

Holiday Highlights
Trinidad and Tobago
8 – 20 April 2018

Guides: Roy Atkins, Dave Ramlal and Newton George

Guests: Lyn Maslin, Ruth Messenger, Tony Danbury, Anne and Jeff Luker, Adele Reynolds and Martin Warren, Evelyn Moorkens and Ian Killeen, Brenda and Peter Wilson

Day 1: We gather at Gatwick for our flight to Trinidad and all runs very smoothly to time. An easy flight takes us to St Lucia, where we sit on the tarmac for an hour or so while people get off and on and we are surprised to not spot a single bird through the windows. We then make the short 40 minute flight to Trinidad and as we come in to land we pass over Caroni Swamp and those with window seats are puzzled by what look rather like Flamingos in a couple of the pools. We land and taxiing to the gate we spot a Peregrine Falcon hunting out over the grass.

We are met by drivers who are taking us and another group up to the Asa Wright Centre and spot Carib Grackle and Tropical Mockingbird as we leave the airport. On our way we spot lots more grackles, Tropical Kingbird and Kiskadee on the wires and, high in the sky, both Black and Turkey Vultures. It does not take long to get out of town and soon we are heading up into forest and gaining height as we head up into the northern range.

We soon arrive at Asa Wright, where we are greeted with a delicious rum punch and have a little time to settle into our rooms before meeting up for our evening meal. We also meet Martyn Kenefick, who will be taking us out for a morning walk and he tells us that there are a few nice birds around at the moment including a flock of Flamingos at Coroni Swamp - so that clarifies that then!

After our evening meal we chat about what is happening tomorrow then head to bed - apart from a very small group of us who take a walk with Jessie, one of the Reserve guides. We walk along the entrance road soon finding big harvestmen, dark brown crickets, at least three land crabs including one very impressive one, millipedes, centipedes, lots of stick insects, two Tail-less Whip-Scorpions and some very impressive Trinidad Chevron Tarantulas! One is enormous and while a couple of them vanish as soon as we shine a torch on them, others allow for some great photo opportunities. We find two Turnip-tailed Geckos and a scorpion. On the way back we find a small rather plain grey snake called a Ratoneel which according to Jessie is harmless - a very nice end to the walk

Day 2: We gather on the famous veranda at around 6am and there are birds already at the feeders, with several Bananaquits, a pair of White-lined Tanagers, Green Honeycreepers, Spectacled Thrush and Silver-beaked Tanager. Crested

Oropendolas are flying up to their nests in a large tree to the right and Orange-winged Parrots fly noisily up the valley towards us. Around the hummingbird feeders there seem to be lots of White-necked Jacobins and they are joined now and then by Purple Honeycreepers but the other hummingbirds are quickly chased away. Now and then a White-chested Emerald or Blue-chinned Sapphire sneaks in and there is great excitement when a male Tufted Coquette appears around the vervain flowers. There is even a very brief tussle between a Tufted Coquette and a Little Hermit. Stunning Violaceous Euphonias appear at the feeders and a distant Black-tailed Tityra pops up onto a dead branch in the distance. Shortly it is replaced by a Bearded Bellbird and then later by a Channel-billed Toucan! This is clearly a branch to watch!!

Under the feeders are a couple of Red-rumped Agoutis picking up any fallen scraps and down the valley are lots of Band-rumped Swifts. We get great views of Squirrel Cuckoo and Yellow Oriole and we add Copper-rumped Hummingbird, Forest Elaenia, House Wren and Bay-headed Tanager to the growing list. We are very excited when a Green Hermit comes into the building then realise it is actually nesting on the light fitting in the lounge! It looks astonishing when it sits on the nest apparently bending in half with both head and tails sticking straight up out of the nest.

It has been hectic and is hard to pull ourselves away for breakfast when we hear the gong at around 7.30am but like Pavlov's dogs we head to the dining room. It is a great breakfast with plenty of choice and afterwards we gather in the lounge for a chat from Martyn about the Centre and a few do's and don'ts. At one point we are seriously distracted by the Green Hermit feeding its young in the nest above Martyn's head!

After a chance to pop back to the rooms we gather by reception for a walk up the entrance road with Martyn and we feel privileged to have the author of the bird book for Trinidad and Tobago as our guide this morning! We start with Tropical Kingbird, one of the more common species we are likely to see on the trip, but while pointing it out notice a soaring Black Hawk-Eagle - wow - what a great start!! Apparently, a pair is thought to be nesting nearby so sightings this year are higher than usual but it is a fabulous sighting and Roy is very excited. Ian finds a delightful immature male Tufted Coquette perched up nicely for photos.

We set off up the drive, stopping to look at the occasional butterfly, land crab, interesting flowers, stick insects and there is so much to see. The forest is beautiful, with so many different trees, flowers, vines, palms ferns and bromeliads on the trees. We hear a calling Euler's Flycatcher and quickly find it and even manage to get the scope on it. There are quite a few of the species we have already seen but we also add a brief Trinidad Motmot, Black-throated Mango and high overhead raptors start to appear. At one point we have a pale phase Short-tailed Hawk, two Black Hawks and another Black Hawk-Eagle! There are Band-rumped Swifts and we get good views of Red-crowned Ant-Tanager

and a very brief Golden-headed Manakin. We work quite hard for rather poor views of Tropical Parula, then find more tanagers including a nice Bay-headed and a Silver-beaked Tanager with a proper silver bill.

Barry, one of the local guides, has joined us and he seems very good at spotting things like Tarantulas finding two, though neither coming out to play. It is quite nice seeing flowering plants that are familiar to us as pot-plants back home such as Begonias, Busy Lizzies, Tradescantia and Bromeliads.

Right at the far end of the driveway we find a bunch of birds making a fuss in the trees above the road and guess there might be a snake or maybe an owl here. Sure enough, moments later, Martyn finds a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and while we enjoy amazing scope views a second bird joins the first - this one looking slightly smaller and more speckled and perhaps an immature. We then get even better views of Black Hawk-Eagle soaring right over our heads and we can see all the barring on the underwing and tail - what a treat!!

Walking back down the road we add nothing new but back at the veranda we are thrilled to spot two White Hawks soaring up out of the forest. At the feeders there seem to be more different hummingbirds, with a brief Long-billed Starthroat and a stunning Ruby Topaz hummingbird at the flowers. We add Barred Antshrike and many people catch up with birds they missed earlier. It is just so delightful to be able to sip coffee or a cold drink in lovely warm weather and enjoy such wonderful birds, scan the skies for raptors and swifts and just take our time to enjoy it.

At around noon the gong goes again and it is time for more food! It is obvious none of us are going to be losing any weight on this trip! After lunch we have a break, before meeting up with our guide for the rest of our trip, Dave Ramlal. He talks us through what we are going to be doing for the next few days and then we head out for a walk down the discovery trail. He is extremely knowledgeable on the flowers, trees and many other aspects of wildlife, not just the birds, and he point out various things as we walk.

We can hear a calling Guianan Trogon and head down to see if we can find it. It takes a little while but eventually it flies into one of the trees close to the path and we get some great views, a very nice male. As we watch this bird it is a little hard to pull ourselves away to look at a small greenish flycatcher Dave has found - a Yellow-olive Flycatcher, a new species for the trip but not a patch on the trogon! A little further on we find a bigger female trogon, a Green-backed Trogon which provides superb views too.

We walk on down the track hearing a few other species, then pass the White-bearded Manakin lek, where a couple of these delightful little birds are perched up but not really displaying at all. A little further on we get good views of Cocoa Woodcreeper, then with a Bearded Bellbird calling loudly up ahead we decide to try for this one. We walk on with the astonishing call getting louder

and louder until we are amazed just how loud it is - it almost hurts your ears! Looking carefully, Dave brilliantly spots it and what a strange bird with its peculiar wattles hanging down like a beard - thin bits of skin that sway and swing when it turns its head. The almost metallic sounding loud call is likened by some to an anvil hit by a hammer and this seems a better likeness than the sound of a bell. Everyone gets a good view through the scope and watches for a while before it finally takes flight and is gone.

