option of an easier, later transfer and would meet us at the Asa Wright Center in mid-afternoon. The journey out to Grand Riviere was long, much of it taking place in darkness on increasingly winding roads but as the dawn broke it was something of relief to see the rugged shoreline and cliffs of the North-east coast indicating that we hadn’t too much farther to travel. We arrived at the base of the Monte Video road at about 6:40am and the Piping-Guan quest began in earnest. Dave explained the birds would not be low down at the base of the hill where we’d parked but instead pointed to a steep gradient that we were about to hike up! After some huffing and puffing we reached some chalets as the road plateaued and spent some time there hoping, waiting for the Piping-Guans to appear. In the meantime we did enjoy White-lined Tanager, several Green Honeycreepers, Copper-rumped Hummingbirds, Orange-winged Parrots and more, but alas there was no sign of the Piping-Guans.

Undeterred, Dave pressed on taking us over the crest of the hill and down the other side through a semi-forested area to the fringe of the Matura National Park and Rio Seco watershed area. Within minutes Dave began yelling “Guans, guans!!”. We needn’t have panicked as one by one, these large dark *cracids* flitted through the forest to alight and feed in the tall cecropias right over the track where we we’d gathered. It was something to savor as we watched this extremely uncommon species (sporting pale blue facial skin and a deep blue wattle) feeding at close range seemingly unconcerned by our presence. The photographers in our party had a field day while the rest of us just enjoyed the general ambience as Dave continued to call out some wonderful birds; Guianan Trogon, Black-tailed Tityra, White-winged Becard (stunning male),



Streaked and Piratic Flycatchers, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Chivi Vireo, Rufous-breasted Wren, Cocoa and Spectacled Thrushes, Violaceous Euphonia, Crested Oropendulas, Silver-beaked and Turquoise Tanagers, and much more!

But, the Trinidad Piping-Guans had stolen the show and Dave's dogged perseverance paid off. After a euphoric one mile walk back over the hill from whence we came, it just was a matter of breakfast on the bus followed by another longish drive. Effectively we retraced our route and headed towards El Suzanne Rainforest Lodge nestled in the Tamana Rainforest. We received a warm welcome from host Dianne who'd prepared a wonderful homemade lunch served on the terrace of her home. Thereafter we just relaxed for a bit and enjoyed the place itself. A Zone-tailed Hawk cruised by with the vultures overhead while a Squirrel Cuckoo posed for nice views and photos off the terrace, and Melissa found herself busy with hummingbirds and bugs in the beds of flowering plants finding Copper-rumped and Ruby-Topaz Hummingbirds, and yet another Tufted Coquette!

Soon afterwards we departed for the hallowed grounds of the ASA Wright Nature Center where we received warm greetings from the friendly staff. After settling into our rather swish rooms we all met on the veranda, including George, Peggy and Mary who'd arrived earlier. Moreover, we were just in time for 'afternoon tea' and enjoyed the rich variety of birds coming into the feeders while savoring some welcome refreshment. As well as being dazzled by Purple Honeycreepers we saw many hummingbirds including White-necked Jacobin, Green and Little Hermits, Ruby-Topaz Hummingbirds, Tufted Coquette, White-chested Emerald, Blue-chinned Sapphire, Brown Violetear and Long-billed Starthroat. Dinner was delicious, locally sourced and buffet-style followed by recalling the day's fun observations in the main house's reading room.

Tue., Jan. 23 | ASA Wright Nature Center | Blanchisseuse Road | Brasso Seco Village

The rain came down heavily overnight but by 6:30am had cleared and while we had no formal plan for pre-breakfast birding, quite a few members of the group were out and about. The parking lot was 'hopping' with good birds including a White-bearded Manakin, a calling Southern Beardless Tyrannulet and a soaring Common Black Hawk. A friendly staff member showed up and pointed out some of the favored food plants of the much sought-after Tufted Coquette - both males and females eventually being seen. It turned out that the staff member was a gentleman named Mukesh, one of the senior staff at the center and the gent who would guide us to the oilbird cave the following day!



