

Holiday Highlights

Trinidad and Tobago

10 – 22 April 2016

Guides: Roy Atkins with Dave Ramlal and Rudal Ramlal on Trinidad and Newton George on Tobago

Guests: Arlene Long, Sue Ripley, Neil Avis, Sara and Roy Cowley, Denise and John Holbrow, Marilyn Pritchard and Mark Bridges, and John McAlpine

Day 1: Our flight leaves Gatwick on time to the minute!! Then we settle in for a long journey but with plenty of entertainment - films and tv programmes available, our books to read and of course plenty of birds to learn! We make a touchdown on St Lucia, which looks like quite scenic, though there doesn't seem to be a single bird as we look out of the plane window. We don't even have to get off the plane but sit on the tarmac while people get off and a few new people get on, then we are airborne again

It is only around 45 minutes from take off to landing again in Port of Spain, where we disembark excited to be here at last. Dave and his father Rudal are there to greet us and as we load up the minibuses we spot Palm Tanager and Tropical Kingbird - our first birds of the trip. It is an interesting drive, passing through the edge of town with the typical mix of rather nice looking houses and other rather ramshackle looking houses all jumbled together. A Carib Grackle is feeding beside the road and a few White-winged Swallows. We start gaining height as we head up into the Northern Range and the trees, tall bamboos and flowers along the road start looking wilder. There has clearly not been much rain and the whole area looked parched, though greener as we gain height. There are a few Turkey Vultures circling and those in Dave's van spot a Zone-tailed Hawk.

We arrive at Asa Wright and we are welcomed with a rum punch by Deborah, who distributes keys and explains where we will find what we need. Then after dropping the bags in our rooms several of us gather on the veranda in the fading light to see what birds we can find. There are lots of hummingbirds having a last drink before heading to bed - White-necked Jacobin, White-chested Emerald, Blue-chinned Sapphire and a Black-throated Mango are busy round the feeders, while hovering round the flowers is a delightful Tufted Coquette. They are so close!! Literally close enough to touch if they would let you. Under the feeders are a couple of Red-rumped Agoutis and we see Spectacled and Cocoa Thrushes and a Crested Oropendola flies past. Then as the light fades bats appear and some even come to the hummingbird feeders to sip the sugar water!

At 7pm we head for our evening meal then gather on the veranda again for a chat about tomorrow and to make our first short run through the checklist. Tired, we head for an early night so we'll up bright and early in the morning to start the holiday in earnest!

Day 2: We wake up to find it raining lightly as we gather on the veranda, though the sky has a look that it will stop soon. It is a lovely temperature and we are simply astonished by the number of birds around the feeders as soon as the food has been replenished. The bird tables are immediately populated by Palm Tanagers, Purple Honeycreepers, Bananaquits, Green Honeycreepers, Blue-gray Tanagers and more! Meanwhile the hummingbird feeders are also alive with birds including White-necked Jacobin, White-chested Emerald, Black-throated Mango, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, a single Blue-chinned Sapphire and a brief Green Hermit. Tufted Coquette feed around the vervain flowers as does an absolutely stunning Ruby Topaz, which looks dark much of the time then catching the light glittering brilliant red and yellow!

On the ground a Grey-fronted Dove is picking up the scraps along with Red-rumped Agoutis. More birds arrive on the bird tables - White-lined and Silver-beaked Tanagers, Violaceous Euphonias, Tropical Mockingbird, Spectacled Thrush and Cocoa Thrush plus astonishing Crested Oropendolas. A Turquoise Tanager appears in one of the trees but does not hang around. Flocks of Orange-winged Parrots fly in from down the valley, some landing briefly in the tree tops. Small parties of swifts cruise around down the valley, hard to identify unless they fly in front of the trees so you can see them properly, which reveals they are a mix of Grey-rumped and Band-rumped Swifts. A Long-billed Starthroat appears briefly and we get good views of a male Barred Antshrike followed later by the female.

One of the local guides, Jessie, spots a distant Bearded Bellbird calling from the top of one of the trees and we set up the scopes for good views. Considering the distance you can clearly see the strange 'beard' of thin wattles of skin hanging down. Then a little before breakfast another local guide, an old friend of Roy's called Mukesh, points out a nest of a Green Hermit just outside the door!! It has two tiny, tiny babies that have just hatched recently and look unfeasibly small. What a treat! After a while the female comes and almost seems to fold herself in half to fit into the nest, her head sticking up and her tail out at a strange angle, just delightful.

There is a Praying Mantis on the back of one of the chairs during breakfast and the open windows mean it is hard to concentrate on what we are eating as hummingbirds hover outside. After breakfast Dave arrives to talk about what we are doing today and for the rest of the week and then take us for a walk down the main trail here. First we can't resist checking if anything different has come to the feeders and Dave points out the trees most likely to attract the birds. In one he spots an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher and a Bay-headed Tanager and it is hard to pull ourselves away from the amazing scene with so many birds at the feeders.

