



Trinidad & Tobago Trip Report (Dec 2024)

[Link: Trinidad & Tobago Trip Report \(Dec 2024\)](#)

Day 1 - Our group arrived and met at Asa Wright Nature Centre, nestled in the Northern Range mountains overlooking the lush Arima Valley. **Day 2** - We began our day at 6am on the main deck of ASA Wright where we began sorting through the multitude of species visiting the feeders with Copper-rumped Hummingbird, White-chested Emerald, **Blue-chinned Sapphire**, Brown Violetear, **Long-billed Starthroat**, Green and Little Hermits and **Tufted Coquette** all busily feeding from the feeders and flowers in front of us. The most abundant birds at the feeders though were the **Purple Honeycreepers** and Bananaquits whose persistent vocalizations are heard from around the building.



Blue-chinned Sapphire © Jared Clarke



Long-billed Starthroat © Jared Clarke



Tufted Coquette © Jared Clarke



Purple Honeycreeper © Jared Clarke

The deck overlooks the Arima Valley with fantastic views of the forest canopy where we spotted Common Black Hawk, Orange-winged Parrot and a Bearded Bellbird giving its loud call. After breakfast we met our local guide Barry Ramdass and driver Ivan and made our way up the Blanchesseuse Road. At our first stop we had Golden-headed Manakin and a cooperative Ferruginous Pygmy-owl. Our next stop was at Las Lapas Trace at the top of the Northern Range and

overlooking the Caribbean. Here we enjoyed views of a couple White Hawks soaring at eye-level and along the trail we spotted a Collared Trogon feeding a fledgling. We were digging out forest birds such as Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Golden-crowned Warbler, Yellow-legged Thrush and Bay-headed Tanager when we were abruptly interrupted by the call of an Ornate Hawk-Eagle - which we saw soaring at fairly close range once we found a clearing in the trees. After devouring our packed lunch and seeing Trinidad Stream-Frogs and a Blue Morpho butterfly, we birded around the village of Morne La Croix and saw **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Giant Cowbird and **Guianan Trogon** before working our way back to the lodge.



Rufous-tailed Jacamar © Jared Clarke



Guianan Trogon, female © Ernesto Carman

Day 3 - After our usual morning dose of caffeine, feeder birds and breakfast we headed out again but this time we went *down* the Arima Valley to work our way east to the Atlantic coast. Along the way we spotted the first of many raptors we had today, a Bat Falcon perched on a snag in the early morning sun. We then birded along a road adjacent to the Aripo Experimental Cattle Ranch and saw **Gray Kingbird**, Red-breasted Meadowlark, Grassland Yellow Finch, Merlin, Savanna Hawk, **Gray-lined Hawk** and **Zone-tailed Hawk**.



Gray Kingbird © Jared Clarke



Gray-lined Hawk © Jared Clarke

Our next stop was at Manzanilla beach where we had lunch, Brown Pelicans, Magnificent Frigatebird and a surprise shearwater floating on the water. After much deliberation and peer review, the bird was determined to be a **Cape Verde Shearwater** - becoming only the second record for Trinidad and Tobago. We continued on our way to the Nariva swamp, picking up Yellow-headed Caracara, **Crimson-crested Woodpecker**, Black-crested Antshrike, Bicolored Conebill and large flocks of Red-bellied Macaws along the way. As we entered Kernaham (Nariva) we watched a Pearl Kite catch and devour a lizard and then we spotted one of the rarities of the area, a **Rufous Crab-Hawk** perched a mere ten meters away! As we walked around the wetlands we spotted Purple Gallinule, Yellow-hooded Blackbird, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Pied Water-Tyrant, Wattled Jacana, Yellow-chinned Spinetail and an awesome fly-by of Blue-and-yellow Macaws before driving back to the lodge.



Rufous Crab-Hawk © Jared Clarke

Day 4 - Today we had the day to spend exploring the trails at Asa Wright with a more relaxed pace, starting of course with our morning routine of birds and caffeine. In addition to the usual veranda birds we also had great views in the morning light of many swifts including Gray-rumped, Short-tailed, Band-rumped and Chestnut-collared. We also had prolonged looks at both Gray-headed and Double-toothed Kites perching in the treetops from the veranda.



