

Trinidad and Tobago Birding Trip

Sponsored by Eric and Gayla Moore of Jay' Bird Barn

(Photos and Story by Bob and Maxine Tinney 21 January – 1 February 2020)

Trinidad Piping-Guans – Grand Rivirere – Jan 21/22



The **Trinidad Piping-Guan** (*Pipile pipile*), locally known as Pawi, is a large turkey-like bird with black body with white areas on the wings, bluish bill with black tip, shaggy crest with white streak, a blue fleshy wattled throat, and pinkish-red legs. According to Cornell's website, the Piping-Guans has been nearly hunted to extinction, its population may be less than 100 and is unlikely to exceed 200 individuals. The *Piping-Guan* is also on the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* in 2018. The Piping-Guans occur in small groups and spends most of its time in the forest canopy, feeding mostly on fruits. On an afternoon adventure on 21 January 2020, Eric Moore leads a group of 7 individuals from Prescott, AZ and two Piping-Guans are observed in the forest near our Mt. Plaisir Beach Hotel (photos above).



The next morning a local guide, Nicholas, leads the group to the Pawi Estates which provides the sighting of 14 **Piping-Guans** (a few shown above) with the latter two photos indicating an aggressive behavior or possibly a breeding behavior.



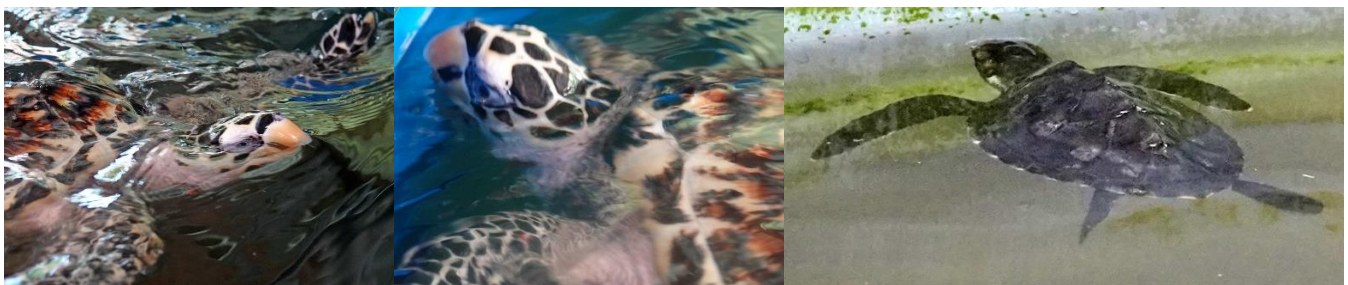
Piero Guerrini is owner of the Mt. Plaisir Beach Estate Hotel. The Hotel offers wonderful meals of fresh catches from the Caribbean Sea. Our lovely upper level rooms provide mosquito netting (although not needed) with open views to a beach, and the sounds of the waves cuddling us to sleep at night.



Nearby Islands serve as sanctuaries for some of the ocean birdlife.



Black and Turkey Vultures, Common Black Hawk, Brown Pelicans, and Parrots are seen flying over the beaches/forests.



We are not present during peak turtle nesting season (1 March—31 August) when five of the seven sea turtle species found globally return to Trinidad's beaches to lay their eggs, but did visit a nearby Turtle Preserve. Trinidad is the second largest leatherback nesting site in the world. Two months later, turtle hatchlings emerge from June to August.



Giant Cowbird, Ruddy Dove drinks from a puddle, **Saffron Finch**, and **Rufous-browed Peppershrike**

Assorted Birds of Grand Riviere



Great Kiskadee, Gray Saltator, White-winged Swallow, and Southern Lapwing



White-lined Tanager, Spectacled Thrush, Black-tailed Tityra, and House Wren



Smooth-billed Anis, male and female Shiny Cowbirds, and Yellow-breasted Flycatcher



Crested Oropendola, Yellow Oriole, Orange-winged Parrot, and Channel-billed Toucan

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron



Just outside the St. Plaisir Hotel in a large beach tree, an adult **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** (*Nyctanassa violacea*) shows her thick neck, slim when extended; short legs and a short, broad bill adapted for crushing the shells of crustaceans . . . and looks after her two growing juveniles (below).



One juvenile **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** curls down a branch, showing its underside, while the other preens itself and picks at the tree branches.

Asa Wright Nature Center – Jan 22/28

The continental origin and proximity of Trinidad to South America, along with its varied habitats, has resulted in an extremely diverse biota. Species lists for this island are impressive, including 97 native mammals, 400 birds, 55 reptiles, 25 amphibians, and 617 butterflies, as well as over 2,200 species of flowering plants. No other area in the West Indies, and few areas of comparable size in tropical America, can match this spectacular species diversity. Trinidad is 50 miles long by about 37 miles wide, and dominated by the Northern Range, which rises to about 3,000 feet and was historically covered by tropical rainforest.

On 22 January, here in this lush part of this beautiful island, our group of 10 individual from Prescott, Arizona, and two from Farmington, New Mexico, join together to enjoy the magical Asa Wright Nature Centre and surrounding locations for birding. Of the 400 species of birds, our group logs 194 species. A large veranda provides entertainment each morning and evening of birds which frequent the fruit and nectar feeders.



After an early morning of bird-viewing on the Veranda, breakfast is enjoyed in the dining room.