We start our walk with a great bird - a Green-backed Trogon. We find a female Blue-black Grassquit then pass several familiar species as we walk down the trail, soon arriving at a tall stand of bamboos where a pair of Trinidad Motmots are calling. They take a little finding but eventually we get superb views of these beautiful birds, a recent split from Blue-crowned Motmot and an island endemic. Walking on down the trail we pause here and there as Dave points out some of the coffee trees, tea, guava, nutmeg, bay leaf and other spice trees that are in the grounds and explains about the history of the site being an old plantation in the past. All the coffee we are drinking at the centre still comes from beans collected in the grounds. Butterflies fly past including The Postman and other Heliconia species, a Sulphur species and a Cattle Heart and we stop to look at an enormous Leaf-cutter Ant nest, though there doesn't appear to be very much activity there today.

We walk on down to the famous White-bearded Manakin lek where we find three males. They are lovely little birds and very cute but we are hoping for a bit more action as they seem content just sitting around at the moment, perhaps we will see them dance later! As we watch them we become aware of a Black-faced Antthrush calling and Dave tries whistling in response. It sounds to be coming nearer and we continue calling back and forth. It takes a little while but eventually it appears! Initially it is very difficult to see, just its head over the brow of the ridge then it vanishes again but after a little persistence we are rewarded with superb views of this absolutely wonderful little bird. It is something like a cross between a thrush and a crane, walking along the ground, stopping now and then to give its lovely call, tail cocked, and then walking on again.

We work our way further down towards the Bearded Bellbird area, where we can hear three or four calling and find Streaked Xenops and Cocoa Woodcreeper on the way. Then we hear a White-bellied Antbird calling, we have no luck with finding it but instead get brief views of Crowned Ant-Tanager. A Golden Olive Woodpecker flies in and is followed by a second that it flies over to feed, a young one! We get very good views of these before starting to search for the Bearded Bellbird. We walk slowly back up with the noise of bellbirds all around and then Dave spots one. It is rather silhouetted, so we try to go past and look back and at last get excellent views of this bizarre bird. Bearded Bellbird is a good name since it has a beard of thin wattles, black and white strings of skin hanging down from the throat and they swing and sway as it moves, very strange indeed. And the call, wow what an amazing sound, it is so loud when you are underneath the bird it makes your ears ring!

It is fast approaching lunch time, so we start walking back up the slope stopping to check out whether there are any Golden-headed Manakins at the lekking area. There is a single male here calling a little now and then and what a gorgeous bird! Through the scope he looks stunning. A Tropical Parula is singing overhead and

we coax him down to get some excellent views before we wander up to feeders, where a new bird is on the bird table, a stunning Yellow Oriole all yellow and black. Then it starts to rain and comes on quite heavy and we realise we have timed things very well!

After lunch it continues raining for a little while then the sun comes out and as a result the birds seem hyperactive, with dozens of Bananaquits and honeycreepers on the feeders. We get excellent views of Long-billed Starthroat and spend a little time working on the swifts, finding good views of Band-rumped and Grey-rumped but also getting a few Chestnut-collared which is much scarcer. Then raptors start appearing! Amongst the many Turkey Vultures there are a small number of Black Vultures but more exciting are good views of Black Hawk and a beautiful White Hawk. A nice pale coloured Short-tailed Hawk appears and at the same time both Plumbeous Kite and Black Hawk-Eagle! We'll surely get Plumbeous Kite again so Roy tells everyone to focus on the eagle as this is a great bird to see here. We spend a little while working on another raptor that we eventually decide has to be an immature Yellow-headed Caracara and high over the ridge a few Magnificent Frigatebirds fly through.

Pulling us back down to the trees we find a superb Channel-billed Toucan in the tree tops calling for some time and looking absolutely superb through the scope. A brief female Guianan Trogon is followed later by a pair of Green-backed Trogons, the female of which seems to be 'anting' by flying to a big ant nest in the tree. We get good views of Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, House Wren and a beautiful family of Blue Dacnis with three babies following the adults around begging. A Bay-headed Tanager appears and, in the same tree, Turquoise Tanagers and a Golden-fronted Greenlet.

At 4pm it is coffee time and cakes are brought out and we enjoy these scanning the tree tops, before deciding to take a stroll down the road. It seems quiet after the bird feeders and we walk slowly listening and scanning for birds, initially finding nothing new. We soon find a Tropical Pewee fly catching from the trees and a couple of Plumbeous Kites glide over high above the trees. We flush Northern Waterthrush off the road then find several female White-bearded Manakins in one fruiting tree with Violaceous Euphonias. At the far end of our walk is a Trinidad Motmot, then as we walk back we get a brief view of a Euler's Flycatcher and even briefer views of Streaked Flycatcher. Perhaps the biggest highlight is a stunning Owl Butterfly perched on the wall, a huge thing with the distinctive big eye circles on the hind-wing and a great finish to our walk. We arrive back for a rum punch on the veranda, while watching another Trinidad Motmot in the trees. What a fantastic day it has been to start the holiday and we chat about it over our evening meal, before running through the checklist and heading to bed and it is not even 9pm!