We start back up the track, pausing to watch the White-bearded Manakins, then head back for a snack and coffee on the veranda, not really spotting any other birds on the way. As we enjoy our snack and sit chatting the hummingbird feeders are alive with a few more species now and as well as the constant White-necked Jacobins we spot Copper-rumped Hummingbird, Blue-chinned Sapphire, White-chested Emerald, Tufted Coquette, Black-throated Mango, Rufous-breasted Hermit and a super male Long-billed Starthroat. It is great to consolidate some of what we learned this morning and we spot Bay-headed Tanager while Golden-olive Woodpecker is new. At 6pm it is rum punch time and then as the light fades we get a fly by Short-tailed Nighthawk and watch the bats heading out into the night sky.

After an excellent evening meal of curry and something they call locally 'Bus-up-shut', which is a bit like a torn-up nan bread, we run through the checklist and add the various butterflies we have identified, and other bits and pieces we have seen such as the creatures on the night walk yesterday - and even as we are doing the list we add House Gecko, an enormous moth flies in and a couple of bats come to drink at the hummingbird feeders - what a place!

Day 3: Back on the veranda bright and early, we are all feeling a bit calmer after yesterdays exciting start and most people can identify many of the species they are seeing this morning. It is a great chance to consolidate on what we have learned but we also think it seems slightly quieter for some reason and it is quite easy to keep up with the birds that arrive including the hummingbirds. We get better views of House Wren and Bay-headed Tanagers this morning plus the Forest Elaenias and we add Piratic Flycatcher and enjoy good scope views of Channel-billed Toucan, Bearded Bellbird and Black-tailed Tityra again. The star birds being the Orange-winged Parrots however, which show extremely well with scope filling views in the tree tops.

After breakfast we are soon on our way, and today we heading down into the lowlands around the Nariva Swamp area - but with plenty of stops along the way. We spot a Grey-lined Hawk as we drive down the road and also Band-rumped Swifts on which we could see the bands. We make a stop, where Dave heard a calling Streaked Flycatcher on his way up this morning but there seems to be no sign just now - though we do find Barred Antshrike, Greyish Saltator, two distant Black Hawks, Ruddy Ground-Doves and a House Wren.

We drive on and our next stop is down a short side road, where there is a big surprise. A pair of Brown-throated Parakeets are working on a termite nest in a tree and Dave explains how in the end they are likely to nest in there - but this is a strange find as this is not a species that even occurs on Trinidad! Dave found them a few days ago and we are not sure where they have come from or whether they are even originally wild birds – they might be escaped cage birds but either way they are very nice to see. We also get brief views of Green-rumped Parrotlet and see plenty of Carib Grackles.

We move on again and make a stop to scan some rather rough looking fields. It does not take long to find our target bird here, Red-breasted Blackbird - now apparently called Red-breasted Meadowlark. There are lots of Smooth-billed Anis here too plus White-winged Swallows, Grey-breasted Martin and we coax out a couple of Yellow-bellied Elaenias. But the best comes last as we find a superb male Black-crested Antshrike that performs wonderfully, pumping its tail as it calls.

We make a very brief stop when Dave spots a White-headed Marsh-Tyrant at the side of the road and while we enjoy views of this bird we notice several Fork-tailed Palm-Swifts and Short-tailed Swifts cruising over the same field. You could not imagine two more different looking swifts but both look superb! There are White-winged Swallows here too and Grey-breasted Martins.

Our next stop is to check out a colony of Yellow-rumped Caciques and we enjoy some wonderful flight views and brief views of birds at nest before they vanish inside. There seem to be plenty of Carib Grackles nesting in here too and we spot our first Blue-black Grassquit.

We arrive at the coast and enjoy lunch looking out at the sea. Asa Wright provide a superb hot meal brought along with us in trays that keep it hot! It is lovely sitting in the breeze and watching Magnificent Frigatebirds cruise majestically overhead as we eat.

From here we drive along the coast looking out in particular for raptors as we drive. We soon spot a gorgeous Savana Hawk amongst the palms and it flies up onto a stump where it looks incredibly elegant with its long legs. While we watch a pair of Green-rumped Parrotlets appears on one of the palms and we get lovely views of them as they perch beside their hole. Our next raptor is Yellow-headed Caracara, then an Osprey flying down the coast. We arrive at a creek in the mangroves beside the road and spot an Anhinga drying its wings. On the other side of the road we glimpse a Green Kingfisher as it skims off upstream and a Striated Heron flies in. We try another spot a little way down the road and find Bicolored Conebill, Northern Waterthrush and another Black-crested Antshrike. There is also the bizarre sight of a long line of mangrove crabs all following each other up one long mangrove root and up into a tree in a perfectly evenly spaced line - very bizarre.

We take a turning away from the coast and shortly pause to check a large tree where Dave tells us a pair of Pearl Kites are nesting. We scan the tree very carefully and shortly he finds the nest. It is well hidden and there is a bird there on the nest which you can see looking around and even down at us watching, watching it, watching us. A rather nice Pale-vented Pigeon appears and we find Shiny and Giant Cowbirds in the tree tops, lots more Smooth-billed Anis, Wattled Jacana, Solitary Sandpiper, an impressive Goat and a superb Zone-tailed Hawk being mobbed by Southern Lapwings.

We hop out when we hear a calling Yellow-chinned Spinetail and Dave tries playing a little of the call - and what a response! It flies straight towards us and poses wonderfully checking us out. There are more Wattled Jacanas here and we spot a flying Limpkin and several Cattle and Great Egrets – the Cattle Egret in full breeding plumage with deep orange bills.

We pass Yellow-hooded Blackbirds and Yellow Orioles and at the far end of the road we get out and have a scan of the area, hoping for macaws while Dave and Boyie set up the rum punch. How delightful to watch Wattled Jacanas, Pied Water-Tyrants and other great birds as we sip our drinks but then there is a shout as two Yellow-crowned Parrots fly past and land in a distant tree disturbing the peace! One is posing well enough to allow fabulous views through the scope.

Time is flying and we set off on our way back, with Dave on great form spotting a small group of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, a superb Grey-lined Hawk, another Yellow-crowned Parrot, a fly by Crested Caracara and a beautiful Plumbeous Kite before we hit the main road.

Day 4: We have an early breakfast this morning, so we can get out birding down in the lowlands before it gets too hot - though we can't resist stopping at a few places on route too, as there is much more activity in the forest at this time of the day.

Our first stop is a little way down the road and we search for Collared Trogon that Dave heard from his van while he was driving. It refuses to play but while scanning we hear a Trinidad Motmot 'whooping' and after a search we find two of them in the bamboos - beautiful birds. Other birds appear including a pair of Red-legged Honeycreepers and a brief Long-billed Gnatwren. We continue on our way and have not gone far when we hear a Bright-rumped Attila calling and hop out to try for that but with no luck despite it sounding so close! Again, the result is a bird we didn't actually stop for when we spot a Golden-olive Woodpecker instead.

From here we head down the valley making our next stop at a rather rough grassy area by some houses where we try playing Masked Yellowthroat call. It doesn't appear but while looking we find a Bran-colored Flycatcher and get superb views of a Zone-tailed Hawk – an even better view than yesterdays.

It is already getting hot and we decide to drive to a spot where we can scan the river and though it is a bit of a drive it proves worth it when we find a quite a few birds here. Looking upstream we find Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers, the latter looking like a thrush underneath! There is a Pied Water-Tyrant here too and over the car park are several Fork-tailed Palm-Swifts and White-winged Swallows. We cross the road and check a flock of birds on the river bank. There are quite a lot of waders, including Southern Lapwings, both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, several Stilt Sandpipers and a small number of Least Sandpipers. We are surprised to find a Spectacled Caiman further down the bank resting on the sand and a Red-eared Slider sunbathing on a small island. The biggest surprise however is amongst the herons and egrets. As well as Great and Snowy Egret, Little Blue and Tricolored Herons we find a Little Egret! This is the first Dave has seen for about six or so years and is a real surprise being on completely the wrong side of the Atlantic! Adele finds a Pied Water-Tyrant nest and we watch it popping back to feed its young.