The group includes Bob and Maxine (not shown) Tinney, Rob and Becky Rhien, Eric and Gayla (not shown) Moore, Karen Williams, Wendy Wonderley, Suzanne Scudder and David Norcross, and Terry and Holly Harman.



Eric and Gayla Moore (left) of Jay's Bird Barn are sponsors of the *Trinidad/Tobago Birding Trip* for the group (right).



After breakfast we are introduced to our Nature Center guide, Mahese Ramlal (3 photos). Mahese's father, Jogie Ramlal (shown in 3rd picture, now 98-years-old) was one of the first drivers and guides for the Asa Wright Nature Center beginning in 1974 and assisted Don Eckelberry (photographer of birds and fund raiser) and Richard French (author of *A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*) with their travels in the area. As a child Mahese learned and loved the birds of the area and became a guide. Each of the five days, our guide takes us down the mountain to visit specific habitats of different species.

Brief History of Asa Wright Nature Center

In 1936 Joseph and Helen Bruce-Holmes bought Spring Hill Plantation (now the Asa Wright Nature Centre) from the government, which acquired it in default of taxes. Mr. Holmes, an oilfield engineer, was particularly interested in the property because of the very accessible Oilbird Cave. They renovated the plantation house, and lived in their "Garden of Eden" until after World War II, when they returned to the United States.

The plantation suffered from neglect, and eventually it was sold to Newcombe and Asa Wright. As Mr. Wright was "sickly," his wife Asa, a strong, confident, Icelandic woman, managed the plantation. At the same time the Wrights bought Spring Hill, William Beebe of the New York Zoological Society, acquired the adjoining plantation, Simla, as a Field Station for the study of the New World Tropics. Because of the well-known Oilbird Cave, Asa Wright became the hostess to numerous visiting scientists, including David Snow, who studied the resident oilbirds for over four years, and John Dunston, a local entomologist, who helped protect the colony from poachers (the Cave is named in his memory). Springhill began to gain international attention because of its ease of access to spectacular wildlife, and Asa Wright became an innkeeper to visitors from around the world.



Photos of pictures of Asa Wright and with Bird of Prey and perhaps Holmes or Newcombe with an Oilbird. About this time, Newcombe died, leaving Asa Wright with dwindling financial resources. As she aged it became difficult for her to maintain the plantation, a source of concern for the many conservationists from around the world. William Beebe died and Simla fell into disrepair. Fortunately, a small group formed to do something to save these treasures. In 1967, Don Eckelberry, a renowned wildlife artist, Erma Fisk, a prominent ornithologist and conservationist, and Russell Mason of Florida Audubon Society raised money to buy Spring Hill. A non-profit Trust administered by the Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Co., and an international Board of Management composed of 11 Trinidadians and 10 foreign members was set up to establish the Asa Wright Nature Centre. Its purpose was to provide a Centre open to the public for recreation and the study of tropical wildlife, as well as to preserve the wildlife and rainforest of the Arima Valley.



Photo of photo of Asa and honored guests.

Asa Wright lived at the Centre until she died in 1971. Shortly thereafter the New York Zoological Society gave the Asa Wright Nature Centre the Simla Research Center, and it has been a Tropical Research facility until the present time.



Photos of Paintings hanging on the walls of the Asa Wright Nature Center

bonck **Bearded Bellbird** *tonk – Jan 22/23*



Our first afternoon adventure into the AWCN forest is headed by Eric Moore and he takes our group down a nearby trail to hear the 'loudest bird in the world', which is the **Bearded Bellbird** (*Procnias averano*). The next morning with our AWCN guide, Mahese, with scopes set in place, the group sees, and Maxine photographs the two bellbirds (above). The adult male Bearded Bellbirds are generally greyish with black wings, white with coffee brown head, and throat with string-like wattles hanging down their chins. The males, loudest birds in the world, give two calls. One an extremely loud, explosive, single note *bonck* and a second tone resembling a hammer hitting an anvil, *tonk, tonk, tonk*.

Asa Wright Veranda Birds – 22/27 Jan



The olive and yellow female and gold and deep blue male **Violaceous Euphonias** feed strictly on fruits.



Male and female **Purple Honeycreepers** including changing males (last two photos) are seen on the feeders from the AWCN Veranda. Several **Red-legged Honeycreeper** are also seen in other areas of the Nature Center.



The black-crowned male, female and changing male **Green Honeycreepers** also forage the fruits provided on feeders.



The colorful female and male **Silver-beaked Tanagers** and **Gray-blue Tanager** vie for fruits.



Several male and female **White-lined Tanagers** along with a chestnut **Bay-headed** and a **Palm Tanager** visit.



The **Channel-billed Toucan**, **Bananaquit**, **Orange-winged** and **Blue-headed Parrots** are also seen.

Animals at the Asa Wright Center



The rainforests are filled with **spider** webs and termite nests. Trinidad **Coptotermes** Termites generally do not build mounds, and mostly **nests** in trees, and sometimes stumps, or poles.



Atta cephalotes (**Leaf-cutter Ant** or Bachac) carry blades of leaves back to the large mounds (left).



The common **Agoutis** are fast runners, but sustainability is questioned due to hunting.



The golden and blacked striped **Tegu Lizards** have lengths of 3-4 feet and live 10-20 years.



The green-headed lizards and geckos easily hide in foliage or climb walls and tree trunks.

Waller Field - Jan 23 Evening/Night



This lovely **Epaulet Oriole** (*Icterus cayanensis*) with yellow head, shoulder and rump markings is a species of bird in the family Icteridae and preening (left photo). The **Moriche Oriole**, formerly considered a distinct species (*I. chryscephalus*) is now placed herein as a subspecies.