Day 3: Several of us gather at the veranda again around 6am, to find the feeders are jumping with birds again, honeycreepers, tanagers, thrushes, mockingbirds, hummingbirds and

everything. The big difference is that while the feeders are just as active, the people are a bit calmer! Even after just one day many people know at least some of the birds and some people have pretty much got the hang of them all and Mark in particular puts in a most impressive display, naming almost everything. We are pleased when one of the centre guides spots a Guianan Trogon and we soon have scopes set up on the bird, a lovely male. Shortly a raptor is spotted high up over the valley and Roy quickly identifies it as a Grey-headed Kite which is a great find.

We set off after breakfast for our day out at Nariva Swamp, pausing en route to look at Smooth-billed Anis and a nice Gray-lined Hawk perched in a tree nearby. A couple of Short-tailed Swifts are flying overhead and Southern Rough-winged Swallow and Grey-breasted Martins are on the wires.

We arrive at our first destination, pausing on the entrance road where we get out and scan the fields soon finding a Red-breasted Blackbird. The chest is a brilliant colour and while we take turns at the scope Dave points out some Green-rumped Parrotlets very close by in the trees, delightful, miniature, green parrots. Perched on fences and on wires and branches out in the field are Tropical Kingbirds and a huge flock of Black Vultures is circling overhead with two Savannah Hawks amongst them.

We move on a little way stopping again for a scan and finding Wattled Jacana, White-winged Swallows and we get superb views of a pair of Yellow-chinned Spinetails. There are lots of Cattle Egrets in the fields and a whole bunch of Black Vultures, that seem very interested in a couple of calves and are following them around like a flock of chickens! We get excellent views of White-headed Marsh Tyrant, a striking bird indeed and then find a Savannah Hawk perched on one of the trees. It looks superbly elegant with long thin legs and when it drops to the ground you can see the gorgeous yet subtle colours. There are lots of Smooth-billed Anis and a little further on a few Grassland Yellow Finches, Southern Lapwings and Green-rumped Parrotlets are in a muddy area beside a farm. A delightful Pied Water Tyrant shows very well indeed, flying up to the nearest wires.

We follow the road round, making a stop and getting out again. A Yellow-bellied Elaenia is calling from the trees here and then Rudal checks a small collapsing barn, in which he finds a family of Tropical Screech Owls, two adults and a youngster. We spend a while enjoying these and taking photos and then there is great excitement when a Zone-tailed Hawk appears right over our heads, providing the best views of this superb bird you could ever hope for!

The day is really heating up now as we head towards the coast, driving through towns and scattered houses, some very run down while others look superb. We pass through agricultural land and a mix of fields and woodlands and mangos and other fruit trees etc. Lunch is all made up by the centre and in large trays ready

to serve! We sit at the coast watching the waves and enjoying the breeze as we eat but it is quite quiet bird-wise. Carib Grackles are trotting around in the car park and above our heads are Grey-breasted Martins. A single Brown Pelican flies past out at sea and a couple of Magnificent Frigatebirds cruise high overhead. The beach has palm trees all along the back and there is a real Caribbean feel to the place, including being hot and humid. Some fish in the shallows with goggle eyes that poke above the surface of the water are quite fascinating to watch and on the grass we find Common Ground Lizards, known locally as the Zandolie.

After we have eaten we drive along the sea front, scanning for raptors but finding just a single Gray-lined Hawk. We pass Great Egrets and make a stop at a spot where the road crosses a little creek in the mangroves. Here we park and walk back, soon finding a Yellow-headed Caracara and a very smart Striated Heron at the edge of the mud. A Pygmy Kingfisher is calling and after a search we locate it and are soon enjoying great scope views of this superb little bird. Nearby a Black-crested Antshrike appears and we notice lots of little fiddler crabs waving at us from the mud! Sadly none are being eaten by a Crab Hawk that was discovered here recently. There are a few lizards scurrying around too, green ones and very stripy ones and Roy identifies them later as male and female Rainbow Whiptails. We move on pausing again a little further down the road, where we find Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, another Black-crested Antshrike, Northern Scrub Flycatcher and a far too brief Bicolored Conebill.

We turn inland towards the swamp, which at this time of year is rather dry. There are lots of watermelons being grown here and we drive slowly along checking fields and scrubby bushes, pausing to check out a Lineated Woodpecker in the palm trees. It looks very impressive through the scope. Nearby we hear a Striped Cuckoo calling and after a bit of a search discover it is very close and when it perches out in the open we get incredible views! This is often a very difficult bird to see, so we are thrilled. We spot at least three Yellow-headed Caracara fly by, then in a small pool find more Wattled Jacanas and a Solitary Sandpiper. A fabulous Long-winged Harrier appears quartering the tall grasses, a wonderfully elegant and smart looking bird that Sara is particularly excited to see. Then to our astonishment a pair of Blue-and-yellow Macaws appear in the background, flying across in front of the trees before landing in full view in a distant palm where we can see them through the scope quite well. Despite the distance we are very pleased to see these rare birds with perhaps just 16 pairs on the island!!

Driving slowly on we pass several Tropical Mockingbirds, Blue-black Grassquits, Striated Herons, Great Egrets and another Long-winged Harrier over to our right. We find a couple of Gray Kingbirds and Marilyn spots a large bird in the grass which we are astonished to discover is a Limpkin! We spend a while looking for Pinnated Bittern, with no luck but spot another distant harrier before making a stop for a scan

and here we enjoy rum punch and cake while watching a flock of four very distant Red-bellied Macaws.

