

Trinidad & Tobago | Trip Report

March 1 – 10, 2018 | Written by Bob Rodrigues



March 1 Arrivals | Asa Wright Nature Centre (AWNC)

Peter and Teresa arrived at Asa Wright Nature Centre (the Centre) around 10:00 AM and were met by hosts Bob and Marsha who had arrived the previous day. The four of us spent a couple hours on the verandah watching hummingbirds (at least six species) and other bird species attending the feeders until lunch. Local guides were almost always available on the verandah to help with bird identification. After lunch we walked a portion of the Discovery Trail, which extends downhill on a gradual slope from the facilities. The highlight of the afternoon walk had to be observations of a White-bearded Manakin lek partway down the trail. At least six males were attempting to impress females by performing their wing-snapping displays. At least one male seemed to respond to some of our camera clicks by approaching closely and flying past us. The rest of the group, which included Trisha and



Tony, Neil and Karen, Larry and Ingrid, Linda and Jerry, and Nancy, arrived in the late afternoon in time for some birding from the verandah and for rum punch.

March 2

Asa Wright Nature Centre | Aripo Agricultural Station | Waller Field

Everyone was up early before breakfast to watch birds from the verandah feeders. After breakfast we had an orientation meeting with Dave Ramlal who would be our main guide while in Trinidad. Dave gave us an overview of what to expect over the coming days and took the entire group for a walk down the Discovery Trail. While we saw both manakin species on the walk, along with tanagers, hummingbirds, oropendolas, trogons, thrushes, and parrots, the highlight of the orientation walk was a most excellent view of a calling male Bearded Bellbird that was perched in clear view at mid-level in the forest. We had

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been hearing the loud calls of the bellbirds all morning but during the walk were unable to find them high in the canopy until this individual gave us such a special view. Bellbirds were also visible daily

from the verandah through spotting scopes where they could be distinguished in the distance. Views from the verandah, however, did not compare to the exceptional look we had along Discovery Trail.

After lunch the group loaded into two vans driven by guide Dave and driver Boyie. We headed to the Aripo savanna and an old, abandoned airfield, previously known as Waller Field, where we had a picnic dinner along with our daily rum and punch. Highlights included Gray-lined, Common Black, Short-tailed, and Savanna Hawks; Yellow-headed Caracara; Common Pauraque; White-tailed Nightjar; Common Potoo; Sulphury Flycatcher; and the rare Moriche (or Epaulet) Oriole.

March 3 Asa Wright Nature Centre | Blanchisseuse Road | Brasso Seco

Everyone was up early again today to view birds from the verandah and the Centre environs. After breakfast we loaded into our two vans to explore the Northern Range along Blanchisseuse Road. The high point on Blanchisseuse Road is at about 2200 feet above sea level which is about 1000 feet higher than AWNC. One of the highlights near the summit was a flock of about six Swallow Tanagers. We also had nice looks at Cocoa Woodcreeper and Linnated Woodpecker, as well as other species.

Lunch was prepared for us at Brasso Seco Visitor Facility in Brasso Seco, which is an eco-oriented village with mature cocoa plantations in the vicinity. During our lunch stop we were given a detailed and delightful presentation on the chocolate-making process used by the



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folks in the village. The presentation included samples and each of us was given a choice of our favorite chocolate bar based on the samples we had tried.

After lunch we took a different route back to the Centre through the town of Morne la Croix. Other birding highlights during the day included Gray-headed and Plumbeous Kites; White and Gray-lined Hawks; Blue-headed Parrot; Squirrel Cuckoo; Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl; Collared and Green-backed Trogons; Rufous-tailed Jacamar; Channel-billed Toucan; Golden-olive and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers; Plain Brown Woodcreeper; White-flanked Antwren; White-bellied Antbird; Golden-fronted Greenlet; Tropical Parula; Golden-crowned Warbler; and adjacent nesting Crested Oropendolas and Yellow-rumped Caciques. We returned to the Centre in the late afternoon in time for rum punch and dinner.