The **Sulphury Flycatcher's** (*Tyrannopsis sulphurea*) head and neck are dark grey, and there is a concealed yellow crown stripe. The upperparts are olive, and the wings and tail are brown. The underparts are yellow with a greenish tint to the upper breast and a white throat. The black bill is short and broad.

Waller Field is a former United States Air Force World War II air base located in Trinidad south of Arima. **Waller Field** was named after United States Army Air Corps Major Alfred J. Waller and closed in May 1949. It then became the informal home of various types of racing for over 40 years.

The **Common Pauraque**, **White-tailed Nightjar** and **Common Potoo** are seen by our group at night along the roadways.



Blanchisseuse Road – Jan 24



Today's excursion takes us high into Trinidad's Northern Range on Blanchisseuse Road. (Bay-headed Tanager above).



The resonant drumming alerts the group to an energetic male scarlet crowned **Lineated Woodpecker** perhaps drilling for a new nest or extracting an insect or the larvae of a wood-boring beetle (above and below).





Mother **Goat** and two **Kids**, with umbilical cords, get their first cell phone lesson.



A **Blue-Black Grassquit** jumps high with spread tail while the **Sooty Grassquit** sit on a branch. **Euler's Flycatcher** right.



After seeing a brick-red **Hepatic Tanager** and a red-breasted **Collared Trogon** with barred black and white tail feathers, our group enjoys a local lunch and Cacao demonstration in Brasso Seco.



After a brief rain shower, a winter-visiting **Merlin** with dark-streaked underpart and a **Gray-lined Hawk** (right) with barred gray lines perch on sticks to let their feathers dry.



Along the roadside near the village of Morne la Croix, a male **Rufous-tailed Jacamar** shows off his iridescent golden green breast, white throat and long chestnut tail as he flits to and from his perch to grab insects.



During late afternoon a large number of **Gray-breasted Martins** congregate on overhead wires.



The yellow wing markings and smaller size (11.5 inches) of the **Yellow-rumped Cacique** (above) helps differentiate it from the **Crested Oropendola** (below) which measures (17 inches) with black wings, a chestnut rump, and larger nests.



A few afternoon birds include a **Tropical Parula**, **Shiny Cowbird**, **Scaled Pigeon**, **Tropical Mockingbird**, free-range rooster (above), **Channel-billed Toucan**, and **Orange-winged Parrots** (below).





Heading back to Asa Wright Nature Center on the narrow Blanchisseuse Road a truck has slid into a ditch holding up traffic as it was difficult to pass with a huge drop on the right side of the road, but with care maneuvering our guide/driver manages, with passengers out of the van on foot, to just clear the steep drop and broken tree.

Aripo Livestock (Agriculture Research) Station– Jan 25

Agricultural Research sponsored by the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT).



Ruddy Dove, Green Parrotlets, Red-breasted Meadowlark, and Tropical Kingbird



Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, and female and male White-headed Marsh Tyrants



"Marsh Giouiti" "Rooti" Yellow-Chinned Spinetail (*Certhiaxis cinnamomea*)



White-winged Swallow, Grassland Yellow-Finch, female and male Savanna Hawks, and Wasps' nest



Cattle of the Research Project grazing in the pasturelands.



Black Angus cattle share a pasture with the **Black Vultures**.



Rob and Gayla making friends with widespread genus of species **Bos**.



Cattle Egret, Wattled Jacana, and Southern Lapwing are in the environs.



Nearby ALS trash dump with many white **Cattle Egrets** . . . and **Green Lizard** at our Coconut Atlantic Ocean lunch stop!



Locals gather crabs from the beach . . . but watch out for the Portuguese Man of Wars' venom-filled nematocysts.

Nariva Swamp– Jan 25



“Coconut Alley” as captured by Wendy, leads to views of the **Gray Kingbird** and **Brown-crested Flycatcher**.



Nariva River fresh water environments of herbaceous swamp and mangrove habitats include the **Wattled Jacana**.



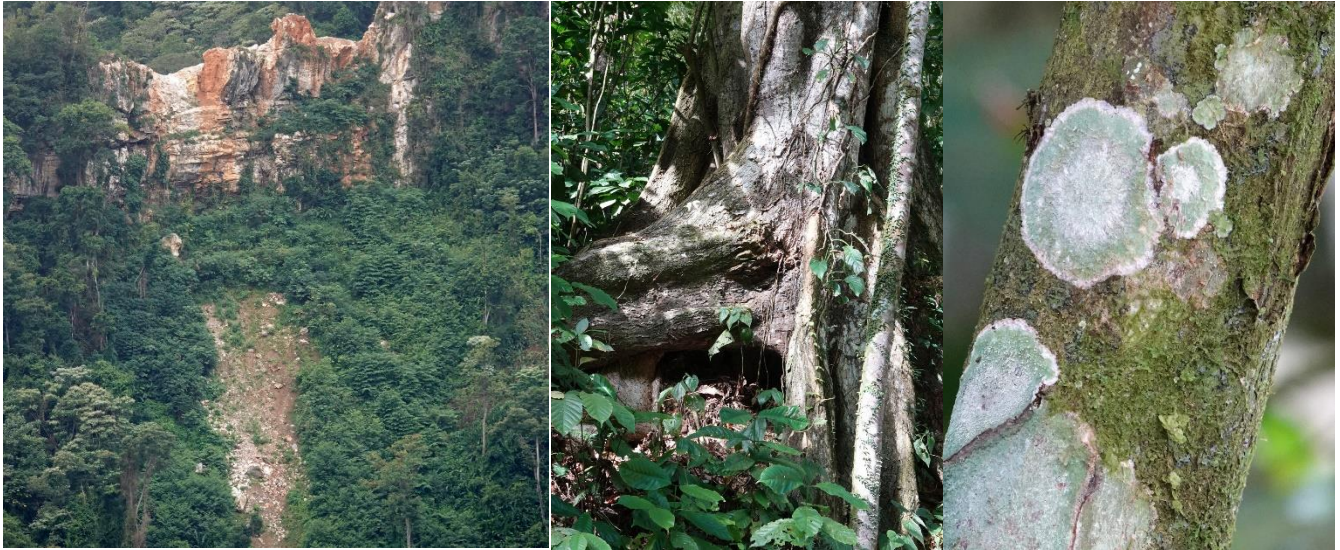
The **Great Egret**, **Blue-black Grassquit**, **Savanna Hawk** and **Smooth-billed Ani** call this area home.