We start heading back along the road, stopping to scope some distant Yellow-crowned Parrots in a bare tree. But this seems amusing when moments later a flock fly into bushes right beside the road and we get incredible views as more and more come in, perhaps approaching twenty in all. After enjoying these we are becoming aware that time is really motoring fast and we drive on only to stop again shortly as flock after flock of Dickcissels are flying over the road!! A few hundred fly over presumably heading to a roost spot somewhere.

We start driving now, with the intention of getting back in time for our evening meal as we are getting very late. But make one final stop to look at a Cocoi or White-necked Heron, before heading for home thrilled with a fantastic day's birding, and arriving a few minutes late for our evening meal but this is not a problem. Our meal tonight is a more typical Trinidad dish rather like chapattis and curry with mashed pumpkin but without the spices, delicious!

Day 4: Birding the lowlands can get very hot, as we now know, so this morning we are aiming to get out a bit earlier, so it is breakfast at 6am ready to head down the hill at around 6:30am or shortly afterwards. It is a lovely day with light cloud and a very nice temperature at this time of day and as we gather at the vans a Golden-Olive Woodpecker appears in the tree above our heads. There are Orange-winged Parrots, Crested Oropendolas, Palm and Blue-gray Tanagers and Purple Honeycreepers high a dead tree too.

We set off on what is a day of many short stops searching for birds and our first is not very far down the hill when we try a spot for Grey-throated Leaf-tosser. There seems to be no sign of it here but while we are looking we discover a calling Red-rumped Woodpecker. He proves hard to find but he flies in and out before eventually settling to feeding on a tree out in the open and we get fabulous views of this tiny woodpecker.

Further down we make another stop as we hear a Bright-rumped Attila calling. Many of these forest birds are almost impossible to find but it is not long before it appears, almost over our heads! A White-bellied Antbird is calling nearby and with patience we get fabulous views of this delightful bird too when eventually it hops out on the forest floor below us and perches calling on a log in full view. A pair of White-flanked Antwrens appears in front of us at the same time, the male the smartest ever!

Delighted with our spoils so far we move on, driving down the valley where we make a stop at a spot that can hold a few nice species. Southern Rough-winged Wallows are gathered here and Gray-breasted Martins too but even better are the strange shaped Short-tailed Swifts wheeling round overhead, great birds! We find

a Grayish Saltator is calling in the bamboo but there is no sign of the Masked Yellowthroat we are searching for.

Our next spot proves very good indeed with a beautiful Rufous-tailed Jacamar, like something between a bee-eater and a kingfisher with iridescent green plumage. A Rufous-browed Pepper-shrike is singing here and we soon find it, much easier here than the bird singing in dense high trees at Asa Wright! It is joined by a second and we also find Masked Yellowthroat that shows very well. The day is warming up rapidly now and huge numbers of Black and Turkey Vultures are soaring high overhead. There are lots of Ruddy Ground doves here and a nice Yellow Oriole.

We move on to another spot, where we find Yellow-bellied Elaenia and get excellent views of a tricky species here, a Southern Beardless Tyrannulet. A Zone-tailed Hawk flies over and as we leave a Crimson-crested Woodpecker flies over perching briefly on a distant tree. Again we move on finding another Zone-tailed Hawk, Gray Kingbird and various common species as we crawl down a very rough track hoping for Pearl Kite. After some way a Gray-lined Hawk appears being mobbed by something much smaller, a Pearl Kite!! We watch this bird as it flies off over the trees, which takes our attention so that we fail to spot another Pearl Kite perched right out on the wires just behind us. It is an exceptionally close view of this beautiful little bird and the cameras are really clicking.

We move on again, making a stop for Ice-cream in the heat before heading up into the woodlands higher up, pausing enroute to admire a White Hawk before Dave hears a calling Sooty Grassquit. We get out and quickly find the bird in a small citrus tree. To our astonishment an Anhinga is circling high up over the trees! Two Plumbeous Kites show well, both in flight and perched in the tree tops as we near our lunch spot, superb! We eat lunch at the edge of the forest but no birds of any note appear, however there are a few butterflies and we identify Doris and Cattle Heart amongst them. We then head back to the lodge where we have a bit of free time to chill out and relax.

Of course there is always the option of time spent on the veranda watching the hummingbirds, tanagers, honeycreepers and anything else around and we are pleased to add another species of hummingbird, a Rufous-breasted Hermit. John spotted a Black Hawk-Eagle this morning while we were out and Roy and Sara head down to check out the manakins finding several birds present and displaying.

At 4pm Dave and Rudal return to pick us up for our trip to Matura Beach, where we are hoping to see Leatherback Turtles come up onto the beach to lay their eggs. It is quite a long and uneventful drive, though it is always interesting to watch the scenery going by and pass through the towns. We arrive with enough daylight left to catch up with the checklist before our evening meal and some rum punch! We also notice there are fireflies, or more probably a species of click beetle that

lights up as it flies around, glowing for much longer than a firefly so some people call them lantern bugs.