We drive on, pausing to check out a small bird on the wires that turns out to be a Saffron Finch, then continue up into the forest at Aripo Heights. We make a short walk down the road, looking out for whatever we can find but in particular searching for Bat Falcon. There is no sign of it but while searching we do get lots of other birds including Streaked Flycatcher, Golden-fronted Greenlet and Southern Beardless Tyrannulet as close as you could ever hope for. We also find Rufous-browed Pepper-Shrike at last - we have been hearing them all over the place but at last get a good view. Then as we walk back to the vans suddenly we hear the Bat Falcon calling and in it flies in and lands in full view in the tree tops - and what a fabulous bird!! It is just stunningly marked and we enjoy scope filling views before it flies off to hunt.

We drive on to another spot and here we find another selection of birds starting with a superb Rufous-tailed Jacamar. We get excellent views of Chivi Vireo, Streaked Xenops, Cocoa Woodcreeper then after some effort finally get great views of Long-billed Gnatwren - a delightful little bird with its long cocked tail and long slim bill.

We drive round to where we are going to eat lunch with a nice covered seating area, where we unpack the picnic. As we eat Roy spots a Plumbeous Kite hunting over the fields and our security guy spots a beautiful Savana Hawk. He also picks out a Piratic Flycatcher - except as Roy calls to everyone to come and see it he takes another look and is puzzled. The colour of the tail suggested Streaked Flycatcher - but the head suggests Piratic?! Then suddenly it clicks - this has to be Variegated Flycatcher!! He is delighted as this is actually the first he has ever seen anywhere despite being within the range of this species on many occasions. We get superb views too - a very nice find. Before we leave a group of three Channel-billed Toucans fly over (making six-cans I think).

We drive back towards the Centre, making one more stop on the way to check out another spot for Masked Yellowthroat and are delighted when one comes

in to the call immediately and after flitting around a little perches up in full view. Then we head back to base arriving at exactly the time Dave said we would - what a professional he is!

We take a bit of a break in the heat of the day, before meeting up again around 4pm for our afternoon snack before leaving for our exciting Turtle Adventure! It takes quite a while to drive there and we watch out for birds on the way but spot nothing new until we are almost there when we add White-tipped Dove and Common Ground-Dove. Once we arrive we go through the checklist before enjoying our evening meal, then when the light fades we notice fireflies flashing before heading down to the beach.

Dave goes through exactly what we should do if and when a turtle appears and also points out the masses of Sargasso Seaweed which seems to be becoming a problem in the last couple of years and can become an obstruction for the turtles trying to get up the beach. Then we wait while Dave and Mahase search up and down the beach, using torches with red filters so as not to disturb a turtle should they find one. Almost immediately Mahase discovers one coming up the beach and we set off only to find when we arrive that it has met the wall of seaweed and turned back into the sea. So we wait again and we watch their red torchlights disappear up the beach. We wait and we wait and it is now completely dark and the sky is stunning with a wonderful show of stars. Both the guides search for a long way and all the way back spotting nothing then try again. It is pleasant standing here chatting but we are starting to get a bit nervous - it would be hugely disappointing if none appeared! Eventually, at just after 9pm, we suddenly hear they have found one!! It is very exciting as we set off but it is a long walk to get to the spot and we are nervous it too might choose to turn round.

We arrive and are excited to see it is still there and digging. There are a lot of people unfortunately but still it is brilliant to see this impressive animal - so bulky and massive yet digging so carefully with its massive and remarkably flexible back flippers. Then bad news... apparently there is a lot of debris under the sand that it keeps hitting and they are pretty sure it won't be happy with this spot and may still go back to sea - noooo! Yet it is still stoically digging and the local guys give it a hand and cleverly remove as much of the debris as they can which even includes an entire unopened coconut!

We begin to have hope it might stay after all as the hole gets deeper and deeper and then after what seems an age it stops digging and pauses for a little while. Then it starts laying eggs and this is when torches are allowed and the guides are very good making sure everyone gets a chance to see the eggs dropping into the hole. They say the animal goes into a trance at this point and you can do much more without disturbing it - including photography and shining torches. One after another the eggs drop into the hole, until there is quite a mass of them and then she starts to carefully cover them up, pressing the sand firmly down with alternate flippers as she does so. It is all wonderful to watch and so fascinating and the local

guys relate all sorts of facts about the turtles and what they eat, where they go and much more.

Eventually it has filled the hole and now comes a long period of camouflaging the spot in which the turtle scatters sand all around the entire area using a combination of back flippers smoothing it all out and front flippers to throw sand all over the place. She gradually moves around the whole area until it is remarkable how impossible it is to tell where she laid her eggs even though we were watching her!

Finally, after a couple of false starts, she heads down the beach and we watch as she drags her heavy body down towards the sea. It all looks a supreme effort and we can't help thinking what a relief it will be for her to finally feel weightless again as she slides away into the water. At last she reaches the waves and we watch as the first small wave overtops her bulky shell then after a couple more pulls a big wave breaks over her and when the wave retreats she is nowhere to be seen - a remarkably moving moment for some reason and it would just feel all wrong to leave before this finale. We walk back to the vans on a high - what an astonishing thing to witness.

Day 5: We wake to rain, though it seems to be heavy showers rather than constant and meet up for breakfast after what seems like a nice lie-in though it is actually 7.30am and quite early really.

After breakfast we gather at the balcony, where the usual birds are around the feeders before a select band set off for a walk with local guide Caleb. It is a beautiful walk, taking the Chaconia Trail and dropping down a lot of steps before entering the forest. Here all seems rather quiet at first but after a while we find a superb Lineated Woodpecker right out in the open where we can see it very well.

A little further on, a Golden-headed Manakin frustrates us when the superb male instantly flies off leaving behind an immature that is almost all green. We find Red-crowned Ant-Tanager and White-bearded Manakin and a brief Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, before coming out near the White-bearded Manakin lek. Here there are several birds and they are quite a lot more active than the other day, with a few males making quite a bit of noise and jumping between perches.

We can hear both Guianan and Green-backed Trogons calling constantly and eventually find both species high in the trees. Walking back up towards the lodge we pause at a shelter when it starts to rain again and are delighted when a Collared Trogon appears, then its mate too. They provide wonderful entertainment catching and eating huge Cicadas while we watch them and what a stunning bird the male is. A Trinidad Motmot is also here and showing well before we continue on our way. We pass a male Guianan Trogon on our way back and there is a Red-tailed Squirrel close to the feeders, then the rain comes

on again as we arrive at the veranda and enjoy a coffee while scanning out over the trees and watching the birds at the feeders.

From here we find our first female, or immature male, Bearded Bellbird - a rather green streaky bird on the same perch the calling male has been using in the distance. Shortly it is replaced by the adult male. Two Scaled Pigeons are on there too and our first Blue Dacnis. On the feeders there is nothing new though we do get good views of Tufted Coquettes as delightful as ever! The rain pours again and it is fabulous to watch how the hummingbirds react to this. They simply treat it as an opportunity to take a shower, fluttering their wings and fanning their tails while the rains pours on them. When the gong rings we head round to the dining room and another lovely lunch before having a bit of free time for chilling out or birding or whatever until 4pm and our visit to Wallerfield for night birding.

We arrive and soon find a Sulphury Flycatcher high in the Moriche Palms plus two Turquoise Tanagers and a Blue Dacnis. We are also hoping for Moriche Oriole here, as this is one of the only places we know to even try for this rare bird but we seem to be out of luck. The showers of rain send us back into the van then in a break in the rain we have time to eat our evening meal before it starts to get dark. The light is really fading now as we clear everything up and we assume any oriole will have gone to roost when suddenly there is one in the tree right beside us! A second bird flies in and we get great views of them right out in the open before they fly - talk about last second!