Birding from the veranda at Asa Wright Nature Center © Jared Clarke

After breakfast we were led by the resident guide Caleb down to the Oilbird cave in hopes of seeing

one of these phenomenal and very unique birds, however the birds had not yet returned this year to the Dunston Cave at the time of our visit. The intermittent showers were also keeping bird activity down a fair bit, but we saw **Turquoise Tanager** and learned a lot about natural history and how chocolate is made.



Turquoise Tanager © Jared Clarke



Learning about cacao © Jared Clarke

After lunch we walked down the Discovery Trail to hopefully get better views of the **Bearded Bellbirds**. The calls became louder and louder until they were right overhead and we had amazing scope views of two different males constantly singing. We also spotted Plain Antvireo, White-bearded Manakin and **Channel-billed Toucan**.



Birding Discovery Trail © Jared Clarke



Bearded Bellbird © Jared Clarke



Channel-billed Toucan © Jared Clarke

Day 5 - Today we spiced it up with an early breakfast and headed down to the Caroní Rice Fields before the temperature got too hot. As we walked through the farms we saw Tricolored Munias and Commons Waxbills feeding in the tall grass, dozens of Yellow-hooded Blackbirds and several Great Egrets. In the muddy flats we had several shore birds including Least, Semipalmated, Solitary and White-rumped Sandpipers, Greater Yellowlegs, Wilson's Snipe, Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers and a Long - winged Harrier perched in one of the only trees in the field. During a quick bathroom stop at the Caroni Swamp mangroves we had our first Scarlet Ibis, Ringed Kingfisher and fantastic views of a Little Cuckoo. After lunch we returned to the Caroní Bird Sanctuary and boarded the boat that would take us through the mangroves. The ride through the mangroves is a pleasant one and as we slowly moved down the channel we spotted a Mangrove Tree Boa, Green-throated Mango, Ringed Kingfisher, **Masked Cardinal**, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Snowy and Great Egrets and Straight-billed Woodcreeper. The narrow channel then opened-up into a large, shallow lagoon which was dotted with pink, and the pink were actually **American Flamingoes** which have been increasing in numbers over the last decade. In the middle of this lagoon was a small mangrove island and it was near this island where we would anchor our boat and wait for the **Scarlet Ibis** to come in to roost. Little by little the emerald-green mangrove island changed to an intense scarlet as the thousands of ibis filled every available space in the trees! As the sun set we began making our way out of the mangroves and had a rather uneventful ride out ?



American Flamingo © Jared Clarke



Caroni Swamp © Jared Clarke

Day 6 - We gathered one last time for our morning routine of birds and caffeine, reviewing the usual feeder birds. After breakfast the group split in two and walked different trails and both had great views of White-bearded Manakin as well as Golden-headed Manakin, Cocoa Woodcreeper and Long-billed Gnatwren. It was then time to bid farewell to Asa Wright and head out to our next destination in the north-eastern corner of Trinidad at Grande Riviere. At about half way we made a strategic

lunch/birding stop at Bajnath's Estate Hummingbird Sanctuary where our hosts, son Josh and mother Andrea, treated us to a fantastic home-made meal. Meanwhile we were surrounded by literally hundreds of hummingbirds of ten different species including a new trip bird, the outrageously colorful **Ruby Topaz**! Also worth mentioning was the up close views of **White-bearded Manakins** from the bathroom window! We made one more stop along the entrance road to the estate and had Yellow-rumped Cacique, Crimson-crested Woodpecker and Black-tailed Tityra, before making our way to our hotel in Grande Riviere.



Ruby Topaz Hummingbird © Jared Clarke



Day 7 - Today we gathered early for coffee, tea and biscuits because we had a mission: find the Trinidad Piping Guan, one of Trinidad & Tobago's endemic species. We took a very short bus ride to the hills behind the hotel and scanned the tree tops for a while. As we did we spotted a Gray-headed Kite, White-shouldered Tanager and a troop of Red Howler-Monkeys sunning themselves in the top of a tree. As we watched the howlers a large black bird perched up in the tree just next to them and there it was, a **Pawi (Trinidad Piping Guan)** sunning itself as well! We had several more sightings and fantastic scope views and photos as several other guans perched up in the nearby trees.



Trinidad Piping Guan © Ernesto Carman

We returned for breakfast at the hotel and then the rain set in for the rest of the morning, giving us some appreciated down time. After lunch and after the rain let up, we went for a walk through the village of Grande Riviere and found Yellow Oriole, Carib Grackles, White-winged and Southern rough-winged Swallows, Yellow-rumped Cacique, a secretive Pale-breasted Spinetail and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls singing at dusk.