After breakfast we were met by Dave and his new driver for the day as Paul was having the day off. Ahead lay a full day on the Blanchisseuse Road and the prospects for a long day in the Northern Range couldn't be any better. After so much overnight rain, the skies had cleared offering us the clearest, crispest day of the tour so far. Dave stopped in several spots as we gained in elevation, the clear conditions being good for soaring raptors with Common Black Hawk, Zone-tailed and Short-tailed Hawks all noted and it was good for flycatchers too, with Olive-sided being new to the trip and multiple sightings of Forest Elaenia. Dave pointed out a beautiful Star Flower and we heard, but couldn't see, a singing Bearded Bellbird. Each stop offered views of beautiful species such as Red-legged and Purple Honeycreepers, Blue Dacnis, Red-crowned Ant-Tanagers, Turquoise and Bay-headed Tanagers. A little further up the road at about 1500 ft. Dave managed to coax in a couple of calling Collared Trogons, an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, a male Golden-headed Manakin, and good views of more Bay-headed Tanagers. Linda found a Green-backed Trogon while Barb simultaneously spotted a White-necked Thrush hopping about on the road – it was all happening!

Eventually we crested the Blanchisseuse Road at Asher's Parlor and Organic Shop, a scenic viewpoint offering glorious views across the Northern Range. Asher was kind enough to rustle up a coffee or two while we enjoyed the scenery as well as couple of soaring White Hawks lifting up from the valley below. Asher's Parlor was also the spot where Martyn Kenefick found an Orange-breasted Falcon about a month prior to our visit and Dave pointed out the exact dead snag where it perched for most of the day – it was the first confirmed sighting of Orange-breasted Falcon in Trinidad in over thirty years! Though we didn't see the falcon, a pair of Lineated Woodpeckers at the nest was a nice find, as was a Black-throated Mango.

We descended downslope to the quaint, secluded village of Brasso Seco where our hosts at the "Chocolate Company" first served a delicious lunch of Callaloo and Taro pie with Callaloo leaves and Taro root on the side. An informative and enjoyable presentation followed on the making of chocolate from raw cocoa and, quite naturally, locally made chocolate, cocoa nibs and cocoa powder were offered for purchase afterwards. Our lunch stop didn't pass without good birds either as a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl called persistently throughout, a Yellow-headed Caracara flew over and we had some of our better views of Yellow-billed Cacique and Palm Tanagers.

We left Brasso Seco around 2:20 pm retracing our route along the Blanchisseuse Road. As remarkable as it seems, things got even better in the afternoon with close, eye-level views of a Black Hawk-Eagle being mobbed by a Merlin and a Broad-winged Hawk continued the day's raptor theme. Dave worked brilliantly to dig out some of the more skulking rainforest birds with outstanding views of Great Antshrike, Stripe-breasted Spinetail and Streaked Xenops! And, it was particularly rewarding to catch with up great views of Channel-billed Toucan, Tropical Parula, White-flanked Antwren and Turquoise Tanager.



Around 4pm Dave even managed to come up with 'afternoon tea' while we were still in the middle of the rainforest as Little Tinamous called in the background. Golden-olive and Red-rumped Woodpeckers, White-necked Thrush and White-bearded Manakin were among the last birds of the day and we arrived back at the ASA Wright Center with enough time for more refreshment, showers and another glorious buffet dinner. It had been quite the day!

Wed., Jan. 24 | ASA Wright Nature Center | Dunston Oilbird Cave

With both Dave and Paul having time off we had an entire day to relax and enjoy at the ASA Wright Nature Center. We were left in the trusty hands of Mukesh who first offered a brilliant presentation in the main house where we learned a great deal about the history of ASA Wright and the Center. Mukesh had been closely associated with the center for decades and from the outset it was clear just how passionate he was about the rainforest environment he called home. After the talk, Mukesh led us down the discovery trail where he had two major objectives in mind; to get good views of the calling Bearded Bellbirds, and to have good views of displaying male White-bearded Manakins...we had excellent experiences with both! The bizarre, mechanical song of the bellbirds rang through the forest all morning but they were not easy to see. Mukesh, using his experience and trained eye, managed to get a singing male in the scope for a while. Further treats came in the form of a roosting Common Potoo, our second of the tour, and a female Collared Trogon. And it was nice to see Green and Little Hermits feeding on Heliconia flowers in the forest rather than coming into feeders.

After a little more time at the veranda feeders with Spectacled Thrush, Turquoise, White-lined and Silver-beaked Tanagers all on view we enjoyed a delicious lunch in the dining area followed by a little downtime before meeting Mukesh again for the afternoon adventure....a trip down to the Dunstan Oilbird Cave! The hike took us downslope along a narrow trail and a series of small switchbacks amid the deafening chorus of Trinidad Stream Frogs and the mellow, resonant calls of Gray-chested Doves. Eventually the sound of fast running, raging water indicated we'd reached Dunstan Cave and under Mukesh's experience and instruction, we entered the cave two or three persons at a time. Mukesh felt that more than that would have pressured the birds and might have jeopardized our own safety. But sure enough, Mukesh used a special non-harmful light to spotlight the Oilbirds tucked away in a sizeable nook in the cave wall. There may have been six birds in all, and each member of our group who made the trek had wonderful views of this weirdly fascinating species.