After we have eaten, the light fades rapidly and we walk down to the beach where we are to wait to see if any turtles appear. Dave explains what will happen and tells us a few details about the turtles. How many eggs they lay, how often, how long they live etc then we wait for the local guides to arrive as we watch the light fade and the stars come out between the clouds.

Our guide, when he arrives, is very knowledgeable and tells us more information about how they look after the turtles, protecting them, marking them with tags and recording everything they can. They have clearly made a huge difference to the success of the turtles in getting young back to the sea, as they used to be eaten by people as well as their natural predators. He shows us the tags and talks us through the life of a turtle then says that a turtle has come up the beach but the other side of the river, so given it is a fair walk and we have people in the group who would not be able to get that far we decide to wait and hope for a nearer one.

After a little while his radio comes to life with news that another has come up much closer and with great excitement we set off! It is about a ten minute walk, though given the soft sand quite hard for John H and a couple of us help him along but we can't help smiling when the local guy offers a hand and virtually lifts him off his feet as he helps him the rest of the way!! It is now completely dark and we arrive to find the turtle already digging with its back flippers, creating a deep hole. It is simply wonderful to see it digging so rhythmically and carefully, the back flippers so flexible as they gently scoop up sand and flick it away from the hole. As it gets deeper it can hardly reach any more sand but keeps going until it is sure the hole is deep enough, then after a short pause it starts laying eggs. They look rather like large ping-pong balls and she lays about 80 or so. While she is laying it is ok to take photos but the moment she stops we turn off the torches and watch as she covers the eggs and presses down the sand with great care, using her weight to press the sand into place. Once the hole is full again she now camouflages the area with much sweeping of sand, pushing it everywhere with her huge front flippers, including all over us! She even creates a false hollow to distract predators away from the right spot.

While she is doing this we spot a second turtle coming up the beach not far away and walk over to watch the start of the process, as she slowly moves up the beach and starts sweeping sand around with her front flippers. She finally settles on a spot and starts to dig, at which point we return to our friend who is still camouflaging the whole area. She takes her time but eventually turns towards the sea and we watch her slowly make her way back down the shore and enter the water, waves breaking over her back as she goes deeper in. You can almost feel her relief as finally she

is deep enough to vanish into waves, she is gone and it is an amazingly moving moment.

Smiling, we start walking back towards the car park and as we do so it starts to rain, though not heavy and it feels like we have timed things very well indeed. What a wonderful experience it has been.

Day 5: After our late night last night only a few people make it to the veranda before breakfast and we don't add any new birds. After breakfast we gather for a walk but before we leave we discover there is a fruiting tree that suddenly this morning is alive with birds! There are loads in there, both Golden-headed and White-bearded Manakins, Crested Oropendolas, Bay-headed Tanagers, Violaceous Euphonia, Blue Dacnis, both honeycreepers, Spectacled Thrush, Turquoise Tanagers, Tropical Mockingbirds and more. It is just a riot of colour and movement and we spend some time enjoying the scene before starting out walk.

We decide to take the Chaconia Trail and Jessie, one of the local guides, agrees to accompany us. We walk slowly down through the trees and bamboos pausing to check any movement and soon find a singing Rufous-breasted Wren. It is well hidden but eventually we get a few glimpses before it vanishes and in the search we also find a superb male Great Antshrike. Further down we are delighted when a Long-billed Gnatwren appears and provides fabulous views, a brilliant little bird with its long thin bill and tail cocked almost over its back!

We continue down to the bottom of the steps and here find a pair of Euler's Flycatchers that show very well and we even scope them. We hear White-bellied Antbird calling but it doesn't seem interested in coming in to the call, then we hit a quiet stretch with nothing else different before coming to the main trail by the White-bearded Manakin lek. There is absolutely nothing happening here so we wander a little further down to get some fabulous views of Bearded Bellbird. They are performing very well and we get wonderful scope views, the beard is so bizarre but they are meant to be in fashion at the moment!! From here we work our way slowly back up the main trail finding a nice pair of Green-backed Trogon and we see a couple of tiny baby Long-billed Gnatwren in a nest. As we arrive back at the feeders the fruiting tree is still jumping with birds and now there are a couple of Golden Tegu lizards under the feeders.

From the veranda things are lively too with the usual hummingbirds including Ruby Topaz, Tufted Coquette and Long-billed Starthroat, while high above the ridge are Common Black Hawk and Plumbeous Kite. Band-rumped and Grey-rumped Swifts are cruising around down the valley and a huge Green Iguana appears, a very impressive beast indeed!

After lunch we have a bit of free time to enjoy the birds on the feeders and scan for raptors before Roy leads a short walk to see if the manakins are lekking. There are certainly Plumbeous Kites high over the ridge and Black Hawk too and all the usual birds on the feeders. At 2:30pm a small group of us walk down the main trail to see what is happening. The fruiting tree is still alive with birds though fewer now and we pause to check the Golden-headed Manakin lek but all is quiet. However arriving at the White-bearded Manakin lek is a real treat as there are several birds present and the sound of chirps and buzzing wings and loud snaps is all around as they dance! They leap back and forth between thin twigs and down to the ground and back up and back and forth and it is just fabulous to watch. The light is good too and we get some great photos before gradually they seem to calm down and one by one disappear off into the forest, just leaving two or three birds at the lek.