After waiting and watching the reed marshes for some time, the finely-barred **Pinnated Bittern** lifts its head for a couple of photos. The **Yellow-headed Caracara** is present and flares its barred tail.

The greatest ‘missed photo’ of the day is of the beautiful **Blue-and-Yellow Macaws** as they head for their roost in the forest, with the consolation prize as the **Orange-winged Parrots**, also head to roost (right).

Arima River at Fraser Stream - Jan 26



Arima River Cliffside, tree trunk and root system, and Lichen on Trees



The **Black Vultures** congregate and food is mainly carrion, offal, and refuse.



Squirrel Cuckoo, Gray-lined Hawk, Trinidad Euphonia, and Blue-gray Tanager

Arena Forest – Jan 26



A bright turquoise **Blue Dacnis** with black forehead and throat, **Yellow Breasted Flycatcher**, and **Piratic Flycatcher**



Savanna Hawk and **White Hawk** often sit along streams or forest edges and enjoy eating lizards and snakes.



Assorted Hawks in flight (left) and the small **Pearl Kite** (two right photos) is uncommon to Trinidad.



The **Masked Yellowthroat** (left) frequents savannahs and freshwater marshes also cane fields. The **Yellow-breasted Flycatcher** has a yellow breast with head and upperparts yellowish olive green. The chestnut-rumped **Crested Oropendola** has a long tail which appears to be dipped in yellow paint.



The song of the lovely **Yellow Oriole** is a beautiful flutelike cadence (two left photos). The **Cocoa Thrush** builds its nest in niches in banks and is somewhat sedentary (two right photos).



Mahe and Eric set up scopes for our birding group to see the **Brown-throated Parakeets** (left photos).

Oilbirds in the Dunston Cave – Jan 27



A special attraction on the property is breeding colony of nocturnal **Oilbirds** or **Guachard** (*Steatornix caripensis*) in a beautiful riparian grotto (Dunston Cave) accessed by a somewhat difficult and steep trail. On our visit there were only four Oilbirds, and Maxine got only one blurry photo (2nd photo) of one visible bird in the dark chamber. Also attached is a photo (3rd) of a picture displayed at the ASA Center showing an **Oilbird** with two white chicks and three eggs.



On the way back from the Oilbirds, our Cave guide, Caleb, points out a Butterfly Orchid (2nd photo), tented Bats (3rd), Tarantula in a pipe (4th), and several birds.

Arsenura beebei Moth – 27 Jan



On January 27, after our evening/night bus trip back to Asa Wright Nature Center, we had a lovely dinner. As we head for our rooms, an **Arsenura beebei** Moth (with a distinctive circle X-wing marking/tagging), is encountered struggling, then alights on the entry porch to the Center. (If you know about such tagging, please inform the Tinneys.)

Blue Water Sewage Ponds – 27 Jan



Osprey, Yellow-hooded Blackbirds, and Ruddy Dove



Common and Purple Gallinules



Tropical Kingbird with YH Blackbird (left), Green Honeycreeper and Wattled Jacanas.



Striated Herons awaits frogs, shrimps and insects (above).



Spotted Sandpiper (left) and **Pied Water-Tyrants** feeds amongst vegetation at water's edge (three photos).

Caroni's Bird Sanctuary- 27Jan



Our group enjoys an outstanding boat trip into the Caroni swamps and marshes in the late afternoon/evening.



The **Little Blue Herons** (*Egretta caerulea*) and have probably recently migrated here for the winter.



Three **Tropical Screech Owls** (*Megascops colibaare*) are common residents on the edges of mangrove swamps. The Caroni Swamp **Anaconda**, also known as common anaconda, common water boa or sucuri (third photo), is a non-venomous boa species and very heavy. Also, a couple of bats (fourth photo) are seen on a marsh tree.



Heron and Egrets are seen flying in the bay and a beautiful **Red-capped Cardinal** is a resident of the marshes.

Caroni's American Flamingos- 27Jan



As evening approaches, our boat enters an open bay and we are greeted by a 100+ American Flamingos.



Most American Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) have landed, but a few others (below photo) arrive with the sunset.



Caroni National Park Scarlet Ibis- 27Jan



Truly a **National Geographic Moment** to witness flock, after flock, after flock, (boat Captain Lester estimated nearly 5,000 thousand **Scarlet Ibis**) coming to roost on a small island within the Caroni Swamp.