It was very humid during the afternoon so everyone took their time hiking back up to the center but still made it back in time for afternoon tea on the veranda where George had earlier spotted a Red-rumped Agouti as well as a whole range of hummingbirds and tanagers. Another wonderful day closed with a rich and varied supper, and catching up on the day's fun observations in the reading room of the main house.



Thurs., Jan. 25 | ASA Wright Nature Center | Yerette Hummingbird House | Tobago Sewage Ponds | Adventure Farm | Cuffie Nature Retreat |

Dave and Paul picked us up after breakfast and we departed the Asa Wright Center around 7:30am. It had been a wonderful stay and more than lived up to its special reputation. A Red-rumped Agouti crossed the road as we departed prompting Dave to comment on the scarcity of mammals seen during the tour - just three species to date! Dave explained that hunting (for meat) is both legal and popular in Trinidad hence the skittish nature of the few mammals seen.

We drove to the Maracas Valley, a journey of about two hours somewhat slowed by the density of traffic on the major highways. Common Black Hawk, Striated Heron and Ringed Kingfisher were seen along the way before we reached the Yerette Hummingbird House atop a surprisingly steep gradient, so steep in fact that Paul couldn't maneuver the bus to drop us off there. Also known as 'Theo's place', Yerette house was buzzing hummingbirds feasting off the dozens of feeders scattered about the yard. Theo sat facing us on his patio and introduced himself as well as having us introduce ourselves to him, one by one. Theo went into great detail sharing his knowledge of hummingbird facts and describing the impact of the birds on his life, and on the lives of others. We had a brief fifteen minute time window to observe and photograph the hummers before a hearty lunch was served by Theo's wife Gloria.

After lunch, we headed to Piarco International Airport for our flight to Tobago. Dave had been a brilliant guide, always upbeat and smiling and very good with answers...we had many questions for him! Paul, the big man at the wheel, had been calm and stoic to the last and a genuinely nice guy. It was sad to see them both go and brought about a definitive end to the first phase of the tour.

The flight on Caribbean Air was relaxed and trouble free and we arrived in Tobago in early afternoon to be met our local guide for the next few days, Jason Radix. Somewhat surprisingly we were straight off the plane and into birding mode visiting the Bon Accord and Center Street Sewage Ponds where we saw a whole range of wetland species quite a few of which were new to the tour; White-cheeked Pintail, Common Gallinule, Sora, Peregrine Falcon, and a few North American breeders spending the winter in Tobago; Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teals. There was even a Little Egret at the Center Street ponds, a vagrant from Europe and the Old World equivalent of the Snowy Egret. Jason had further plans for us as we swung by the 'Adventure Farm', a small site with an odd name but packed with really good birds including lots more hummingbirds (Rufous-breasted Hermit and Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird included) and two new birds to the trip; Great Black Hawk and the all-important Trinidad Motmot, one of only two endemic species possible on this tour, the other being Trinidad Piping-Guan.



And with that we were dropped off at the Cuffie River Nature Retreat at dusk and greeted by site owner, Regina, before settling into our rooms and meeting in the dining room to enjoy another marvelous dinner and retiring for the night. For those not too battle-weary at the end of the day, White-tailed Nightjars put on quite the show on both sides of the building beautifully illuminated by the lodge's lighting system.

Fri., Jan. 26 Cuffie Nature Retreat | Tobago Forest Reserve--Gilpin Trace | Little Tobago Island

The day began with a resounding chorus of Rufous-vented Chachalacas emanating from all around the retreat. Flights of Orange-winged Parrots crossed the horizon and one or two in our party spied a couple of Trinidad Motmots before breakfast. Jason came to pick up us and we sped away to the rugged and incredibly picturesque northern flank of the island. Birds were few along the route and we took the opportunity for scenic and group photos and had a brief stop in the small resort town of Castera. It was actually quite late by the time we reached Gilpin Trace but a walk down the muddy, forested track there was very productive and included such beauties as Blue-backed Manakins performing their mating dance, a pair of Rufous-breasted Hermits building a nest, a brief Wedge-tailed Saberwing and a singing Yellow-legged Thrush. Afterwards we dropped down to Speyside for a nice seafood lunch close the beach at the Bird Watcher's Cafe and then moved across to the nearby to Blue Waters Inn where Jason handed us over to another guide for the afternoon, Zolani. A glass-bottomed boat took us on the short but choppy crossing to Little Tobago Island and once on the island Zolania (or Zee) described some of its history and biology before we slowly made our way up the trail to the spectacular lookout with a magnificent vista overlooking the bay and guano-stained seabird cliffs. Hundreds of Red-billed Tropicbirds cruised through the air in front of us, some of them nesting in shallow scrapes below the platform where we stood. Red-footed and Brown Boobies, and Brown Pelicans soared around too and put on the most incredible show. Magnificent Frigatebirds were active and in full piratic mode forcing the odd tropicbird to regurgitate its catch. Zee was in good form and succeeded in showing us an Audubon's Shearwater in a nesting burrow, a Trinidad Motmot, several Scaled Pigeons and a tiny Ocellated Gecko apparently endemic to Tobago and Little Tobago.