We wait for the rain to stop again before going in search of night birds and we are lucky to spot a Common or Black-eared Opossum wander out of the bushes and down the road. Now we are going to focus on night birds and we are about to walk off down the road to try for Pauraque when to our astonishment a Mottled Owl calls! This is a very difficult bird in Trinidad and we quickly try playing a little of the recording to see if it responds. Almost immediately it flies across the road then perches up and we get a brief view before it flies again. Then we hear another call and realise there is a second bird and remarkably quickly Dave is on it and this time we get superb views right out in the open. What a fantastic find!!

With the rain coming on again we get back in the vans and drive slowly along scanning with the torches and looking for eyeshine. It does not take very long to spot our first Pauraque perched on a road sign and it flies around a little showing well before flying away. Next, we get exceptional view of a Common Potoo and we set up the scope for amazing views and, with Dave stood to one side with the torch to reduce eyeshine, you can even see the brilliant yellow staring eyes. Our next target is White-tailed Nightjar and we are pleased to find one quite quickly and this one behaves impeccably, resting on the ground where we can shine the torches right on it. It is amazing how completely unbothered birds are by this and it sits there a while before flitting away a short distance. We find another Pauraque on the road, where we can scope it very well. and it has all

been unbelievably easy. As we drive back we get another brilliant view of the Potoo before heading back to the Centre.

We scan for anything we can spot on the way back as well and pick out a Tarantula on a post and the lead bus gets a brief Oilbird flapping around a fruiting palm - an amazing ending to the day.

Day 6: Today the weather looks much better and those on the veranda early are treated to nice sightings of Channel-billed Toucan, Bearded Bellbird, Squirrel Cuckoo, Bay-headed Tanagers and Rufous-breasted Hermit.

We gather after breakfast, ready for our outing along the Blanchisseuse Road. We gain some height before making our first stop and are very quickly finding birds with Golden-crowned Warbler and Golden-hooded Manakin shortly followed by a wonderful close up view of Rufous-breasted Wren. We coax a Swallow Tanager down a little from the tree tops and it perches up in full view looking gorgeous. We find a singing Tropical Parula then get even better views of two adult male Golden-headed Manakins - just fabulous.

Today is a drive and stop and search day and at our next stop we find Bay-headed Tanagers, Golden-fronted Greenlet and enjoy looking at some of the ferns, selaginellas, bromeliads and things in what is really a beautiful bit of forest. We drive on to a spot overlooking the mountains to the north and the sea beyond and can even see a large ship going past. Several Black Vultures are soaring over the forest and amongst them a White Hawk appears and shows superbly as it gains height then glides right over our heads. We get a brief view of Lineated Woodpecker, then above the trees find Grey-rumped Swifts and a single White-collared Swift. In one of the lower trees we are delighted to get fabulous views of a Tropical Parula, much closer than the earlier bird. A Black Hawk also flies overhead and perches for a while on top of one of the broken off trees. We are delighted when Dave finds a Black-throated Mango on its nest – a perfect little cup stuck on a horizontal branch. A Plumbeous Kite flies over as does a Magnificent Frigatebird.

We move on to another spot in search of Collared Trogon but with no luck. We do however get unbelievable views of Stripe-throated Spinetail - frequently a very skulking species and Evelyn even manages to get a photo! We also discover a tiny Worm Snake here, rather like a tiny thin Slow Worm.

We drop down to a town, where we can enjoy lunch with the chance of a toilet too and ponder on why the chicken wandered half way across the road then changed its mind!

Fed and watered, we drive next to a spot where Dave recently found Crimson-crested Woodpeckers excavating a hole but there is no sign of them on the big dead tree, though we can certainly see the big hole! Roy finds a Giant Cowbird nearby and we get good views of Zone-tailed Hawk, Streaked Flycatcher,

Smooth-billed Ani, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Greyish Saltator, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Yellow Oriole and Tropical Pewee. An Emperor butterfly flies past glowing in the sun. Suddenly Roy notices that while we have been distracted by all these birds the Crimson-crested Woodpecker has appeared and what a spectacular bird it is!

We spot a Short-tailed Hawk at our next stop, then at another spot we finally find a Collared Trogon with a very obliging female. We glimpse Red-legged Honeycreeper, then make an effort to try and find Trinidad Euphonia, finding it eventually at our second site when they come into some mistletoe and give good views. Ian is particularly thrilled.

We make a stop where Dave has seen White-flanked Antwren in the past and after playing a little of the recording get very good views indeed of both this and Barred Antshrike. Despite the habitat being completely inappropriate we are surprised to find a Sooty Grassquit here too!

Our final spot is where we hope to see Blue-headed Parrots and we hang around waiting for any to appear. We quickly notice a Rufous-tailed Jacamar positively glittering in the sunshine beside its hole in the banking above a track but we are surprised to see it getting harassed by a Southern Rough-winged Swallow. It seems strange the jacamar is so nervous of it when you consider the big dagger like bill it possesses! We see Turquoise Tanager here and a Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, then suddenly in come four Blue-headed Parrots which perch on the wires above the road. They are superb and we enjoy great views before they suddenly take flight and are gone.

Day 7: Some of us are back on the veranda at 6am and there are plenty of birds and everyone is feeling much more confident identifying them all now. There are a few nice moments, such as the White Hawk soaring up out of the forest, the Squirrel Cuckoo in the tree straight out from the veranda and by far our best views of Channel-billed Toucan.

After breakfast there is a Grey-fronted Dove under the feeders. We gather in the lounge for a chat with Jessie, our guide this morning for our walk down to the Oilbird cave. He explains what we are going to do and tells us a few facts about Oilbirds and the history of how they used to be used in the past - poor things! I guess if you are full of oil you are rather useful for all kinds of things!

We then get going, walking down the trail which heads down and down many steps then undulates along for a way. It seems rather quiet but we do find a Clearwing Butterfly, which is a lovely little thing with see through wings as the name suggests. The ferns along this route are exceptional and we are excited to find a Common Tent-making Bat.

Eventually we arrive down at the bottom of the ravine and here we wait while two or three people at a time go into the cave entrance with Jessie to look at the

Oilbirds. It is a fabulous experience and there are plenty to see, including some quite close ones. Jessie lights them up with a dimmed torch beam but even this is enough to get some quite good photos. There are a few individual birds around the periphery and a cluster of them on ledges towards the back and most people are surprised by just how big they are - like giant nightjars and unique being the only nocturnal fruit-eating bird. They can also echolocate to find their way round the cave. You can see them very well and there is light from the top of the cave coming in too. We can see perhaps thirty or so birds and they look very calm.

Outside, while waiting our turn we search for Trinidad Stream Frogs, which we have been hearing since the start of the holiday and are pleased to find several here. It is remarkably bird-less however. On the way back, we find several Owl butterflies, which look huge. They are fabulous and perch up nearby and chase each other around almost between our legs!

Back on the veranda we glimpse the Ruby Topaz hummingbird and there are plenty of the usual birds. A Black Hawk is circling high up and there are both Band-rumped and Grey-rumped and even Short-tailed Swifts amongst them.

After lunch a bunch of us decide to head down the trail to see what the White-bearded Manakins are up to. We are pleased to discover they are quite active and while they still spend periods of time not doing much they then suddenly start springing between twigs and the ground while making clicks and buzzed and peeoo noises – all very exciting to watch!

We spend a while enjoying them before deciding that, since we can hear lots of noise from the Bellbirds it might be fun to see if we can find our own. We walk down the trail until we can hear one good and loud and then suddenly it flies into the tree in front of us. We enjoy some wonderful views as it clanks away making an incredible noise, staying for a long time performing its two calls - the slow one and a faster clank-clank-clank repeated over and over

After a while we decide to leave it be and wander back up the track, pausing to enjoy more manakins on the way but then hear a calling White-bellied Antbird. This is a new species for the trip and knowing it can be a difficult bird to see we decide to try playing a bit of the call. Gradually it comes closer before appearing very briefly in a tangle of fallen tree branches - then equally quickly disappears and starts calling again from further away.