The **Scarlet Ibis** (*Eudocimus ruber*) makes its home in the Caroni Bird Sanctuary in the Caroni Swamp--an area set aside by the Trinidad government for the protection of these colorful birds. The Caroni Swamp includes fifteen thousand acres of marshland, tidal lagoons, and mangrove trees. Several thousand Scarlet Ibises nest and roost in the sanctuary and are often seen in large numbers during the last two hours of daylight. These birds feed mainly on crabs which they seek out on the mud flats exposed at low tide and on the stilt roots of the red mangrove. As Eric Moore wrote in *The Daily Courier*, "Looking at the Island after thousands of birds had descended upon it was like looking at a Christmas Tree with scarlet ibis ornaments." (Five photos below).



Humming Birds from Trinidad and Tobago



Rufous-breasted Hermit –Cuffie Retreat



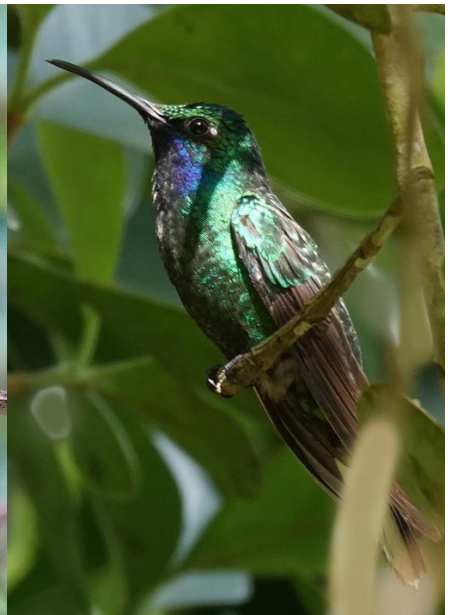
Stressed Rufous-breasted Hermit at Asa Wright – netted and released
Green Hermit – Seen but no photo



