



Trinidad & Tobago 2022 Trip Report

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Trinidad and Tobago has a fantastic mix from the Caribbean and South America providing a good introduction to Neotropical families. On this tour in particular, we had very good weather as we did not get rained-out a single time and the birds were very cooperative allowing for great viewing and photographic opportunities. However, not only were the birds good, but all other aspects made for a very enjoyable tour, including food, lodging and especially the friendliness of the local people we ran into! **Day 1, Pax Guest House** In the late afternoon, as the normal breeze of the so called “kite season” steadily blew up the valley, we had our first crash course on T&T hummingbirds, and it was a busy one! The hummingbird feeders on the back porch of the century old Pax Guest House were bustling with birds. Copper-rumped Hummingbird, White-chested Emerald, Blue-chinned Sapphire, Long-billed Starthroat, Black-throated Mango, Green Hermit and the phenomenal—but fast—Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird were bickering over the feeders as Purple Honeycreepers and Bananaquits pushed everyone aside for a sip of sugar water. Meanwhile in the valley in front we got fantastic views of the pair of Zone-tailed Hawks that lives around the Mount Saint Benedict Monastery.



Blue-chinned Sapphire © E Carman

Day 2, Pax Guest House and Blanchisseuse Road First thing in the morning we birded in front of the hotel, with a background of church music sung to the rhythm of a steel drum band! Some of the common birds we saw were Ruddy Ground-Dove, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, Tropical Kingbird, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Palm Tanager, Blue-gray Tanager and the usual Zone-tailed Hawk behaving just like a Turkey Vulture. In a patch of vervaine (*Stachytarpheta frantzii*) we saw the usual hummingbirds plus several spectacular Tufted Coquettes!!! After breakfast we headed out with our local guide Mukesh Ramlal to the famous Blanchisseuse Road where the world-famous Asa Wright Nature Center is located. At our first stop along this forested road along the Arima Valley we listened to several Bearded Bellbirds singing, but were not able to spot a single one! However we did have fantastic views of a White Hawk and Band-rumped Swifts. Our next stop along this road which eventually crosses over the Northern Range was quite productive, with great views of Slaty-capped Flycatcher, Ochre-ored Flycatcher, American Redstart, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Green Honeycreeper and both White-bearded and Golden-headed Manakins. A little further along the road, right at the crest of the hill at Las Lapas Trace, we saw Olive-sided Flycatcher, Tropical Pewee, Golden-olive Woodpecker and Green-backed Trogon. After a picnic lunch, we continued birding along this rural road down to Morne LaCroix and had an incredible burst of activity to finish the day. Collared Trogon, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Orange-winged Parrots, Blue Dacnis, Tropical Parula, Violaceous Euphonia, White-lined Tanager, Gray-lined Hawk, Bat Falcon and a flock of seven Channel-billed Toucans that put on an incredible show!

Day 3, Woodlands, Waterloo and the Temple in the Sea Our pre-breakfast walk was quite productive as we found a fruiting fig tree with many birds coming in for breakfast: Palm Tanager, Blue-gray Tanager, Turquoise Tanager, the miniscule Green-rumped Parrotlets, both Trinidad and Violaceous Euphonias, Olive-gray Saltator, Yellow Oriole and Spectacled Thrush were all feasting on the rich fruits. After breakfast we drove towards the south-western part of the island to the town of Woodlands where we birded open fields and wetlands and added a good number of birds! Pale-breasted Spinetail, Yellow-hooded Blackbird, Masked Yellowthroat, Pale-vented Pigeon, Yellow-bellied Elaenia and a species which only occurs in this region in Trinidad, the Spotted Tody-Flycatcher! We also saw Wattled Jacana, Pied Water-Tyrant, White-headed Marsh Tyrant, Least Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper and fantastic views of a Long-winged Harrier that even perched for a

