

Trinidad & Tobago Trip Report 2023 (Dec 6 - 16)

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Day 1 We began our tour of Trinidad and Tobago based at Pax Guest House which is set in a spectacular location on the slopes of the Northern Range overlooking the lowlands to the south where we would be birding for the next few days. After a quick briefing and delicious dinner we went to bed to be ready to be out bright and early.



Birding at Pax Guest House © Ernesto Carman

Day 2 We began our day birding around the guest house and immediately began seeing some of the species we would become well acquainted with during the tour, Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers, Barred Antshrike, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Bananaquit, Ruddy Ground-dove and an amazing selection of hummingbirds including Copper-rumped Hummingbird, White-chested Emerald, Blue-chinned Sapphire, Black-throated Mango and superb views of one of the showiest hummers of the island, a male Tufted Coquette!



Tufted Coquette © Ernesto Carman

After breakfast we were met by our local guide, Barry Ramdass, and we drove down to the lowlands and birded the Aripo savannas and surrounding areas, mostly a mix of scrub and agricultural fields. Our first stop included several shorebirds and wetland species in Trincity including Least, Stilt and Spotted Sandpipers, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Southern Lapwing, Mangrove Swallow, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Pied Water-Tyrant, Wattled Jacana and Yellow-chinned Spinetail. We also had great views of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Lineated Woodpecker, Savanna Hawk, Tricolored Munia and Common Waxbills.



Black-throated Mango © Ernesto Carman



Guianan Trogon © Ernesto Carman

Day 3 Today we headed out to Blanchesseuse Road, a narrow, windy road that crosses the Northern Range and crosses a diversity of habitats as it gains elevation. Our first stop was at Barry's house where we watched for some new hummingbirds and added Long-billed Starthroat, Little Hermit and Rufous-breasted Hermit. Afterwards we began birding along the roadside and could hear several Bearded Bellbirds, and saw Golden-headed Manakin, White-bearded Manakin, Violaceous Euphonia, Green Honeycreeper, Blue Dacnis, Bay-headed Tanager, Silver-beaked Tanager and a soaring White Hawk before the rain began pouring down. We took advantage of the rainy time to eat our packed lunch before continuing on to the small village of Morne Lacroix. As we reached the village the rain stopped and we began seeing new birds left and right! Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Blue-headed Parrot, Channel-billed Toucan, Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Streaked Xenops, Yellow-rumped Cacique and Crested Oropendolas.



Little Hermit © Ernesto Carman



Channel-billed Toucan © Ernesto Carman



Rufous-tailed Jacamar © Ernesto Carman



Silver-beaked Tanager © Ernesto Carman



Wattled Jacana © Ernesto Carman

Day 4 After our morning dose of birds and caffeine we went down to Waterloo and birded the shore where we spotted Brown Pelicans, Magnificent Frigatebird, Laughing Gull and Ruddy Turnstones, including one banded individual which, after reporting it to the North American Bird Banding Lab, we learned it had been banded in Delaware Bay in 2021! We also spotted Bicolored Conebill, Ringed Kingfisher, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Great Egret and Yellow-headed Caracaras. We had lunch at the Pointe a Pierre- Wildfowl Trust, a site dedicated to bird rehabilitation and captive breeding of endangered species and we had spectacular views of Purple Gallinule, Common Gallinule, Yellow-hooded Blackbird, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Giant and Shiny Cowbirds, Short-tailed Hawk, Cooi Heron, Masked Cardinal and a group of Proboscis Bats hanging on the side of a trunk along the lakeside.



Cooi Heron © Ernesto Carman

Mid-afternoon we arrived at Caroni Swamp to do the mangrove swamp tour and had a marvelous tour with Lester Nanaan whose grandfather was the person who pushed to protect the Scarlet Ibis and Caroni Swamp. We saw a great diversity of egrets and herons, but also had great views of roosting Tropical Screech-Owls and even a Common Potoo, Green Kingfisher and the tiny American Pygmy-Kingfisher. The mangroves then opened-up into a wide lagoon with a small island in the middle and we anchored our boat a certain distance away and waited. First off we saw several dozen American Flamingos standing around the base of the island and then the main spectacle began as flocks of Scarlet Ibis began coming in to the island to roost for the night. The island, which started out emerald green had turned completely scarlet red after about forty-five minutes.