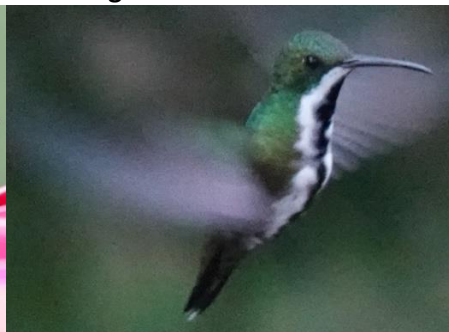
Little Hermit – Asa Wright and Cuffie



White-necked Jacobin - male and female – Asa Wright and Cuffie



White-tailed Sabrewing – female and male – Asa Wright and Cuffie



Black-throated Mango- male and female and female on nest over the Parkway



Brown Violetear – Asa Wright and Cuffie



Green-throated Mango - Carino Swamp



Ruby-topaz Hummingbird – Cuffie Retreat

Long-billed Starthroat – Seen by many birders, but eludes Maxine



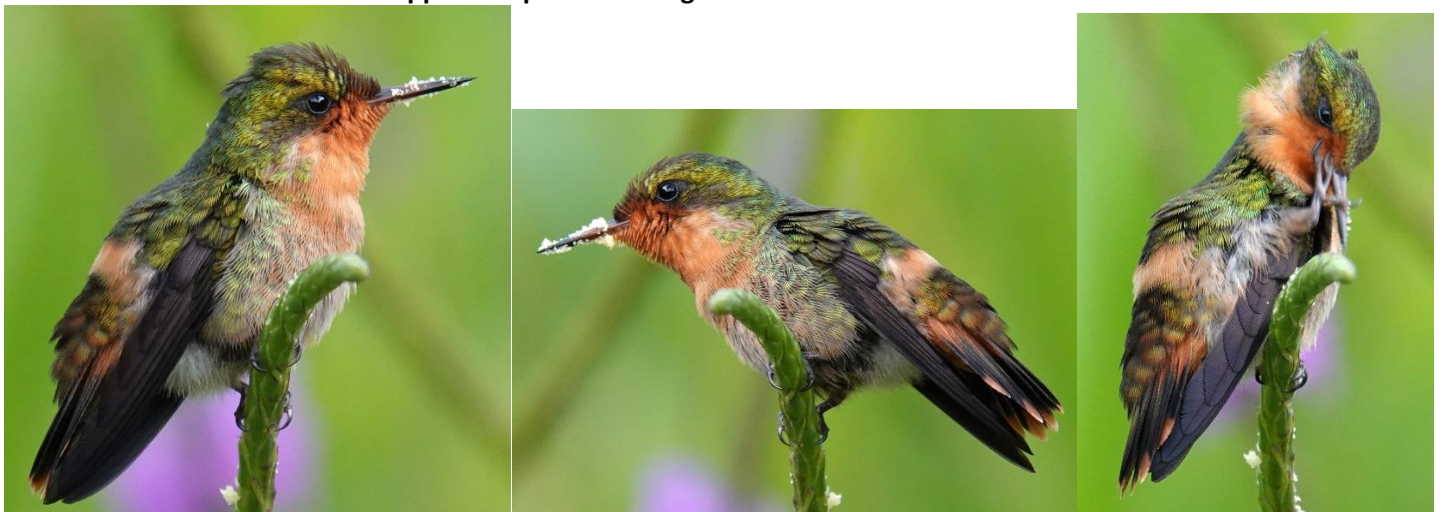
White-chested Emerald – Asa Wright



Blue-chinned Sapphire - male and female – Asa Wright



Copper-rumped Hummingbird – Grand Riviere and Cuffie



Female and juvenile **Tufted Coquette** (above and below) – Asa Wright



Male Tufted Coquettes – Asa Wright

Trinidad/Tobago Rainbow Flowers Fruit



Trinidad/ Tobago Butterflies and Moths



Flight to Tobago – 28 Jan



Because our 20-minute Caribbean Airlines Flight departed at an earlier time, we had lunch at the A. N. R. Robinson International Airport, which is an international airport located on the island of Tobago. It is located in the southwestern most part of the island, near the town of Canaan, and 11 km from the capital, Scarborough. Tobago has less than 60,000 people. Because our flight arrived early, our guide, Jason, was still with another group, so we had some 'liming' time. The word is associated with sitting under a **lime** tree, or having nothing more demanding to **do** than squeezing limes. It is also thought to **originate** from "limey", a slang **term meaning** a British serviceman during World War II (noted for hanging around bars and drinking), but we elected a little stationery birding with our first sighting of the **Eared Dove** and a **Bananaquit** building a next (right photos above).

Bon Accord Sewage Treatment Ponds – 28 Jan



Great Egrets (above, compared with **Little Egret** right) look for frogs, fish and insects in the Ponds.



The **Snowy Egret** has a thinner bill than the **Little Egret**, and **Cattle Egret** (right) has a conspicuously yellow bill.



The **Greater Legs** (13 inches) has slightly upturned bill, so these may be **Lesser Yellowlegs** (10 inches).



A couple of black **Anhingas** with yellow bills and white markings on the wings and buff tipped tail dance.



The **Green Heron** has a greenish loreal streak, and back and wings are greenish slate.



Least Grebe, Spotted Sandpiper, Common Callinule, Tropical Mockingbird, and House Wren



The **Ospreys'** wing span is about 1.8 meters, while the **Yellow-headed Caracara** (right) screams *shreee-oo*.

Tabago Plantation Lake – 28 Jan



Air sacs beneath the skin on the breast of the **Brown Pelican** act like cushions. While diving, a pelican rotates its body ever so slightly to the left. This rotation helps avoid injury to the esophagus and trachea, which are located on the right side of the bird's neck. Upon impact, the Brown Pelican opens its bill and expands its pouch, trapping small fish inside.



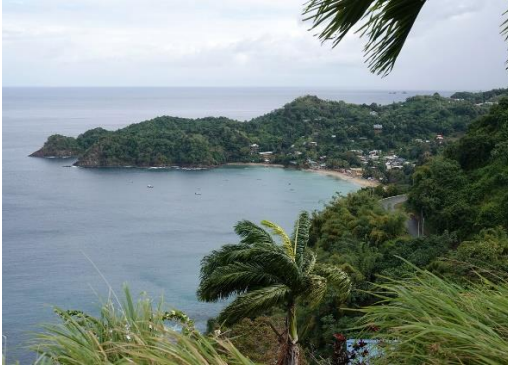
Then the **Brown Pelican** pops to the surface, spills out the water, and gulps down dinner.



The **Anhinga** (left) hunts by spearing fish and other small prey using its sharp, slender beak. On the opposite shore is an Anhinga family with the male having a black head, female with a lighter beige color head, neck and breast, while the nestlings have a downy white plumage.



Castara – 29 Jan



Today morning the group visits the seaside village of Castara and make arrangements for rain boots for the next trek.



Brown Boobies and **Pelicans** on nearby islands and red-billed **Royal Terns** ply the fishing waters.



A **Magnificent Frigatebird** flies overhead and **Pelicans** and **Laughing Gulls** rest on the outlying boats.

Tobago Forest Reserve Galpin Trace – 29 Jan



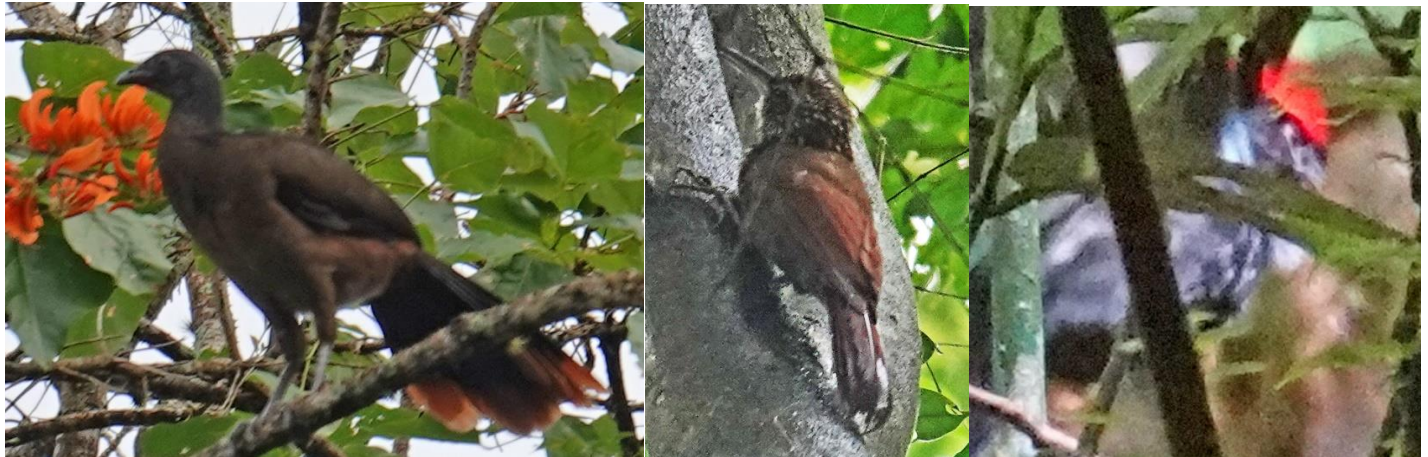
Everyone rents the use of rain boots and have their own rain gear to venture into the rain forest.