while and gave us fantastic scope views! After this we visited the Temple in the Sea to have lunch along the coast and saw Laughng Gull, Lesser black-backed Gull, a literal boat-load of Ruddy Turnstones, Brown Pelicans and Magnificent Frigatebirds. One more stop along the mangroves of the Bay Road fish market yielded Bicolored Conebill, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Willet, Whimbrel, Greater Yellowlegs and a flock of fifteen American Flamingoes! On the way back to our hotel we made a brief stop at the Hanuman Temple where the largest statue outside of India of Hanuman, the Monkey God, stands. Later that afternoon we returned to the hotel to get some rest and study the hummingbirds at the feeders and get ready for the next day. **Day 4, Trin City, Aripo Savannas and Arena Forest** Our usual pre-breakfast walk near the Pax Guest House was again very productive. We walked to the fruiting fig tree which was bustling with activity with several of the usual species such as Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers, Great Kiskadee, Boat-billed Flycatcher and Spectacled Thrush, but we also saw several new birds such as Cocoa Thrush and Olive-gray Saltator. We also had jaw-dropping views of a pair of Orange-winged Parrots that perched very close, glowing in the early morning sun, but to make the sighting even more special there was also a pair of the miniscule Green-rumped Parrotlets perched very close showing the massive size difference between these two species. Back at the guest house grounds we had even better views of the Tufted Coquettes and the usual barrage of hummingbirds at the feeders. After breakfast we drove back down the hill and stopped at the Trin City golf course and had several waders including both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Black-necked Stilt, Tricolored Heron and many Southern Lapwings. We also had fantastic views of Purple Gallinule, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Pied Water-Tyrant, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, White-winged Swallow and very large flock of Saffron Finches. Our next stop in the Arena Forest Reserve was equally productive with both Golden-headed and White-bearded Manakins, Lineated Woodpecker, Bay-headed Tanager, Channel-billed Toucan and Black-crested Antshrike. On our return to the guest house, we saw a Pearl Kite perched along the highway and had fantastic scope views.



Pearl Kite © E Carman

After a little rest we gathered on the deck to review our hummingbirds at the feeders and some of the names were starting to sink in with repetition! After dinner we went for a short owl prowl and the night was perfectly clear so we scoped out several of the planets including Jupiter with three of

its moons and Saturn and its rings! We also got fantastic scope views of a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl before going to bed. **Day 5, Blanchisseuse Road and Caroni Swamp** Once again our pre-breakfast walk was very productive as the resident Zone-tailed Hawks circled over head and allowed for great comparisons with the Turkey Vultures. The daily visit to the fig tree was a blast as usual, this time providing fantastic views of a Turquoise Tanager in full sun and a Crested Oropendola with its sky-blue eyes. We also found a Lineated Woodpecker, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet and an elusive Bran-colored Flycatcher before heading for our morning dose of caffeine. After breakfast we visited the first section of the Blanchisseuse Road and again heard the Bearded Bellbirds and got fantastic views of Bay-headed Tanager, Blue-chinned Sapphire, Collared Trogon and a White Hawk circling low against the blue sky. We returned to the Pax Guest House for lunch before heading out on our afternoon expedition to the Caroni Swamp. Mid afternoon we drove the short distance to the Caroni Bird Sanctuary where we took a boat with captain Lester Nanan and slowly cruised through the mangrove forest. Being in a totally different habitat, it was not long before we began seeing new species such as Green-throated Mango, a family of Tropical Screech-Owls, Masked Cardinal, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Green Kingfisher, Little Blue Heron and a few Scarlet Ibis which contrasted amazingly against the dark green of the mangroves. We also spotted two reptiles, the Spectacled Cayman and several Cook's Tree-Boas hanging just a couple meters from the side of our boat, as well as the tiny Proboscis Bats blending in with the tree bark. We eventually came out to a more open brackish lagoon with a mangrove island in the center and we anchored about 150 meters from it and waited for one of Trinidad and Tobago's most renowned bird spectacles. As the sun moved closer to the horizon to our backs, flocks of Scarlet Ibis began coming in from all directions, landing on the island to roost for the night. The small island, which had started out green had turned mostly red from the thousands of Ibis that had arrived. Apart from the ibis there were also many Great and Snowy Egrets, Little blue and Tricolored Herons and a large flock of American Flamingoes in the water surrounding the island! As darkness set in we made our way back out of the mangroves and back to Pax Guest House for dinner.



Mangrove boat tour, Caroni Swamp © E Carman

Day 6, Pax Guest House and Grande Riviere Our routine morning walk was as birdy as usual, getting more views of Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet and the

