

Trinidad & Tobago | Trip Report

January 27 – February 6, 2020 | Written by Kelly Vandenheuvel



With Guide Kelly Vandenheuvel, and participants Christopher, Karen, Deanna, Wilfried, Gordon, Judith, Gary, Debra, and Lynn.





Mon., Jan. 27 Arrivals at the Asa Wright Nature Centre

The first two guests, Christopher and Karen from Toronto arrived early, and joined Martyn and I for coffee on the veranda at daybreak followed by breakfast. Deanna and Wilfried from Portland arrived mid-morning. The six of us had lunch together and made introductions. Some of the birds we saw today were the Channel-billed Toucan from a scope on the verandah, plenty of Hummingbirds, a Green-backed Trogon, Black and Turkey Vultures, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Common Black Hawk, Gray-lined Hawk, and we heard the Little Tinamou many times.

We did our checklist while having rum punch. The final group of guests, Gordon and Judith from England, Gary from North Carolina, and Debra and Lynn from Tucson and Pacific Northwest arrived shortly after 6 PM. We all had dinner together and had a chance to get to know each other.

Tues., Jan. 28 Centre Grounds Discovery Trail | Night Birding

After breakfast, we all gathered in the sitting room at the center and went over basic orientation with Martyn. We were then introduced to our guide, Dave who talked with us more about the Asa Wright Nature Centre and its history. He then took us to the Centre Grounds Discovery Trail where we saw Scaled Pigeon, Ruddy Ground Dove, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Red-rumped Woodpecker, a Merlin, and of course the infamous Bearded Bellbird just to name a few. After taking an afternoon break, we headed out in Dave's van and driver Jerry's car to do some night birding. Before dusk we saw Moriche Oriole, Sulphur Flycatchers, a Zone-tailed Hawk, and heard a Little Tinamou. After dusk we saw Southern Lapwings, White-tailed Nightjars, and Common Pauraque.

Wed., Jan. 29 Blanchisseuse | Brasso Seco

This morning we drove with Dave and Jerry to Blanchisseuse Northern Range and Brasso Seco—we saw a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Band-rumped and Gray-rumped Swifts, Chestnut and Lineated Woodpeckers, a Merlin, Yellow-headed Caracara, and more. We had a delicious lunch served to us at the local community centre in Brasso Seco.



After lunch we were given a talk and demonstration on how cocoa is made from the original cocoa plant. It was a fascinating presentation that everyone enjoyed. We then had the opportunity to taste a variety of chocolates, and purchase some as well, which we all did! On the drive back to the centre we enjoyed more birding.

Thurs., Jan. 30 Nariva Swamp | Bush Bush Creek

Today was an early rise with a fun departure to the Nariva Swamp and Atlantic Coast. Dave our guide was unfortunately ill, and unable to accompany us, however his father Roodal stepped in along with our driver Jerry. We started out at the Cattle Research Station where we saw a Savannah Hawk, lapwings, Cattle Egrets, Snowy Egret, Brown Pelicans, and Black Vultures. We then continued on to the Atlantic Coast where we stopped for a picnic lunch and saw many Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans.

After lunch we went to Bush Bush Creek—where we saw a Striated Heron, Spotted Sandpiper, House Wren, Bicolored Conebill, and more. At Cascadoux Creek Road we saw a Gray-lined Hawk, several Blue and Gold Macaws, Yellow Orioles, Yellow-headed Caracara, Pied Water-Tyrant, White-headed Marsh Tyrant, Bananaquits, and so much more.

Fri., Jan. 31 Aripo Savannas | Birding from the Verandah

Another early breakfast and early departure to Aripo Savannas where we saw a Pearl Kite gathering nesting materials, a Crane Hawk, a few Zone-tailed Hawks, Green-Rumped Parrotlets, a pair of Brown-throated Parakeets, a Short-tailed Hawk, and Gray-rumped and Band-rumped Swifts.