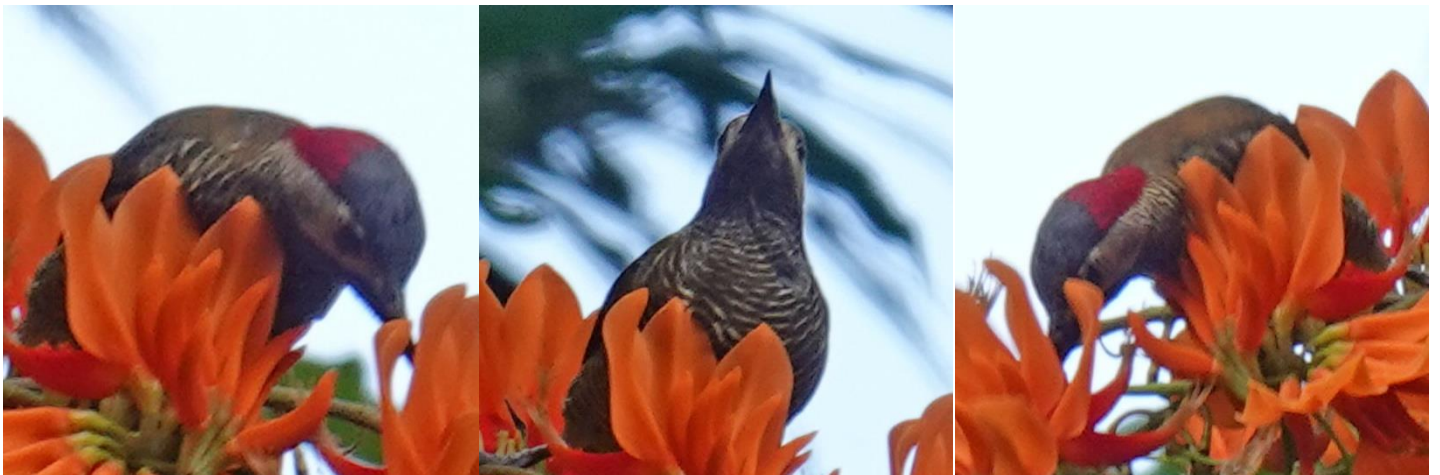
We are met with beautiful trees for the Main Ridge and Gilpin Trace routes. (Becky and Rob center photo)



The colorful **Rufous-tailed Jacamar** with extended bill brings a colorful slant to our hike.
The blue-crowned **Trinidad Motmot** with black mask lined with turquoise and a long blue tail with racquet tips.



Numbers of the **Rufous-vented Chachalacas** have fluctuated due to hunting of this local delicacy.
A very wet **Cocoa Woodcreeper** nests in a tree holes or hollow stumps moves among the leaves searching for insects.
A **White-fringed Antwren** is black and white adorned with a red flower.



The **Golden-olive Woodpecker**'s upperparts and wings are black-and-white barred with red nape, and is very excitable.
The brilliant vermillion **Immortelle Trees** (*Erythrina poeppigiana*) are flowering, which attracts insects and birds.

Cuffie River Nature Retreat – 28/31 Jan

The Cuffie River Nature Retreat, owned by a most gracious lady, Regina Duman and husband Earl, is billed as a 'romantic secluded rain-forest retreat' and furnishes us with lovely rooms, terraces, wonderful meals and bird sightings. It was originally a coffee Plantation owned by Regina's father in the early 1900's, who died shortly after she was born. Her mother worked in Trinidad as a nurse, where Regina grew up, and retraced her roots and dream of building the Cuffie Retreat.



An immature white, **Little Blue Heron** plies the waters of the Cuffie River Valley.



Tropical Mockingbird, Pale-vented Pigeon, Fuscous Flycatcher and Tropical Kingbird



The chestnut female and black-and-white male **Barred Antshrikes** eat ants, lizards, berries, and Bananas.



A **Banaquit** checks out that dry nest up on the terrace, while another elects to continue building under rainy leaves.



Two **Rufous-breasted Jacamars** and **Trinidad Motmot** look for appetizing breakfasts.



A male **White-lined Tanager** lures the female to try a bit of pineapple or banana.



The **Spectacled Thrush** enjoy fruits including paw-paw, guava and avocado pear.



Red-crowned Woodpeckers: "Would you like a bite of my banana?" "No thanks I have one of my own."



The **Rufous-Vented Chachalaca** (locally known as **Cocrico**) is Trinidad's National Bird.



The **Cocrico** are still being hunted, so numbers are uncertain.



The **White-tipped Dove** (above and below) prefer the semi-open forest edge.