We walk back up to the veranda and discover we have just missed a Rose-chested Grosbeak! It is a fabulous breeding plumage male too, which is a rare bird here indeed. Disappointed we wait for a little while and suddenly it is back!!! What a superb bird it is, a beautiful black, red and white bird perching right out where we can even scope it! Over the next half hour or more it keeps returning and everyone gets to see it well and it is even still there when Dave and Rudal arrive at 4pm, causing Dave to dash around with his camera.

They are here to pick us up for our night birding session and we are soon on our way, heading down to Wallerfield first, where we pass a huge flock of Black Vultures gathering near the roost site as we go in, they are everywhere and in their hundreds! We hope to get a couple of new birds including Sulphury Flycatcher, which we find almost as soon as we arrive, obtaining good scope views in the palms. Overhead we see several Fork-tailed Palm Swifts, tiny and extremely elegant they look almost fragile as they zip by. We were hoping to see Red-bellied Macaws here but have no luck before the light starts to fade and we need to go, only pausing to look at a lovely flock of Short-tailed Swifts as we leave.

We head round to where we are going to do our night birding but first we have our evening meal. There are Cattle Egrets and Great Egrets heading to roost, a distant Savannah Hawk in the trees and a few Green-rumped Parrotlets and out in the fields a couple of Red-breasted Blackbirds.

We finally set off for our night birding, driving slowly along the tracks scanning around with torches, soon finding a few Southern Lapwings. There is eye-shine coming from the small pond by the road and closer inspection reveals it to be from a little group of baby Spectacled Carmen in the small pool and they look great, so small and all stripy. We drive quite a way seeing nothing else and pause to look at the Tropical Screech Owls at the little ruined hut. Then we spot our first Pauraque and walk a short distance to see that before it flies. Driving further along the road we see several more before stopping to have a look at a Common Potoo. It is perched

in one of the higher trees and we set up the scope to enjoy fantastic views in the torch beam. It is a great sight and just yards down the road we find a second on a fencepost that allows quite a close approach.

We move on slowly and find a Pauraque right beside the track that looks superb in the torch light then suddenly we hear a Rufous Nightjar calling! Dave jumps out and we gather nearby. The Rufous Nightjar lazily flies over our heads to some scrubby trees nearby where it lands on one of the branches and through the scope we can see it in the torchlight. It looks quite dark and does indeed have a hint of rufous. Again it flies and again right over our heads, beautifully lit up by the torches. Delighted we then try for White-tailed Nightjar and it does not take long to find one, which Dave spots perched on a broken stick and once again we enjoy fantastic views! Some even get great photos before it flies. It has been an immensely successful evening with all our target birds easily found and a bonus one in Rufous Nightjar, unexpected and even a new bird for Roy!

Day 6: Arriving on the veranda this morning we find a Boat-billed Flycatcher perched up the tree, above yesterdays 'magic' tree which still appears to be pretty magic with loads of birds already feasting on the berries. Bay-headed Tanagers, Turquoise Tanagers, honeycreepers, Golden-headed Manakins and more are there, a great start to the day. The hummingbird feeders are busy and a few moments later Sara spots a Scaled Pigeon perched in one of the treetops, a very nice find. Searching the magic tree for more birds we are pleased to find a Guianan Trogon and we get great views of a male Barred Antshrike too.

At 8:30am we gather at the buses, ready for our day along the Blanchiseuse Road. We start by driving right up to the masts at the top of the hill, where we scan the tree tops and bushes finding nothing of note but up at the masts we are impressed to see a Hercules or Rhinoceros beetle. It is so big it fills the palm of Roy's hand!

We drive further down the road and make a stop and have a look round. A Collared Trogon is calling above us and we get a disappointing view from right below before it flies. Swallow Tanagers perform well perching out in the open and we get a very brief view of Plain Brown Woodcreeper and a female Crowned Ant-Tanager. Further on we make another stop down a small side track. Unfortunately Arlene feels a little unwell and Dave calls for a car to pick her up and run her back to the lodge. The rest of us start walking down the track, soon finding White-necked Thrush, Golden-headed Manakin and Golden-crowned Warblers working through the lower bushes. Further on we hear a Chestnut Woodpecker and try to coax it in. It flies right in over our heads but doesn't hang around flying away again very quickly.

We walk on down the track and pause when we hear a calling Golden-Olive Woodpecker. It flies in and perches right out in the open on a bare trunk. As we

are watching this a superb Blue Morpho Butterfly flies by with its strange rollercoaster flight path up and down as it goes, an astonishing sight! We see more Swallow Tanagers then the Chestnut Woodpecker re-appears and this time we get much better views. As we walk back towards the vans we also get much better views of Collared Trogon with a superb male perching lower in the trees for us.

We drive further down the road, making another stop to look at a Rufous-breasted Hermit on a nest hanging below a palm frond. A Stripe breasted Spinetail is calling nearby and we try to find this skulky bird, some people managing at least a glimpse. A Long-billed Gnat Wren shows well, if briefly and a couple of people glimpse a Little Hermit at some flowers by the road. Further on a pale phase Short-tailed Hawk is hovering over the road and we get a brief view of a Zone-tailed Hawk.