We wander back up to the veranda and enjoy watching whatever appears for a while, then at 4pm it is cakes and coffee. We enjoy our best views yet of Ruby Topaz hummingbird and Lyn spots a Great Antshrike - a very impressive black and white male with bright red eye. At dusk we watch through binoculars as Roy has discovered that Oilbirds fly out from the caves but are not very obvious to the naked eye - and sure enough, now and then, an Oilbird flies through the view and everyone cheers each time!

After our evening meal we decide to join the evening's night walk along the driveway. It is great to see so many insects out and about that are not at all obvious during the day – crickets that look like they made of mahogany, stick insects of different kinds, land crabs, harvestmen and down by the stream we find an impressive Chevron Tarantula a Turnip-tailed Gecko and back on the road a rather annoyed scorpion, which after an adventurous trip to the local hospital proved to have cause no harm!

Day 8: After checking out the usual birds at the feeders before breakfast we gather afterwards for our trip down to the coast. It is quite a long drive but we eventually arrive at Waterloo, where the tide is still quite a long way out but coming in fast.

Scanning the mud, we quickly find Little Blue and Tricolored Herons and a rather scruffy Yellow-crowned Night-Heron then add Whimbrel and a close Willet. We also find a Scarlet Ibis, though a disappointing first one of this species being a very dull coloured immature. Scanning more carefully we find several Black-bellied Plovers and with them a few Red Knot which is rather a surprise. A single Greater Yellowlegs is here and a few Spotted Sandpipers, while more distantly we add Semipalmated Plover and Western and Least Sandpiper. We are thrilled to find there are a lot of Black Skimmers and that some of them are actually skimming! It is amazing how they even use the smallest shallow bits of water amongst the mud. There are lots of Laughing Gulls and amongst them on the shoreline are more Black Skimmers and a few Large-billed and Royal Terns.

We decide to try another spot and as we walk back to the vans we find a distant adult Scarlet Ibis and wow what a colour it is! We hope for more later. We are astonished to discover that a tiny flock of just six small waders very close to the car park are actually four Semipalmated, a Least and a Western Sandpiper - a fabulous opportunity to compare these look-alike waders. We also can't fail to notice all the fiddler crabs waving cheerfully from the edge of their burrows.

We drive round to another location and are astonished by the noise! There must be hundreds, if not thousands, of Laughing Gulls here and they are all laughing!! It really is astonishing and in amongst them are lots more Black Skimmers and a few Large-billed Terns. There is a single, brilliant red, Scarlet Ibis and it really stands out amongst the other birds glowing red and so bright. A Clapper Rail appears amongst the tiny Mangrove bushes in front of us before making a dash across the open mud - a great view of this sometimes very difficult bird. We gather later that this has now been split into three species and, here, it is now called Mangrove Rail.

We walk down to the end of the jetty and find lots of Brown Pelicans gathered on the boats and rocks and also plenty of Ruddy Turnstones, including some in superb breeding plumage, though they certainly won't be breeding here. Dave is beckoning to us to come and see what he has found and we arrive to find

a Greater Ani amongst the mangroves, a superb find. Then, before we leave, we find a lovely breeding plumage Western Sandpiper.

We drive round to our lunch spot on the beach, where there are lots more pelicans on the jetty and way out to sea you can see them diving. It is nice to watch the locals sorting their boats and we eat to the accompanying reggae music. Before leaving the area entirely we drive just across the grass to the edge of the trees and here are more mangroves and the chance for woodcreepers perhaps. We have no luck but do see Northern Waterthrush and an absolutely stunning American Pygmy Kingfisher – what a gorgeous bird! Still keen to try for woodcreepers we try a couple more spots and eventually get Streaked-headed Woodcreeper very well. At another spot we find several Saffron Finches and more Greater Anis. Dave plays the call to try and coax them out and wow - bizarre or what!!

Time is flying now so we get on our way, stopping briefly for photos of the statue of Hanuman the Monkey God, which is very impressive. We drive to Caroni Swamp, heading to the toilets first as there won't be any on the boat! We park up and have walked perhaps three yards when Dave stops us to point out a Tropical Screech-Owl perched in a tree - which he confesses has been roosting in that same tree for some time now so was not quite as impressive as it might have appeared! Closer to the buildings he throws down a few biscuit crumbs and we wait for birds to come. At first we get just Carib Grackles but after a few minutes our target bird appears - a Masked Cardinal, a superb bird with reddish head and dark mask through the eyes.

We drive back to the jetty and we're soon on board with Lester, our boatman, who introduces himself and tells us bits and pieces about the swamp as we travel. We head down a channel lined with mangroves of different sorts and we spot a hummingbird - a new one called Green-throated Mango. This can be a tricky species to find but we are pleased to soon spot another two and even find one on a nest! We pass Little Blue Herons and Spotted Sandpipers, then Adele brilliantly spots a Cook's Tree Boa all coiled up in the trees above our heads. To our amazement a Greater Ani flies across the channel - the third place we have seen this species today, when some years we see none anywhere! Lester is a mine of information about the area and the trees, explaining the differences between the mangrove species and also telling us about how his father was integral to setting up the Reserve here - he sounds very proud.

We ease our way into a small blind ended channel, where after peering around we find a great bird, a Boat-billed Heron. It is a strange looking bird with such a large bill and big dark eyes peering back at us suspiciously. Moments later a Straight-billed Woodcreeper flies in and we get astonishingly close views, then further on a couple of Lineated Woodpeckers. Our first Scarlet Ibis fly over and Lester catches a couple of the tree climbing crabs and passes them to Dave to show us the red pigment in the claws and legs which ends up turning the Scarlet Ibis feathers red. Without this pigment from their food they remain

a rather washed out colour apparently. We continue on our way and we are thrilled when the next stop is to look at a Silky Anteater! How does he spot them? It is fast asleep unfortunately, though not surprisingly as they are nocturnal – but asleep they look a little like a furry tennis ball in a tree.

We continue on our way but now start to speed up a little as we want to be in the right place when the Scarlet Ibises start to come in. Entering one of the lakes we find some flocks of American Flamingos, a species that seems to have moved into the swamp in the past year or so and which we have never seen on this trip before. There are quite a few, including some beautiful adults but also immature birds so they must have bred not too far away, perhaps in Venezuela.

We arrive at our spot and are thrilled to see several flocks of brilliant red Scarlet Ibis winging in to land in the bushes in front of us within seconds of our arrival. They are unreal - redder than red - they almost seem to glow! Roy keeps count as flocks come in one after another - 24, then 56, then 28 and another 50 and it is amazing how rapidly the numbers build up. Soon there are around 200 birds in the trees in front of us and more coming and landing round the other side. Others seem to be flying over to another spot. As well as Scarlet Ibis there are Tricolored and Little Blue Herons, a Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Great and Snowy Egrets. Then a Short-tailed Hawk flies over and hundreds of Scarlet Ibis take flight wheeling round in a firework display of colour before landing back in the bushes again - wow!!

As we watch the spectacle unfold we pass out the rum punch and make a toast to the ibises and also to Dave for a great week - he has been excellent. What a treat to be here watching this amazing scene as more birds fly in, bringing the total to around 500 birds now. The colour against the green of the bushes plays tricks with the eyes, making them look like they are in another plane! But time is going fast and although it still seems light it is quite a way back and we don't want to be heading out in the dark, so Lester tells us to enjoy the last views and we start heading back. We follow flocks of Spotted Sandpipers heading to roost, then pass a Spectacled Caiman as we approach the jetty. We thank Lester and get on our way - arriving back a little late at Asa Wright but they expected that and have saved food for us.

Day 9: Today we are travelling to Tobago, so some of us make the most of the veranda for the last time, spotting all the usual culprits at the feeders and in the bushes while Ian and Evelyn stake out the Little Hermit bushes and manage to get several brief views.