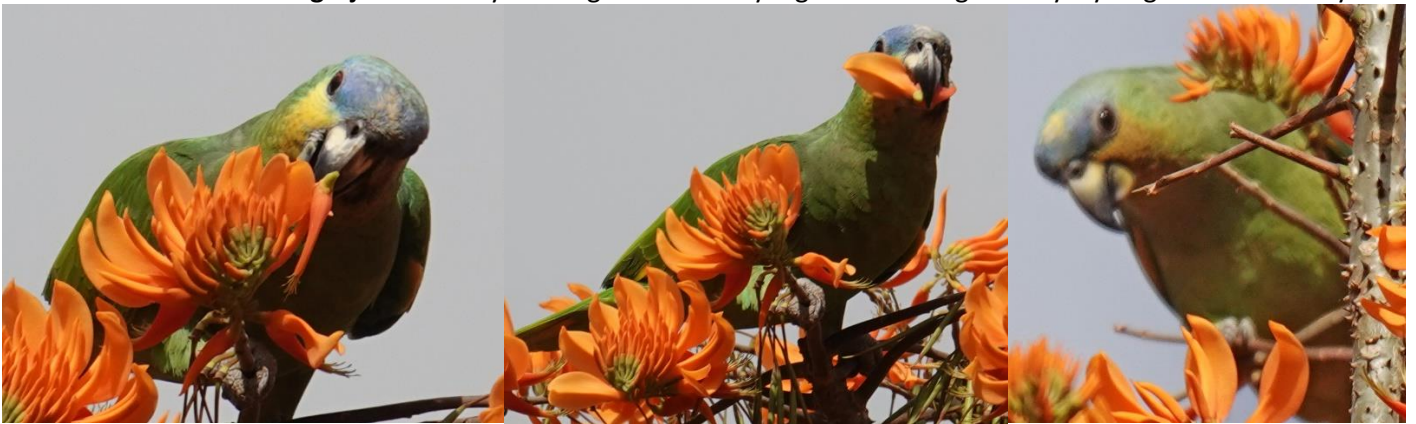




A male **Palm Tanager** tells his mate that he would like to help with building a nest.



The **White-tailed Nightjars** are busy hunting for insects by night and during the day try to get some shut-eye.



Our morning wakeup is always with the Orange-winged Parrots . . . the song is an ever-changing mixture of the bird's favorite sounds, from gurgles and trills to whistles and loud **squawking**.



Little Tobago Island – 29 Jan



Today our birding group takes a glass-bottom boat trip passing Goat Island to Little Tobago Island (also called Bird of Paradise Island) anticipating seeing the Red-billed Tropicbird with guide, Zolani. In 1908 the British politician and businessman Sir William Ingram purchased **Little Tobago** in order to turn it into a bird sanctuary. The next year he introduced the greater bird of paradise (*Paradisaea apoda*) to the **island** in an attempt to save the species from overhunting for the plume trade in New Guinea. After Ingram's death in 1924 his heirs deeded the island to the Government of **Trinidad and Tobago** as a wildlife sanctuary. The birds of paradise survived on the island until at least 1958 when they were filmed by a National Geographic crew. There are no reliable records of their existence on the island after 1963 when Hurricane Flora hit the island and the population is thus presumed to be extinct.



Captain Frank and Zolani help take care with boarding and offloading passengers to the glass bottom boat.



As we climb to the top of the island, Zolani shares the history of the island, point out various animals/plants including, a Shearwater's nest, the Jungle Dragon Flower, the Ocellated Gecko, and numerous birds including the Red-billed Tropicbird.



A short hike to the highest point on the island resulted in a spectacular ocean view of the 'Meeting of the Water' (note changes of color, left photo) of the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea and a **Magnificent Frigatebird** flying overhead.



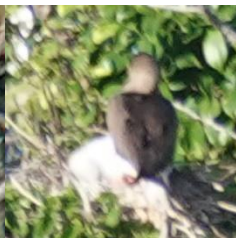
Then the long-tailed **Red-billed Tropicbirds** seem to be flying all around the cliffs.



They feed by vertical plunge dives, which produce a plume of water like a mini whale blow. Adult has stout red bill and long white tail streamers. Immature has yellow bill and short, black-tipped tail.



We also notice the numerous **Brown** and **Red-footed Boobies** with chicks on the nearby steep cliffs.



Then Zolani says that he has a little Surprise for us . . .

Zolani points out a **Red-billed Tropicbird** on its nest, just next the viewing stand.



The **Red-billed Tropicbird** (*Phaethon aethereus*) is a **tropicbird** which superficially resembling a tern in appearance, it has mostly white plumage with some black markings on the wings and back, a black mask and, as its common name suggests, a red bill. The female lays just one egg a year onto a scrape in the ground, in a cliff crevice, or sometimes just under a large rock close to shore. Incubation is by both sexes and takes about six weeks.



The bird does not seem frightened, but we try to be calm and non-disruptive to it. A few websites indicate that the **Red-billed Tropicbird** does not walk well, it lands by flying into the wind, stalling and dropping to the ground.

Then Zolani tells us that he has another surprise for us . . .

After a short walk on a side trail . . .



A **Red-billed Tropicbird** with a chick . . . newly-hatched chick covered in thin, long, grey-white down . . . which is paler on the head.



Cuffie River Nature Farewell –31 Jan



Most of the group have noonish flights from Little Tobago to meet their departure planes from Port of Spain to Miami, but Bob and Maxine's flight back to Trinidad is not until 8:40 at night to Port of Spain to catch our 1:00 a.m. 'red-eye' flight to Houston, so we spend the day watching the Hummingbirds and other special bird visitors to the Cuffie Retreat.

A special **Thank You** to Eric and Gayla Moore and participants for supporting this wonderful Birding Trip!

Prior to our departure we have a special send off with a visit of two blue-headed Trinidad Motmots.