We had a picnic lunch at the Arena Forest, and then back to the Asa Wright Nature Centre for an afternoon of relaxation and birding from the verandah. Of course, from the verandah there is always so much to see, this afternoon along with the ever-present variety of hummingbirds, bananaquits, and Spectacled Thrush, we saw the Crested Oropendola, Trinidad Motmot, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Forest Elaenia, and we even saw the White-bellied Antbird.



Sat., Feb. 1 Oil Birds | Caroni Marsh

With a strange mix up with guides, we had three extra people from the Audubon group, join our group for the Oil Bird cave outing. We took the trail to Dunston Cave where we saw five Oil Birds at the cave opening—super!

In the afternoon we drove to the Caroni Marsh with a few birding stops along the way. We stopped at a canal where we saw quite a few birds including Purple Gallinules, Black-necked Stilts, Southern Lapwings, Stilt Sandpipers, White-rumped Sandpipers, Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and Ringed and American Pygmy Kingfisher. We all loved this spot for birding!

We arrived at Caroni Marsh where we took our boat out to see the Scarlett Ibis. We saw a pair of Tropical Screech-Owls roosting in a tree and a few Ruschenbergerii Tree Boas along the way. Upon arrival into the Caroni Marsh, we saw American Greater Flamingos at a distance. After mooring our boat, we watched in awe as thousands of Scarlett Ibis flew in, to roost. Everyone was thrilled to see such a beautiful sight!

Sun., Feb. 2 Flight to Tobago | Trinidad Motmot!

We left Asa Wright after a leisurely breakfast and were driven to the airport to catch our flight to Tobago. Jason Radix picked us up at the Tobago Airport. We birded on the way to the Cuffie River Nature Retreat and Eco-Lodge, stopping along Bon Accord Road where we saw the Wilson's Snipe. We then we spent an hour at the sewage plant where we saw Frigate Bird, Osprey, Common Gallinule, Blue-Winged Teal, and a Green Heron on a nest. We stopped outside of the Tobago Plantations where there was a beautiful pond, and saw Magnificent Frigatebirds, Osprey, Little Blue Heron, and a Caymen.

When we arrived at the lodge, we were warmly greeted by the owner Regina Dumas, and she showed us to our rooms. We all had a chance to relax and do some birding on the property. We saw a Trinidad Motmot almost immediately which was a thrill for all. Dinner was served at 7:30 PM and we finished the evening with our bird check list.

Mon., Feb. 3 Birding in Tobago | Speyside

Today was a big day, full of birding. We were taken to the north east coast of Tobago, stopping en route at Gilpin Trace. From there, we continued on to the small town of Speyside where we took a glass bottom boat to Little Tobago Island, followed by lunch at Frank's Birdwatcher's Restaurant and Bar in Speyside. Along with



Magnificent Frigatebirds, we saw Brown Pelican, Anhingas, the Brown and Red-footed Booby, the Neotropic Cormorant, Laughing Gull, Osprey, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Southern Lapwing, Ruddy Turnstone, Audobon's Shearwater, and so much more—amazing!

Tues., Feb. 4 Cuffie River Nature Retreat

After breakfast, we birded areas around the Cuffie River Nature Retreat property with our local guide Desmond. We saw, and heard, the Rufous-vented Chachalaca everyday while at Cuffie. We also saw Crested Oropendola, Fuscous Flycatcher, Venezuelan Flycatcher, Blue-backed Manakin, White-tailed Saberwing, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Scrub Greenlet, White-tipped Dove, and more.

After lunch we had the afternoon off to relax and enjoy the eco-lodge and all its amenities. We had a celebratory farewell dinner followed by our final bird species check list as a group.

Wed., Feb. 5 Departures

Everyone left at their leisure today. We all had a wonderful time together; a great group of people!

Photo Credits:

All pax and scenic photos provided by Kelly Vandenheuvel; Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, Red-billed Tropicbird, Great Kiskadee, Carib Crackle, Bearded Bellbird, Tufted Coquette; all by Wilfried Mueller Crispin.