After breakfast we make our fond farewells to the lovely staff here then we get on our way, travelling down to the airport, then it is hugs all round with Dave and Boyie before we check in and go through to the gate, where we catch up with the checklist.

The flight to Tobago is very short, just 18 minutes and then we are met outside by Newton who guides us to the bus. A Caribbean Martin flies over and is our first new bird on Tobago. It is about an hour's drive to the hotel and we pass lots of Magnificent Frigatebirds on the way plus a Yellow-crowned Night Heron and a couple of Green Herons.

We arrive at our hotel overlooking the bay and looking out to Little Tobago and check-in, then head straight for a welcome drink of rum punch before ordering lunch. The food is excellent, if a little slow coming, but it is lovely here and we watch frigatebirds and distant boobies out to sea from the table. At around 3pm we gather on the jetty for our boat trips over to Little Tobago. It is quite choppy but it only takes 15 minutes to get there, passing a few fish on the way under our glass bottom boat and Roy points out Sargeant Majors and a couple of Doctor Fish and Blue Tangs plus Gorgonians and Brain Corals too.

We arrive at the island, where we are welcomed by one of the islands resident Chickens! A self-sustaining population that has been on the island for over a hundred years so surely they count. Also high above we are surprised to find a Merlin circling high above the trees. It is then a steep walk up the steps and slopes quickly gaining height - though we pause here and there as we find each Trinidad Motmot.

At the far side of the island we are rewarded with wonderful views from the viewpoints, not just of the coastline and smaller islands offshore but more importantly of the various seabirds this place is so famous for. The most noticeable and exciting are perhaps the Red-billed Tropicbirds, which are wheeling round and chasing each other right in front of us - some coming very close indeed and what beautiful birds they are – so elegant and fast! We are astonished when Randy, our boatman-guide, points out a nesting bird right by our feet where it looks perfectly unbothered by our presence so close to its nest in which there is a big fluffy chick! Magnificent Frigatebirds are watching everything as they cruise around looking menacing. We make an effort to make sure we see the various colour morphs of Red-footed Boobies, as they can be white with black flight feathers, brown with a white tail or completely brown all over - but they all those amazing bright red feet. Many have chicks on nests down below, as do many of the Brown Boobies, which are much more straightforward in their plumage all looking exactly the same. Scanning the sea below Roy also pics up some distant Brown Noddies.

We also keep our eyes peeled for Scaly-naped Pigeon, a species gradually becoming more common here though still scarce. After a while Randy spots a group of them high on the slope and we get these very dark birds with a strange looking red and yellow eye in the scope. He also wanders up the track a way and finds a couple of White-tailed Nightjars and we go to see - though they are disturbed by our appearance and flap off into the bushes, where one perches for a little while on an open branch. We find a Brown-crested Flycatcher here too.

It has been fabulous to see the seabirds so well but with time moving on we make our way back, stopping to check out more Trinidad Motmots on our return walk. The boat trip back seems much less rough than going out and soon enough we are back at base.

Day 10: We meet at the bus at 6.30am and before heading off take photos of a bunch of Rufous-vented Chachalacas on the hand rails of the bus! We are soon on our way down the island, which is quite a long drive and we get a little snarled up in traffic around the bigger town, but we arrive at The Hilton where we drive in, pausing at the first of the lakes. There are plenty of birds around the lake, including quite a lot of Anhingas - though one of them is rather concerning. It appears to have stabbed something very strange looking with its bill, like a ball of fur and can clearly not get it off its bill. Its head is hanging down with the weight and we wonder what will become of it but there is nothing we can do. There are also Neotropic Cormorants and several Black-crowned Night Herons - and some of these appear to be doing something very surprising. They are flapping around in circles slowly above the lake and now and then one will dip right down the water almost hovering and dangling its legs while attempting to grab a fish!! This really is very interesting behaviour indeed and no-one I know has seen this anywhere else.

Scanning round the edge of the lake we find Spotted Sandpipers, Southern Lapwings, Green Heron and several Moorhens. These Moorhens looking rather different to ours at home, having a much larger shield that is both longer and wider creating a rather different look and may be split in the future and called Laughing Moorhen. There is a big Spectacled Caiman lying amongst the rubbish at the edge of lake and a smaller one a bit nearer too. Above the lake are plenty of Caribbean Martins and, as we are about to leave, a Great Blue Heron flies in.

We drive round to park under a tree where we are going to eat breakfast but first we check the small patch of water here where we find more 'Laughing' Moorhens and some superb American Purple Gallinules, often a shy species but showing very well here. There are Caribbean Martins overhead and Grey-rumped Swifts too and in the tree above us a Brown-crested Flycatcher. We walk through the gateway and find Least Grebes on the small patch of water here plus Wattled Jacana and in the bushes our first Eared Doves and Scrub Greenlets. We eat breakfast here, while we watch the various birds and then take a walk round the pools here, pausing first to check out a White-fringed Antwren that is calling nearby. We try playing a little of the call and get brief but very good views before it heads back into the foliage. We continue round the pools and find Brown-crested Flycatcher, Grey Kingbird, another pair of White-fringed Antwrens and a Barred Antshrike.

From here we then walk on to the next lake and here we find a superb male Anhinga which allows a remarkably close approach before flying off. A Yellow-breasted Flycatcher and Brown-crested Flycatcher are here in the trees and Martin spots our first Red-crowned Woodpeckers.

From here we take the boardwalk trail that goes through the mangroves. It is an astonishing place with all the roots from the mangroves arching all around us and with the shade of the trees it is amazingly atmospheric. We find more Red-crowned Woodpeckers, a Cocoa Woodcreeper, more Yellow-breasted Flycatchers then Newton points out a Common Potoo roosting high in the trees. It has its back to us but the markings are beautiful. We get very close views of two Yellow-crowned Night Herons, then spot another Common Potoo, this one facing us and what a strange face it has. We get incredible close views of Barred Antshrike and Brown-crested Flycatcher and a young Granada Tree Anole - an introduced species on Tobago and the only anolus species here.

We drive round to our final lake, where we scan through the mass of stunning water lilies, pink, purple, white and even blue - to find Green Heron, American Purple Gallinules, Laughing Moorhens, Wattled Jacanas and a Black-necked Stilt. Then as we are leaving these lovely grounds we spot a Merlin that flies in and lands in the tree tops allowing us fabulous scope views.

It is a shortish drive to Bon Accord Sewage Treatment Works, where we check out a nice flock of White-cheeked Pintails through the fence. They look great and beside them on the embankment are some waders, including Spotted Sandpipers and a single Short-billed Dowitcher. Short-tailed Swifts, Caribbean Martins and Barn and White-winged Swallows are flying over the pools and there are more Least Grebes.

Next we head to a very swanky looking hotel, where we walk through the foyer to the back which overlooks a beach, where they have created a safe place to swim using rocks on a big arch as a breakwater. On these rocks are lots of terns and gulls and working through them we find Laughing Gulls and lots of beautiful Roseate Terns. There are several Royal Terns too and also Cabot's Terns (now split from Sandwich Tern) and a smaller number of Cayenne Terns - still considered a subspecies of Cabot's Tern but with an entirely yellow bill. These subspecies do cross breed and create inbetween birds and we even find one of these with a black base to the bill and the rest yellow.

It is getting close to lunchtime now and we head to a restaurant at Pigeon Point, where we enjoy a very nice meal with a view of the sea. It seems very quiet out there but it is fun to watch the kite-surfers who are clearly having a wonderful time sometimes leaping high in the air!

After lunch we drive back up the island, stopping shortly at a spot called Turtle Beach. Here we check out a little creek where we discover Whimbrel, Semipalmated Plover, Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers and also some Granada Tree Anoles up in the trees, amazed at how big they are for an anole.