March 4 Nariva Marsh | Asa Wright Nature Centre

Today was a long driving day. We left the Centre after breakfast, making stops at Aripo savanna, remnant patches of forest, an old rice field, and Nariva Marsh. Marsha's knee wasn't doing so well and she decided to remain at the Centre. It was a lengthy day with generally good weather, although we did get occasional light rain a few times, and it was a bit windy near the



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beach where we had a picnic lunch. When we got back to the Centre in the late afternoon, Marsha reported that there had been a steady downpour most of the day, and we could see the resulting flow of muddy water in the rivers. So, it was probably a good day for us to be away from the Centre.

Some of the new species we had during the day included Black-bellied Whistling Ducks; Brown Pelican; several heron and egret species; Pearl Kite; Zone-tailed Hawk; Crested Caracara; Peregrine Falcon; Wattled Jacana; Solitary Sandpiper; Green-rumped Parrotlet; Little Cuckoo; Ringed Kingfisher; Yellow-chinned Spinetail; Black-crested Antshrike; Yellow-bellied Elaenia; Pied Water Tyrant; White-headed Marsh Tyrant; Brown-crested Flycatcher; Gray-breasted Martin; Yellow-hooded Blackbird; and Red-breasted Meadowlark (sometimes called Blackbird). After our long day we returned to the Centre for rum and punch, and Dave gave us a choice for the next day's activities. The vote was (possibly) unanimous that we stick around the Centre rather than have another driving day to visit Aripo savanna once again.



March 5 Asa Wright Nature Centre

As usual, everyone was up early watching birds before breakfast. After breakfast we met with Dave to walk up the entrance driveway to the main road and then down the main road a short way. We returned in time for lunch and had the



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afternoon free. The highlight of the morning was the endemic Trinidad Motmot, which most in the group had not yet seen. Other new birds included Gray-fronted Dove on a nest; Short-tailed Nighthawk from the verandah in the evening; good looks a Gray-throated Leaf-tosser and Great Antshrike; Piratic Flycatcher; and Red-crowned Ant-Tanager. Teresa also encountered a land crab at close range on the walk back.

March 6

Oilbirds at Asa Wright Nature Centre | Caroni Marsh for Scarlet Ibis

After breakfast we went down the muddy trail with one of the local guides to view the Oilbird colony in Dunston Cave. The trail went down, then up, then down again and was quite muddy with all the rain we had been having. But it wasn't a long trail and we made it down and back without incident. The cave was dark and we stayed at the opening where we were able to see the outline of several Oilbirds. One of the Oilbirds flew up and landed on a ledge, which revealed the relatively large size of these birds. Oilbird wingspan is about three and a half feet.



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After lunch we boarded the vans and headed to Caroni Marsh to view the Scarlet Ibis evening flight to roosting areas. We made a few stops along the way where we were fortunate to see a rare Little Egret along with Black-crowned Night-Herons; Striated Heron; Greater Yellowlegs; Black-necked Stilts; Osprey; White-winged Swallows; and Yellow Warbler. Several splendid Red-capped Cardinals at the entrance to the Caroni boat-launch were observed by all in the group. We got onboard the boat and motored through several channels formed by mangrove trees before entering more open areas of the marsh. Species observed within the canal areas included Snowy Egret; many Little Blue Herons; Yellow-crowned Night-Heron; Common Potoo; Pygmy Kingfisher; and Straight-billed Woodcreeper. We also passed under a large mangrove tree with a Cook's Tree Boa coiled above us.

We then moved to more open water to wait for the Ibis flight to roosting locations and to have our rum and punch. As the sun was setting, large flocks of 50 to 100 or more Scarlet Ibis began landing in the mangrove trees across the water from our stationary boat. We must have seen several thousand ibises moving through and landing in roosting areas over the next hour or so. To call the event spectacular would be an understatement. In addition, we saw hundreds of Little Blue and Tricolored Herons, and far more Spotted Sandpipers than I have ever seen in one place. As the sun set we made our way back to the boat dock and to the Centre in time for a slightly later-than-usual dinner.