Day 5 Before breakfast we looked for the Tufted Coquette again and also had great views of Turquoise Tanager, Orange-winged Parrot, Bran-colored Flycatcher and a Black-throated Mango sitting in her nest. We then set out to the Atlantic coast where we saw a nice selection of raptors including Zone-tailed, Roadside, Short-tailed and Savana Hawk and Crested and Yellow-headed Caracara. We also saw Green-backed Trogon, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Long-winged Harrier and White-tailed Goldenthrout. As an unexpected bonus on our drive back we spotted a pair of Red-bellied Macaws perched atop some royal palms!



Orange-winged Parrot © Ernesto Carman

Day 6 After our usual set of morning birds and fantastic views of a male Ruby Topaz Hummingbird we boarded our bus and began making our way to the north-eastern tip of Trinidad, to the village of Grand Riviere where we would spend the following two nights. On our way we did stop to buy our lunch in Sangre Grande where we had a selection of local cuisine including several types of roti. After reaching our hotel we went for a walk nearby and had several raptors including Zone-tailed and Broad-winged Hawks, Merlin, Southern Lapwing and the skulky Silvered Antbird.



Birding at Grand Riviere © Ernesto Carman

Day 7 Early in the morning we were picked up by our small bus which took us the short drive into the forest where we would be looking for our main target, the endemic and endangered Trinidad Piping Guan. It had only been a few minutes when we began hearing the characteristic mechanical rattling sound made by the guans in flight. After a little searching we spotted them and had fantastic views of various individuals calling and displaying in the trees around us! After such a successful outing we returned to the hotel for breakfast and a bit more birding during the rest of the morning where we found Golden-headed Manakin, White-flanked Antwren, White-shouldered Tanager, and Short-tailed Swifts. After lunch we had a nice review of some species we had seen previously including Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Turquoise Tanager and Yellow Oriole.



Day 8 Our morning birding before leaving for the airport proved to be quite productive with fantastic views of Olive-gray Saltator, White-winged Swallow, Gray-breasted Martin, Giant and Shiny Cowbirds and point-blank shots of a Crimson-crested Woodpecker. After breakfast we made our way to the airport in Port-of-Spain for our 20 minute flight to Tobago. There we were greeted by our driver Oswald Kerr who took us to our last birding stop for the day, the Bon Accord Sewage Ponds. Here we saw Anhinga, Little-blue Heron, Common and Purple Gallinule, Glossy Ibis, Blue-winged Teal and a White-cheeked Pintail.



Crimson-crested Woodpecker © Ernesto Carman

Day 9 Today we visited the Main Ridge Forest Preserve, a gorgeous protected area covering the hills of Tobago. Our first stop along the road produced Barred Antshrike, Orange-winged Parrot, Scrub Greenlet and great views of A Trinidad Motmot sitting in gnat light for viewing and photos. A bit closer to the top of the ridge we saw more motmots and Rufous-tailed Jacamars and had amazing views of White-tailed Sabrewing, Fuscous Flycatcher, Yellow-legged Thrush and Rufous-breasted Wren before the rain began coming down hard. After lunch we ventured out for another walk and saw Pale-vented Pigeon, Northern White-fringed Antwren, Cocoa Woodcreeper, and Black-faced Grassquit.



Trinidad Motmot © Ernesto Carman

Day 10 Our last day of birding gave us a good review of species previously seen but we also had Rufous-vented Chachalacas, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Gray Kingbird, Green Heron, Crested Oropendola and Red-crowned Woodpecker, but the highlight of the day was the afternoon tour to the island of Little Tobago to see the Red-billed Tropicbirds. After the short boat ride we were led by our guide Troy along the short trail that reaches a view point that looks out over the Atlantic Ocean, but what makes the spot even more attractive is the presence of hundreds of Red-billed Tropicbirds flying all around us! The views were absolutely breathtaking as they engaged in aerial persecutions and vocalized, sometimes flying mere meters away from us. Present as well were Brown Boobies, Red-footed Boobies and Magnificent Frigatebirds which would chase the tropicbirds and if they caught them they would violently shake them to force them to regurgitate their food to be able to steal it. With such a spectacle in our minds we returned to the lodge for our final dinner and said our farewells.



Red-billed Tropicbirds on Little Tobago © Ernesto Carman



Little Tobago © Ernesto Carman