It is very hot now indeed with the temperature well into the thirties, which is unusual even here and we stop for lunch at a little roadside shelter. As we eat there are occasional birds flitting around in the undergrowth and we see Golden-crowned Warbler, Slaty-capped Flycatcher and a couple of lovely Speckled Tanagers plus several butterflies most of which go unidentified.

After we have eaten we move down the road to a good area for Trinidad Euphonia. We can hear one calling as soon as we get out and scan the mistletoes for any feeding on their favourite food. After some time we find a female but we have to work quite hard, before finally getting good views of a smart male. Nearby we get excellent views of a Long-billed Gnatwren in the lower bushes.

We head back the way we came then take another road down to a small village where a flock of Blue-headed Parrots are perched on the wires. We get out and walk down the road for better views and they fly to a nearby tree, where we scope them. All the time Yellow-rumped Caciques are flying over, back and forth to a breeding colony behind us where they are busy at their nests. There are very close Carib Grackles too calling noisily and a superb Yellow Oriole.

Time has run out though and so after a piece of cake and a drink we load back into the vans and head back to Asa Wright, where we chill out once again on the veranda. Knowing a couple of people are not going to make the walk down to the Oilbirds in the morning we wait until dusk to see if can spot any flying out to feed. At around 6:30pm, or perhaps even later, the first bird appears and over the next ten minutes or so we see at least four birds flying out, large, slow flapping, silhouettes against the sky. The first bats are already out too and several are feeding on the sugar water in the hummingbird feeders.

Day 7: A small group of us meet up at 6am on our quest for a Gray-throated Leaf-tosser! They are supposed to be down the road a little way but so far we have had no luck and we wonder if early morning might be a better time, so we walk slowly hoping

we might be lucky. Looking back at the big tree above the roof we can see a collection of Orange-winged Parrots waiting for the sunshine and various birds are already gathering in the magic tree.

Walking along the road we spot a Northern Waterthrush then reach the spot where we hope for the leaf-tosser but there seems to be no activity at all. We can only assume their young have already fledged and they are out in the forest somewhere. We can hear various calls that sound of interest including an Euler's Flycatcher, which we can't find but in the process of looking we find a Streaked Flycatcher instead. These are by far our best views of this species and we find a pair hanging around a hole where we assume they may be nesting. We get wonderful views of a Trinidad Motmot then find a Tropical Pewee in the trees. We are delighted when a Clearwing Butterfly lands nearby and you can actually see the veins of the leaf through its wings. A Rufous-breasted Wren starts singing. It proves hard to find but another bird singing in response further down the road behaves wonderfully singing right out in the open!

Back at the centre all the usual culprits are around the feeders and we enjoy great views of all sorts before our guide, Natalie, arrives to lead us down to the Oilbird cave. It is a little quiet for birds as we walk down the trail with Bright-rumped Attila calling in the background and we enjoy the butterflies such as Postman, Tigerwings and an Owl butterfly that perches very close allowing great views and photos. The trail is undulating with plenty of steps and eventually we start dropping down the final flight of steps to the bottom of the gorge, where we approach the entrance to the famous Dunstan Cave. Here, there are now boards to stand on and look into the cave, a change since Roy was last here. From here you can go down some steps, a couple at a time with Natalie and walk into the mouth of the cave. She has a torch and views of the birds are fantastic from here as she spotlights groups of birds on the ledges. A whole line of them are perched along a ledge at the back and more birds are almost above our heads and scattered around the cliff ledges. They are fabulous looking birds; all rufous coloured with white spots on the wings and rather a hooked bill but clearly related to Nightjars. We learn that they are the only nocturnal fruit eating bird and also the only one known to echo-locate, which they mainly do to find their way around the caves where they breed. The occasional bird flaps around looking enormous in the confined space and they call too, a rather unpleasant raucous sound which has earned them the name devil-bird! There are well grown chicks on some of the ledges and we get to take photos while Natalie spotlights them with her torch. It is a fabulous experience to see these almost mythical birds and we hear that the numbers have increased in recent years to around 180 birds, after huge declines in the past when the chicks were used for their oil.

After enjoying a good long look at them and taken our pictures we slowly climb back up the steps, pausing when Roy hears a calling Stripe-breasted Spinetail. We get

brief but excellent views for the lucky few in the right spot. Walking back we add Golden-crowned Warbler and Neil sees a Cocoa Woodcreeper.

Back up at the feeders the birds are as busy as ever with nothing new but extremely good views of Black Hawk above the trees and Band-rumped and Gray-rumped Swifts. A Bearded Bellbird is calling from a tree down below.

After lunch most of us spend a good deal of the afternoon simply sitting on the veranda, where there is a light breeze coming up the valley and watching the birds on the feeders, while also keeping an eye on the skies for raptors. It is a frenzy of activity, especially when the feeders have just been filled when there is almost a ball of Bananaquits on the hummingbird feeders. Highlights this afternoon include superb views of Black Hawk and a Double-toothed Kite spotted by Marilyn, then later a stunning pair of Swallow-tailed Kites which appear to the side of the veranda but proceed to sweep across right in front of us and quite close too, simply beautiful birds. There are all the usual hummingbirds but we enjoy very nice views of Rufous-breasted Hermit, as well as Green Hermit and some excellent views of Long-billed Starthroat. We find an Orange-winged Parrot perched, eating a fruit full of seed straight out and quite close allowing our best scope views so far. A Northern Waterthrush is potting round the edge of a small concrete pond and we get good views of Barred Antshrike. Roy C and Sara enjoy a walk down to see the manakins displaying and get great views of dancing males again plus Euler's Flycatcher and a good view of White-necked Thrush.