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March 7 Flights to Tobago | Cuffie River Nature Retreat

This morning we packed our bags and headed to the airport after breakfast for our flight to Tobago. It was a short, 20 min or so flight and we were met by our first Tobago guide, Jason, who picked us up in a large bus. We made two birding stops, first at the local sewage ponds, and second at some ponds near the golf course, before heading out to Cuffie River Nature Retreat. Some of the species observed included Pied-billed Grebe; Neotropic Cormorant; Anhinga; several heron and egret species; White-cheeked Pintail; Purple and Common Gallinules; Wattled Jacana; side by side Greater and Lesser yellowlegs; Gray Kingbirds, which seemed common; Caribbean Martin; Barn and White-winged Swallows; and Shiny Cowbird. Just before reaching Cuffie Retreat, Jason pointed out a sleeping Common Potoo just off the side of the road at about eye level. We were able to come back later and get some good photos of this same bird. We arrived at Cuffie in the late afternoon and were greeted by numerous and noisy Rufous-vented Chachalacas. In addition, Red-crowned Woodpeckers were common in the bird feeding area, as were White-necked Jacobins. Other hummingbirds included Rufous-breasted Hermit; Black-throated Mango; and Copper-rumped Hummingbird. Two other species, Ruby Topaz Hummingbird and Trinidad Motmot seemed to be much more common here at Cuffie than at Asa Wright Nature Centre.



Dinner was a little more special than usual today. It was Nancy's birthday and the Cuffie staff prepared a special birthday cake for her. As it turned out, however, we had met a woman named Elizabeth at Asa Wright whose travel schedule was very similar to ours, and she was at Cuffie Retreat with us. Another coincidence was that Elizabeth's birthday was also March 7, so we had a joint birthday celebration for both Nancy and Elizabeth.

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March 8 Main Ridge Forest Preserve | Little Tobago Island

After breakfast our new guide, Zolani Frank, and his driver Shawn, picked us up for birding at Tobago's Main Ridge Forest Preserve. We stopped and birded along the road and later walked into the forest at Gilpin Trace. Some of the forest birds we saw included Great Black and Broad-winged Hawks; Pale-vented Pigeon; Eared and White-tipped Doves; White-tailed Saberwing; Rufous-tailed Jacamar; White-fringed Antwren; Blue-backed Manakin; and Red-legged Honeycreeper.

We then drove to Birder's Restaurant in the coastal village of Speyside for lunch. After lunch we took the glass-bottom boat to Little Tobago Island. The word dramatic could be used to describe the four transfers each person had to make when getting on and off the boat. There were, however, no mishaps and all went well.

After accessing Little Tobago Island, we walked a relatively short but steep trail to a seabird viewing area. As we walked up the trail Zolani pointed out several Audubon's Shearwater nesting burrows. We were actually able to see a shearwater, or at least parts of one, in one of the burrows. When we reached the viewing area, Red-billed Tropicbirds were obvious and numerous. A closer look also revealed many nesting Brown and Red-footed Boobies. The Red-footed Boobies were particularly interesting with all three morphs (white, brown, and white-tailed) present. Booby nests were relatively distant and best seen through the spotting scope. Most Tropicbird nests could not be seen from our vantage, however at least two Tropicbird nests were visible a few feet from the seabird viewing area where we were standing. We were also lucky to see a rare Scaly-naped Pigeon in the distance through the spotting scope. We had a fairly long bus ride back to Cuffie but made it back before dinner. While we were waiting for dinner, Karen spotted a White-tailed Nightjar in the driveway that most (if not all) got to see

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March 9 Cuffie River Nature Retreat

After breakfast we were met by guide Desmond who took us for a walk along the road and along some adjacent trails through old plantation and second growth property. Some bird species included Common Black and Broad-winged Hawks; Green-rumped Parrotlets; many Rufous-tailed Jacamars; White-fringed Antwren; Ochre-bellied Flycatcher; Red-eyed (Chivi) Vireo; and Red-legged Honeycreeper. Later in the day some saw a Peregrine Falcon and a Merlin.

March 10 Departures

After breakfast today most of us packed our bags and prepared for flights home. Several folks, however, remained for an extra day at Cuffie Retreat.