outrageously ornamented Tufted Coquette. After breakfast we packed our bags and got on our bus to our next destination on the northern coast of Trinidad, in the small village of Grande Riviere. Although we had some rain along the drive as we bordered the Atlantic Ocean, it had stopped by the time we reached our hotel, which sits on the beach on the Caribbean Sea. Being on the northern coast, this region is more humid and hence the flora and fauna is different than the areas we had previously visited. After we checked-in to the hotel, we went for a late afternoon walk and it was well rewarded! We walked through the small village of Grande Riviere and up Monte Video Road which runs through a mixture of shade-grown cocoa and forest and there were birds everywhere! Spectacled and Cocoa Thrush, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Lineated Woodpecker, Crested Oropendola, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Orange-winged Parrot, Channel-billed Toucan, Guianan Trogon, White-flanked Antwren and, our main reason for visiting this region, Trinidad Piping-Guans!!! We had a total of eight guans and had fantastic scope views from all different angles! Pressure was off, so to speak, as our main target bird was in the bag, so we wandered back to the hotel for a delicious meal and a much deserved rest. **Day 7, Grande Riviere** At six a.m. we were picked up by a small van that drove us up to the spot where we had the piping guans the previous afternoon so we could do some more birding before it got hot. It was not long before we spotted the Trinidad Piping Guans again, so we indulged in some more scope views before they moved off deeper into the forest. Continuing on down the road we had both White-bellied and Silvered Antbirds, Barred Antshrike, Pale-breasted Spinetail, White-bearded and Golden-headed Manakins, Silver-beaked Tanager and more views of Channel-billed Toucans. We drove back to the hotel for a late breakfast and a bit more relaxed morning, some of the group enjoyed the beach and others walked through the town enjoying the local vibes. Mid-afternoon we gathered for another walk and started off with an astounding number of birds just in the hotel parking lot! In a tree above our cabins was a flock of Crested Oropendolas starting to build their colony with large, pendant nests, intricately woven to the branches. Yellow-rumped Caciques, another oriole relative, were noisily flying back-and-forth over our heads as Turquoise, Blue-gray, Palm and White-lined Tanagers foraged in a cecropia tree. One of the new species we found was a pair of Black-tailed Tityras, posing for fantastic views as they inspected a cavity in a dead tree behind the restaurant. We walked down the road towards the bridge over the actual river called Grand Riviere and had more views of Channel-billed Toucans, Orange-winged Parrots, Shiny Cowbirds, Green Kingfisher, Ruddy Ground-Doves and a very close view of a Little Hermit feeding from flowers in a garden along the roadside. As evening set in, we returned to the hotel to chill out and have a beer before dinner. **Day 8, Grande Riviere and Bon Accord Sewage Ponds** It rained heavily through the night and at sunrise it had reduced to a light drizzle, but birding was still great! Spotted Sandpipers, Crested Oropendolas, White-winged Swallows, Southern Rough-winged Swallows and Gray-breasted Martins were providing entertainment as usual, but as a bonus we had fantastic scope views of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and a family of three Crimson-crested Woodpeckers noisily foraging on the same tree where we had seen the tityras on the previous day.



Crimson-crested Woodpecker © E Carman



Crimson-crested Woodpecker © E Carman

After breakfast we rode back to the airport in the outskirts of Port of Spain for our short flight to the island of Tobago. First off after landing in Tobago we visited the Bon Accord sewage treatment plant and saw Anhinga, Common Gallinule, Least Grebe, Wattled Jacana, Blue-winged Teal, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck and White-cheeked Pintail before driving to our hotel, which was located near the town of Speyside. **Day 9, Blue Waters Inn and Little Tobago** The hotel grounds were a bit

quiet because of the steady breeze coming in off of the Atlantic, however we did get to watch hundreds of Magnificent Frigatebirds streaming overhead, coming from their breeding site on Saint Giles Island and headed to their feeding waters. After breakfast we took a short boat ride to the small island of Little Tobago. When we got there we walked up the trail leading through the forest towards a lookout and spotted Brown-crested Flycatcher, White-tipped Dove and several Trinidad Motmots at close range. These birds were fun, but our true purpose to visit Little Tobago was waiting for us at the lookout where both Brown and Red-footed Boobies were nesting as well as dozens of Red-billed Tropicbirds! Although the tropicbird nests were not visible from the overlook, the adults would sometimes fly some meters in front of us, giving us mind-blowing views from all angles, with their long-white tails cruising in elegant fashion. We also had the opportunity to watch the Magnificent Frigatebirds dive-bombing and harassing the tropicbirds to steal their food. After taking in such impressive spectacle in an equally impressive setting, we returned to the boat and had a short tour of the coral reefs looking through the glass bottom! Back at the hotel we had lunch and the afternoon off for relaxing and beach/pool time.



Sunrise over Little Tobago © Ernesto Carman

Day 10, Blue Waters Inn and Main Ridge Forest Reserve Birds were much more active this morning as we walked along the entrance road to the lodge and saw Red-crowned Woodpecker, Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Barred Antshrike, Scrub Greenlet, Black-faced Grassquit and the exceptionally patterned White-fringed Antwren. After breakfast we took a short ride up into the Main Ridge Forest Reserve which hosts one of the oldest protected areas in the world with an incredible rainforest. At several stops along the road we had repeated, killer views of Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Trinidad Motmot, as well as Collared Trogon, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Rufous-vented Chachalaca and fantastic scope views of the Blue-backed Manakin!



Rufous-tailed Jacamar © Ernesto Carman

We also walked down a trail known as Gilpin Trace and had fly-by views of White-tailed Sabrewing and White-necked Thrush, but overall we enjoyed a great walk in a fabulous and unique forest. We returned to the hotel for lunch and a short evening walk where we enjoyed watching a flock of about one hundred Red-billed Tropicbirds interacting over the water in front of the hotel. **Day 11, Return to Trinidad and end of tour** Just before sunrise it was time to make our way back to Trinidad and bid farewell for this fantastic tour.



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