Heading up the Caribbean side of the island we watch the scenery go by and enjoy views of the sea, stopping here and there for photos. We make a stop

at Englishman's Bay in the hope of seeing Brown Noddies but though Roy spots one way out to sea there are none on the rocks below us where we were hoping they would be. There are certainly plenty of Magnificent Frigatebirds in many of the places and we spot the occasional Brown Booby and Royal Terns. Further on we stop at a bridge over a river where we get brilliant views of Giant Cowbird even perching on the cows, plus Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Spectacled Thrush and Black-crowned Night Heron but sadly no kingfishers which were hoping for.

The rest of the drive we make occasional short stops but one is particularly nice as we stop at the Pink Ice Cream Shop!! Wow - what amazing flavours with everything from ginger and coconut to Guinness! We pause to look down to the beautiful bay at Charlotteville and then drive the final short distance back to the hotel where we have time for a bit of relaxation before meeting up for our evening meal.

Day 11: We gather at 6.30am again and head south then inland, making our first stop to search for Common Potoo. Although we have seen some already Newton suggests the views of them here may be better. He very quickly finds two of them, one of which is in a good pose for photographs. We are well pleased but then as we head back to the bus he hears the call of a White-winged Becard, a scarce bird here and Newton's first in six months or more. It does not take long to find it and we get good views in the tree above our heads.

Back in the bus we start climbing on the road up into the hills of the central ridge. It is beautiful forest habitat either side of the road and we make occasional stops to see what we can find. Gray-rumped Swifts are flying up and down the road and there are Rufous-vented Chachalacas, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Scrub Greenlet, Red-legged Honeycreepers, Trinidad Motmots galore and a brief Ruby Topaz hummingbird. A Broad-winged Hawk disturbs a mass of Orange-winged Parrots from the trees and they call raucously as they scatter in all directions. We get good though brief views of our first Blue-backed Manakin, Yellow-legged and White-necked Thrushes and also of White-tailed Sabrewing. We also are joined by Lester, the guy from Caroni Swamp, who is bringing a group here next week and is hoping for some help from Newton on places to go.

We continue up the road to the lookout at the top and enjoy stunning views of a Great Black Hawk perched right out on the open – an exception view of a superb looking bird. We find more Red-legged Honeycreepers and spend some time trying to find a calling Venezuelan Flycatcher while we eat our breakfast. It is calling for ages but despite searching hard we never even glimpse it.

We drive down to the start of the Gilpin Trace and start our walk, pausing to listen to Newton explain a little about this National Park that covers around one third of the entire island and was founded back in the 1776 - perhaps the earliest act of the environmental movement. It is a really beautiful bit of forest with lots of palms and ferns and vines and a great variety of trees and we soon start finding good birds. Yellow-legged Thrushes seem to be showing particularly

well and we find a Rufous-breasted Hermit nest and watch the female briefly come in to feed her babies. A White-tailed Sabrewing shows very well, perching up for a while before being chased off by a second bird.

We can hear a Collared Trogon calling and try to encourage it in, however while we search for this Lester finds a Rufous-breasted Wren and we get excellent views of that before the Collared Trogons appear. Next, we find a Streak-breasted Spinetail and a little of the call brings it in very close. It seems completely unconcerned about us as it sits preening just a couple of yards away calling now and then.

We can hear Blue-backed Manakins calling and they are clearly lekking the other side of the stream somewhere but after a few minutes one flies up and lands in full view. What a stunning bird it is and over the next few minutes at least three males show very well indeed and a young one that looks more like a female. Two birds perch together calling and we hope we might see some proper leking behaviour but they never quite get there.

We move on and get great views of Plain Antvireo, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Plain-brown Woodcreeper, a brief Golden-olive Woodpecker, White-necked Thrush, Streaked Flycatcher and Olivaceous Woodcreeper, meaning we have seen all the woodcreeper species possible. Well pleased with our finds we start walking back up to the road but with the day now warming up things seem to have gone much quieter and we add nothing new on our return walk.

Back at the bus we decide to head back down and make one more stop in the way to check out a Fuscous flycatcher spot. There is no sign of any here but instead we are well pleased to find Red-rumped Woodpecker instead.

We drive back to Speyside and just before getting back we make a stop at Newton's house, where he has lots of hummingbird feeders. Some people have still not had a really good view of a Ruby Topaz and we are hoping there might just be one here. Within seconds of arriving we are delighted to see a stunning male turn up and over the next fifteen minutes or so we get lots of fabulous views of stunning males, as well as several females and White-necked Jacobin, Black-breasted Mango and a Copper rumped Hummingbird too. We also add Black-faced Grassquit to the list with a rather dull female.

Back at base we enjoy a leisurely lunch and then we have free time to soak in the sun, chill out in the pool or even snorkel if you can face the choppy waves and rather murky water close to shore this year. Further out it is clearer but this is not easy snorkelling - but if you are confident enough there is plenty to see with around 25 fish species seen in about an hour.

We meet up a little earlier tonight so that we can do our final run through the checklist and our traditional roundup of the holiday in which we choose favourite species, a favourite place and a 'magic moment'. With so many wonderful birds

and other things seen we decide to allow five species and it quickly becomes apparent that there are plenty for people to choose from as the list grows rapidly. Many different birds are chosen from a selection of hummingbirds right through to Magnificent Frigatebirds. There are motmots, manakins, trogons, potoos, honeycreepers, tanagers, kingfisher and many more - even tarantulas and tent-making bats! Several species secure more votes than most with Tufted Coquette and Rufous-tailed Jacamar scoring three, White-bearded Manakin and Oilbird four, Red-billed Tropicbird five and Scarlet Ibis six - but Leatherback Turtle wins by an easy margin with ten votes from twelve people - and well deserved too - what an experience it was to watch this astonishing animal.

Favourite places included 'Tobago', Matura Beach and Caroni Swamp but the most popular for obvious reasons was the veranda at Asa Wright - such a delightful place to be with so many birds and plenty of time to enjoy them with coffee or rum punch in hand! This also got a mention in the magic moments, as did watching the tropicbirds and the famous Scarlet Ibis roost while Martin said his was actually meeting up with old friends at the start of the holiday knowing what fun we would have. Peter and Brenda mention their lovely wedding anniversary celebrations but the winning moment by a country mile was the Leatherback Turtle laying eggs in the beach and especially watching it go back into the sea at the end. That moment, when the final wave breaks over its back and when the wave retreats there is no turtle any more, seems to have moved everyone and is very special. We are all agreed it has been a wonderful holiday and a great group and we have enjoyed a lot of laughs so thanks to everyone!

Day 12: Our final morning is a very relaxed affair with a leisurely breakfast looking out at the sea. As we eat breakfast a Green Turtle appears just offshore and though it only surfaces for a second or two at a time several people manage to see it. Then it is time to pack and drive to the airport for our flight back to Trinidad and then home.

Birds

Rufous-vented Chachalaca
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck
White-cheeked Pintail
Least Grebe
Brown Pelican
Anhinga
Neotropic Cormorant
Red-billed Tropicbird
Magnificent Frigatebird
Brown Booby
Red-footed Booby
Black-crowned Night-Heron
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
Boat-billed Heron
Striated Heron
Green Heron
Cattle Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Egret
Little Blue Heron
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Tricolored Heron
Scarlet Ibis
American Flamingo
Limpkin
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Pearl Kite
Plumbeous Kite
Long-winged Harrier
White Hawk
Gray-lined Hawk
Great Black-Hawk
Common Black-Hawk
Savanna Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Short-tailed Hawk
Zone-tailed Hawk
Black Hawk-Eagle
Yellow-headed Caracara
Bat Falcon
Peregrine
Merlin
Mangrove Rail

Wattled Jacana
American Purple Gallinule
Common Moorhen
Black-necked Stilt
Southern Lapwing
Black-bellied Plover