After cruising back to the Blue Waters Inn we had a lengthy drive back to the opposite side of Tobago and the Cuffie Nature Retreat arriving after dark but still in good time for a delicious supper (Mahi-mahi with Oriental Stir-fry on the menu!) and the daily bird list in the lounge.



Sat., Jan. 27 | Cuffie River Nature Retreat and surroundings

Once again, the chachalacas announced the start of the day and, as Jason was taking the day off, the whole day would be spent on foot birding the grounds without him though between 9am and 12 noon we were allocated a guide by the name of William who just happened to be an excellent birder full of local knowledge and field skills. William escorted us on guided walk of around 2.5 miles taking us out of the retreat and into the forest trails nearby. The abundance of Rufous-tailed Jacamars was something to behold, they appeared to be around every corner and gave great views, and good birds such as Northern White-fringed Antwren and Venezuelan Flycatcher were seen very well including spectacular comparisons of the latter with the similar Brown-crested Flycatcher. A couple of Great Black Hawks were seen, as well as a couple of soaring Broad-winged Hawks. After a 'retreat' lunch there was some downtime giving everyone the chance to either rest up, or catch up with the many hummingbirds coming to the flowers and feeders right on front of the lodge. Eventually most had views of the White-tailed Sabrewing, a key hummingbird species totally absent from Trinidad. The remainder of the afternoon was spent in low key mode as Linda, Melissa, Barb and Mary strolled around the grounds and watched Orange-winged Parrots, Trinidad Motmots and Red-crowned Woodpeckers among others. Melissa spotted a Gray Kingbird and even added a late addition to the trip list with a Blackpoll Warbler near the swimming pool, a scarce visitor to Tobago in winter. And so it was one more delicious supper at the Cuffie Retreat with a special birthday cake for Lou, followed by the bird list in the lounge and all the fun that goes with it!

Sun., Jan 28 | Cuffie River Nature Retreat | Tobago International Airport

After one last wholesome 'Cuffie' breakfast we said our goodbyes to Regina and her hard-working staff as well as George and Peggy who were leaving the island later in the day. The journey to the airport was smooth and our driver got us there in plenty of time for the flight, so much time in fact that Melissa had one more chance to photograph the Green-rumped Parrotlets hanging out near departures. Our early arrival might have seemed like a drag but we were on Tobago time so not only did we board our flight early, we took off early and even landed ahead of our original scheduled departure time! This had been an exceptional tour with an exceptional group of travelers, and a wonderful introduction to the magic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Photos: Group (James P. Smith - JPS), American Flamingo (Lou Taylor - LT), Trinidad Piping Guan (LT), Green-backed Trogon (LT), Chinese Hibiscus (LT), Red-billed Tropicbird (LT), Trinidad Motmot (LT), Red-bellied Macaw (JPS), White-necked Jacobin (LT), Savanna Hawk (LT), Scenic (Melissa McMasters - MM), Hindu Temple (LT), Saffron Finch (LT), Tropical Screech-Owl (MM), Scarlet Ibis (LT), Rainbow Scenic (MM), Violaceous Euphonia (LT), Silver-beaked Tanager (LT), Female White-lined Tanager (LT), Amazon sapphirewing (MM), Squirrel Cuckoo (LT), Scenic (Barbara Jording - BJ), White-shouldered Tanager (LT), Green-backed Trogon (LT), Channel-billed Toucan (LT), Tropical Parula (LT), Boat-billed Flycatcher (LT), Purple Honeycreeper (LT), White-bearded Manakin (MM), Oilbirds (LT), Group (Linda Sholl - LS), Carmine

skimmer (MM), Copper-rumped Hummingbird (LT), Tufted Coquette (JPS), White-cheeked Pintail - LT), Red-billed Tropicbird (MM), Magnificent Frigatebird (LT), Trinidad Motmot (LT), Ruby Topaz Hummingbird (MM), Tobago (JPS)