Birding Grand Riviere © Jared Clarke

Day 8 - We departed early to make our way back to Port of Spain to catch our flight to Tobago. Upon arrival we were met by our driver Gairy and we drove to our first birding spot at the Bon Accord and Centre Street Sewage Ponds where we had a nice variety of new birds. In the ponds themselves and flooded ditches along the road we had Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Blue-winged Teal and **White-cheeked Pintail**, Common and Purple Gallinule, Anhinga swallowing a large fish, Green Heron, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Whimbrel and Ringed Kingfisher. We also had Gray Kingbird, Black-faced Grassquit and Bank and Cliff Swallow. We arrived at Blue Waters Inn in time for a short walk where we found Rufous-vented Chachalacas all over the grounds, Barred Antshrike, Ruddy Turnstone and the endemic **Trinidad Motmot**.





Trinidad Motmot © Jared Clarke

Day 9 - Before breakfast we birded the hotel grounds and entrance road again and had many **Rufous-vented Chachalacas** noisily calling around us, White-tipped Dove, Pale-vented Pigeon, Gray Kingbird, skulky White-fringed Antwrens and phenomenal views of a Red-rumped Woodpecker feeding from some dead branches at close range. After breakfast we boarded the glass-bottom boat with our captain Troy who took us to the small island of Little Tobago. Here we had great views of Trinidad Motmot once again, but the main reason to visit the island was to watch the seabirds from the overlook on the opposite side.



Rufous-vented Chachalaca © Jared Clarke



Birding Little Tobago Island © Jared Clarke

The view over the Atlantic was spectacular from the lookout and the birds as well! In the trees on the surrounding cliffs there were hundreds of **Red-footed Boobies**, of both the light and dark morphs, many of which were at different stages of nesting. We also saw a dozen Brown-boobies, but the star of the show were certainly the **Red-billed Tropicbirds** with their long-slender tail trailing behind them contrasting against the clear blue sky. We also had the chance to watch the

Magnificent Frigatebirds, also known as pirates of the sky, chase and harass the Tropicbirds to try and steal their food.



Red-billed Tropicbird © Jared Clarke

On our return boat trip we slowly worked our way back over the coral reef and saw an incredible diversity of tropical fish. A few participants returned after lunch to snorkel these same reefs, enjoying even more intimate experiences with the amazing marine life. Later in the afternoon we went for a stroll along the main entrance road and although it was rather quiet we did see **Rufous-breasted Hermit**, White-necked Jacobin, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, Crested Oropendola, Little Blue Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, fantastic views of the Trinidad Motmot and Magnificent Frigatebirds passing in front of the almost full moon!



Rufous-breasted Hermit © Ernesto Carman



Batteau Bay Speyside Tobago © Jared Clarke

Day 10 - Today we got up bright and early to meet our driver Gairy who took us up into the Main Ridge Forest Preserve to bird Tobago's rainforest. Our first stop was just along the roadside and was very productive with good views of Blue-backed Manakin, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Collared Trogon and Venezuelan Flycatcher. From here we made a stop at the visitor center to eat our packed breakfast and use the restroom before heading into Gilpin Trace, a trail

that leads through the rainforest. Here we had several White-tailed Sabrewings - including one building her nest, Rufous-breasted Wren, Yellow-legged Thrush, Stripe-breasted Spinetail foraging on the ground not unlike a mouse and an immature Great Black Hawk posing for us at very close range. After such a successful visit to the rainforest we returned to Blue Waters Inn for lunch. Later that afternoon we headed out birding along the Starwood Trace just above the hotel and had a review of some of the common birds of Tobago such as the Blue-black and Black-faced Grassquits, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Scrub Greenlet, White-fringed Antwren, Barred Antshrike, Trinidad Motmot and a Bananaquit in every other bush. We also saw a Brown-crested Flycatcher and from the view point we could see dozens of Red-billed Tropicbirds engaging in aerial pursuits around Goat Island and Green-rumped Parrotlets in the trees in front of the bar! A little after sunset the full moon rose over the Atlantic as we had our farewell dinner and enjoyed one last meal together, reminiscing over the many birds and experiences Trinidad and Tobago had given us. [Trinidad & Tobago species list \(Dec 2024\)](#)