Semipalmated Plover
Short-billed Dowitcher
Hudsonian Whimbrel
Ruddy Turnstone
Greater Yellowlegs
Lesser Yellowlegs
Stilt Sandpiper
Solitary Sandpiper
Spotted Sandpiper
Willet
Red Knot
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
Laughing Gull
Royal Tern
Large-billed Tern
Cabot's Tern
Cayenne Tern (Cabot's subsp)
Roseate Tern
Sandwich Tern
Brown Noddy
Black Skimmer
Scaled Pigeon
Scaly-naped Pigeon
Pale-vented Pigeon
Eared Dove
Feral Pigeon
Common Ground-Dove
Ruddy Ground-Dove
White-tipped Dove
Gray-fronted Dove
Yellow-crowned Parrot
Orange-winged Parrot
Blue-headed Parrot
Brown-throated Parakeet
Green-rumped Parrotlet
Squirrel Cuckoo
Greater Ani
Smooth-billed Ani
Mottled Owl
Tropical Screech-Owl
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl
Oilbird
Common Potoo
White-tailed Nightjar
Common Pauraque
White-collared Swift
Band-rumped Swift
Gray-rumped Swift
Short-tailed Swift
Fork-tailed Palm-Swift
Rufous-breasted Hermit

Green Hermit
Little Hermit
White-tailed Sabrewing
Ruby-topaz Hummingbird
Green-throated Mango
Black-throated Mango
White-necked Jacobin
Blue-chinned Sapphire
White-chested Emerald
Copper-rumped Hummingbird
Long-billed Starthroat
Tufted Coquette
Guianan Trogon
Green-backed Trogon
Collared Trogon
Trinidad Motmot
Rufous-tailed Jacamar
Channel-billed Toucan
Ringed Kingfisher
Green Kingfisher
American Pygmy Kingfisher
Red-crowned Woodpecker
Red-rumped Woodpecker
Golden-olive Woodpecker
Lineated Woodpecker
Crimson-crested Woodpecker
Stripe-breasted Spinetail
Yellow-chinned Spinetail
Streaked Xenops
Plain-brown Woodcreeper
Olivaceous Woodcreeper
Straight-billed Woodcreeper
Cocoa Woodcreeper
Streak-headed Woodcreeper
Great Antshrike
Black-crested Antshrike
Barred Antshrike
White-flanked Antwren
White-fringed Antwren
Plain Antvireo
White-bellied Antbird
Ochre-bellied Flycatcher
Forest Elaenia
Yellow-bellied Elaenia
Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet
Yellow-olive Flycatcher
Yellow-breasted Flycatcher
Bran-colored Flycatcher
Tropical Pewee
Euler's Flycatcher
Great Kiskadee
Piratic Flycatcher
Variegated Flycatcher
Streaked Flycatcher

Gray Kingbird
Tropical Kingbird
Brown-crested Flycatcher
Sulphury Flycatcher
Pied Water-Tyrant
White-headed Marsh-Tyrant
Black-tailed Tityra
White-winged Becard
Bearded Bellbird
White-bearded Manakin
Blue-backed Manakin
Golden-headed Manakin
Rufous-browed Peppershrike
Chivi Vireo
Golden-fronted Greenlet
Scrub Greenlet
White-winged Swallow
Caribbean Martin
Gray-breasted Martin
Southern Rough-winged Swallow
Barn Swallow
Bank Swallow
Rufous-breasted Wren
House-Wren
Long-billed Gnatwren
Tropical Mockingbird
Yellow-legged Thrush
Spectacled Thrush
White-necked Thrush
Cocoa Thrush
White-shouldered Tanager
White-lined Tanager
Silver-beaked Tanager
Blue-gray Tanager
Palm Tanager
Turquoise Tanager
Bay-headed Tanager
Swallow Tanager
Blue Dacnis
Red-legged Honeycreeper
Purple Honeycreeper
Bicolored Conebill
Green Honeycreeper
Bananaquit
Black-faced Grassquit
Sooty Grassquit
Blue-black Grassquit
Saffron Finch
Masked Cardinal
Grayish Saltator
Crowned Ant-Tanager
Tropical Parula
Golden-crowned Warbler
Northern Waterthrush

Masked Yellowthroat
Crested Oropendola
Yellow-rumped Cacique
Moriche Oriole
Yellow-hooded Blackbird
Yellow Oriole
Shiny Cowbird
Giant Cowbird
Carib Grackle
Red-breasted Blackbird
Trinidad Euphonia
Violaceous Euphonia
Chicken!
A final total of 226 including the chicken!

Mammals

Red-rumped Agouti
Red-tailed Squirrel
Silky Anteater
Common Opossum
White-lined Sac-winged Bat
Long-nosed Bat
Tent-making Bat

Reptiles

Leatherback Turtle
Green Turtle
Red-eared Slider
Spectacled Cayman
Golden Tegu Lizard
Common Ground Lizard (Zandolee)
Green Iguana
Granada Tree Anole
House Gecko
Turnip-tailed Gecko
Cook's Tree Boa
Ratonel Snake
Worm Snake
False Coral Snake
Green-backed Snake
Trinidad Stream Frog

Other things

Trinidad Chevron Tarantula
Tail-less Whip Scorpion
Land Crabs
Mangrove Crabs
Fiddler Crabs
Harlequin Beetle
Cicadas
Flatworm sp
Millipedes, Crickets, Katydid, Harvestmen and
lots more!

List of butterflies, from Ian Killeen

1 Cattle heart	<i>Parades anchises</i>	Asa Wright entrance road
2 Illionius Giant Owl/ Cane Mort Bleu	<i>Caligo illionius</i>	Asa Wright
3 Flambeau	<i>Dryas iulia</i>	Several places (no photo)
4 Plain longtail	<i>Urbanus simplicius</i>	Asa Wright entrance road
5 Red postman	<i>Heliconius erato</i>	Asa Wright and Blanchiseuse Rd
6 Isabella longwing/ Tiger longwing	<i>Eueides Isabella</i>	Asa Wright and other places
7 Cassius blue	<i>Leptotes cassius</i>	Asa Wright and other places
8 Cramer's 88	<i>Diaethria clymena</i>	Asa Wright
9 Malachite	<i>Siproeta stelenes</i>	Asa Wright (no photo)
10 Cloudless sulphur	<i>Phoebis sennae</i>	Asa Wright
11 Skipper sp. indet		Asa Wright
12 Red peacock / coolie/ Red anarkia	<i>Anartia amathea</i>	Downhill from Asa Wright
13 White peacock	<i>Anartia jatrophae</i>	Several places
14 Blurry-striped longtail	<i>Chioides catillus</i>	Red-breasted blackbird site
15 Orcus checkered skipper	<i>Pyrgus orcus</i>	Near Manzanilla & Arena Forest
16 Hanno blue/ common blue (tiny)	<i>Hemiargus hanno</i>	Near Manzanilla
17 Florida White	<i>Appias Drusilla</i>	Arena Forest
18 Soldier	<i>Danaus eresimus</i>	Nariva Swamp, no photo
19 Agnosia clearwing	<i>Ithomia agnosia</i>	Asa Wright
20 Blue morpho	<i>Morpho helenor</i>	Several places
21 Blue cracker	<i>Hamodryas laodamia</i>	Asa Wright restaurant floor
22 False giant swallowtail	<i>Heraclides homothoas</i>	Asa Wright
23 Gulf fritillary	<i>Agraulis vanilla</i>	Manzanilla

The following are additions:

24 Penelope satyr	<i>Cissia Penelope</i>	Arena Forest
25 Orange mapwing	<i>Hypanartia lethe</i>	Blanchiseuse Rd
26 Mangrove buckeye	<i>Junomia genoveva</i>	Blanchiseuse Rd
27 Grecian shoemaker	<i>Catonephele numilia</i>	Blanchiseuse Rd Up a tree
28 Stinky leafwing	<i>Historis odius</i>	Blanchiseuse Rd Up a tree
29 Common mestra	<i>Mestra hersilia</i>	Tobago Starwood Trace
30 Red rim	<i>Biblis hyperia</i>	Tobago Starwood Trace
31 Gold-rim swallowtail	<i>Battus polydamas</i>	Tobago Starwood Trace
32 Venusta yellow	<i>Pyristia venusta</i>	Tobago Starwood Trace
33 Apricot sulphur	<i>Phoebis argante</i>	Asa Wright