Eagle-Eye Tours



Trinidad & Tobago birding tour 2017

Link: Trinidad & Tobago birding tour 2017

By Jared Clarke



Imagine stepping out into the warm morning sunshine, pouring yourself a cup of crisp, locally grown coffee, and sitting back to take in the splendour of a lush rainforest cascading down through a mountain valley below. Swarms of brightly coloured hummingbirds, honeycreepers and bananaquits flit around just metres away, while raucous parrots and maybe even a toucan say “good morning” from nearby treetops. The incredible “gong” of an enigmatic bellbird rings up through the forest.

This was the scene that greeted 11 birders (led by Jared Clarke & Ernesto Carman) as we began our Trinidad & Tobago birding tour this past December. This beautiful destination provides a wonderful introduction to the birds of South America, perhaps the most diverse and exciting birdlife on earth. The tour is also a relatively relaxing one, since we stay at just two locations the entire time – including the famous Asa Wright Nature Centre, with the amazing verandah described above. Our excursions consist of world class birding opportunities, like the unforgettable Scarlet Ibis roost in the Caroni Swamp, the Oilbirds at Dunstan Cave, hundreds of nesting Red-billed Tropicbirds on Little Tobago Island and the amazing Main Ridge Forest Reserve (the world’s oldest protected area).

The list of highlights for 2017 was a long one and included amazing views and photo opportunities of 14 species of hummingbird – including the highly prized Tufted Coquette and Ruby-topaz Hummingbird. We also enjoyed great views of Channel-billed Toucan, encounters with the endemic Trinidad Motmot and Trinidad Piping Guan, lots of other wildlife and of course those Scarlet Ibis, Oilbirds and Red-billed Tropicbirds.

A small sample of photo highlights are included below (photos by Jared Clarke). As always, the tour was a resounding success and enjoyed by all. Be sure to check out details for upcoming tours to Trinidad & Tobago.



Tufted Coquette © Jared Clarke

Asa Wright Nature Centre offers some of the best opportunities to see the often-elusive Tufted Coquette – a tiny yet beautiful hummingbird of northeastern South America. A combination of carefully planted gardens and well-placed feeders allows guests to get up-close and personal with a great variety of hummingbirds and other colourful species.



Bearded Bellbird © Jared Clarke

The large estate, lush forests and many walking trails of Asa Wright Nature Centre also allow guests to explore and find plenty of other exciting birds – from tiny manakins to soaring raptors. One of our many highlights was this unusually cooperative Bearded Bellbird – considered the loudest bird on earth. Its deafening call can be heard for miles, and was absolutely astounding at this range!



Oilbird © Jared Clarke

The Asa Wright property is also home to the one of the world's most accessible Oilbird colonies. These unique birds are the world's only nocturnal fruit-eating bird – roosting in dark caves by day, and using echo-location to navigate and find food only under cover of darkness. Our visit to see

these birds is always a highlight, and certainly one of the most surreal experiences you'll ever have in nature.



Trinidad Stream Frog © Jared Clarke

While this trip is definitely planned around birds & birding, we also take time to find, learn about and enjoy lots of other wildlife and aspects of nature. This tiny Trinidad Stream Frog lives only here on the island – one of two endemic frog species we encountered while birding at Asa Wright Nature Centre.



Guianan Trogon © Jared Clarke

Our group enjoyed numerous day trips and excursions to various habitats on Trinidad. One of the most exciting trips took us into the higher elevation rain forests of the Northern Range mountains, where we encountered a great variety of birds and amazing scenery. This Guianan Trogon came out to greet us on the drive back, sitting right over the road for us all to enjoy.



Ferruginous Pygmy Owl © Jared Clarke

Owls are a highlight of any birding trip, and this Ferruginous Pygmy Owl was no exception. We found it sitting calmly in the middle of a frenzy of songbirds, all of which were frantically trying to drive it away.



Savannah Hawk © Jared Clarke

Other excursions took us back down the mountains into lowland habitats, including mangroves, savannah and agricultural areas. The variety of birds and other wildlife here was very different, yet equally rich and amazing. This Savannah Hawk was drying its wings after a heavy rain shower (we actually encountered very little rain during our trip – another reason the tour is scheduled for this wonderful time of year).



Rufous-tailed Jacamar © Jared Clarke

One of our group's favourite birds to see and watch was the beautiful Rufous-tailed Jacamar – of which we found several. This one was very obliging as a small group of us strolled through a wooded garden, even flying towards us and landing quite close.



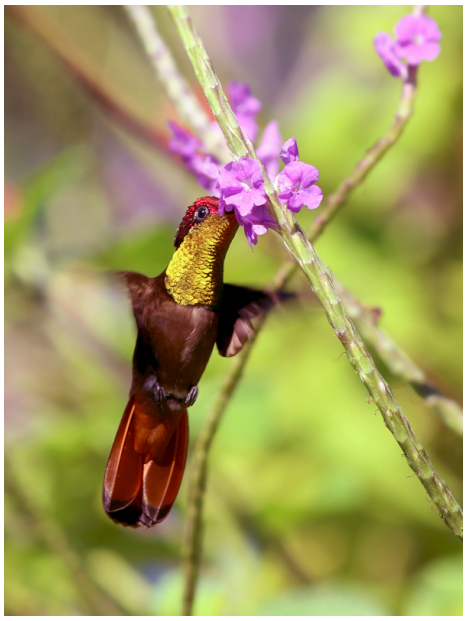
Caroni Swamp/Scarlet Ibis

A huge highlight of our time on Trinidad was a visit to Caroni Swamp. A relaxed, bird-filled cruise through the mangroves was capped off with the spectacle of thousands of brilliant Scarlet Ibis (along with several species of herons) coming in to roost. Guests always count this among the most amazing experiences of their birding lives, and with very good reason!



Trinidad Motmot © Jared Clarke

The Trinidad Motmot is one of two endemic birds in this island nation, and we enjoyed amazing views of several throughout the tour. This one was especially cooperative during our first day on Tobago, where they tend to be less shy.



Ruby Topaz © Jared Clarke

The Ruby-topaz is considered among the most beautiful of all the hummingbirds. We were fortunate

to see a dozen of these brilliant birds at three locations, including some incredible views like this one on Trinidad.



Blue-backed Manakin © Jared Clarke

While on Tobago, we spent a morning exploring the beautiful Main Ridge Forest Reserve. This large reserve was first proclaimed in 1776, making it the oldest protected area in the world – and the numerous hiking trails makes this tract of pristine, native rain forest very accessible. One of our targets here was the Blue-backed Manakin (absent on Trinidad), like this male that showed surprisingly well in a fruiting fig tree.



Little Tobago & Red-billed Tropicbird © Jared Clarke

No visit to Trinidad & Tobago is complete without a visit to the spectacular seabird colony on Little Tobago. This small island, just off the northeast coast of Tobago, is home to hundreds of Red-billed Tropicbird, Brown Boobies and Red-footed Boobies – among other great birds. Our clifftop vista found us overlooking the colony, dozens of soaring birds and the sparkling blue water below. What a fantastic way to end a wonderful adventure!



Eagle-Eye Group 2017