It has been a very enjoyable, relaxed afternoon with everyone enjoying light hearted conversation as we watch the birds in the sunshine and at around 6pm it is rum punch time. After that, we focus on watching for Oilbirds flying out of the valley and like last night see them flapping slowly out against the sky, superb!

After our evening meal we run through the checklist before those who are interested go on a night walk. It is fascinating and we start with a lovely female Variegated Gecko with yellow speckles on her flanks. We soon start finding a variety of creepy-crawlies, lots of Crickets of at least three species, several Harvestmen, a large and impressive looking spider, a click beetle with glowing spots, a couple of Mountain Crabs and a Pseudo-scorpion. We are particularly impressed with an enormous flatworm, which is a rich orangey colour with two dark bands and later identified as the Forest Flatworm, *Geoplana gigantea*. There are several Stick Insects too, a winged rather grey species and as we walk back we hear a distant Spectacled Owl calling.

It has been an enjoyable walk and a nice end to the day but a late night for us, it is after 9:30pm by the time we get back!

Day 8: Everyone is pretty at home with the birds on the veranda now and identifying their own birds, with the only addition to the list this morning being a Squirrel Cuckoo. After breakfast we gather at the vans and start on our way to the west coast. It is quite a long drive and we watch the scenery going by as we travel and look out for birds though we see nothing unusual.

We make a stop enroute at a small sewage treatment plant, where we jump out and scan the edges of the pools. We drive up to the gates but they won't let us through, however as we turn round a Mongoose dashes across the grass and vanishes into the scrub at the far side. Later research identifies it as a species called Small Indian Mongoose - introduced some years ago in an attempt to control snakes. There are lots of Cattle and Snowy Egrets and a couple of Little Blue Herons while Yellow-billed Terns are flying over the pools and landing on the posts. Roy C is particularly pleased, as he is a big fan of terns and keen to see any of the species here. They are very like Little Tern but with a longer bill and no black tip. We get lovely views of Yellow-hooded Blackbirds, including some very smart males, plus Wattled Jacana and as we leave someone spots a large Spectacled Caiman gliding through the water on the far side.

We finally arrive at Waterloo and make our first stop at the mudflats where the tide is coming in fast. A large and very noisy flock of Laughing Gulls is here and amongst them we find a couple of Black Skimmers and our first Scarlet Ibis! They are startlingly red!! At the far end of the mud are a few Hudsonian Whimbrel, a Spotted Sandpiper, Tricolored and Yellow-crowned Night Herons. A distant flock of Brown Pelicans takes off and flies out to sea and we find a Neotropic Cormorant fishing offshore. Our first Large-billed Tern flies past and we get quite good views of this strange looking tern with oversized bill and wing pattern almost like a Sabine's Gull! A single Greater Yellowlegs flies in but we are very surprised at the lack of waders and decide to try another spot nearby.

A short drive and we arrive, finding a load more Laughing Gulls and Black Skimmers and a few immature Lesser Black-backed Gulls. This seems a surprise this side of the Atlantic but they do occur in small numbers in North America too and while rare here they are expected in small numbers and we find at least six of them. A single immature Roseate Tern is perched amongst the gulls and a Royal Tern flies past but we are surprised there are not more of these. We find close Spotted Sandpipers with spots! There are still no other waders but we know there should be a flock of them somewhere, so we walk across to check another bay nearby and here they all are!! There is a big flock of Western Sandpipers, with lots of Semipalmated Plovers and a small number of Semipalmated Sandpipers amongst them. A few Greater Yellowlegs are nearby with a couple of Lesser Yellowlegs, making for a useful comparison. We find a small group of Black-necked Stilts around the bottom of the mangroves plus Short-billed Dowitchers and several Willets. We are also delighted to find a huge flock of Black Skimmers! There are hundreds of them, a wonderful

surprise and they look absolutely fantastic when they all take off and fly around together! Amongst them are a few Large-billed Terns and even a distant Yellow-billed Tern.

It is now almost unbearably hot!! The temperature has soared higher than ever and higher than is normal for this time of year, hitting 38 degrees by midday with high humidity too, so we head to find a nice shady spot for lunch. There are concrete seats and tables in the shade and sleeping dogs under the tables that don't even try and look to us for food, so we let them lie (as one should!). Carib Grackles are all over the place as are Ruddy Ground Doves and out to sea the occasional Brown Pelican. Over the car park we spot both Short-tailed Swifts and Fork-tailed Palm Swifts. From here you can also see the 'Temple in the Sea' which was built when a previous Hindu Temple was knocked down because it had been built on land owned by a sugar company. No one owned the sea so building it here got round any land ownership problems very neatly!

Well fed we move on to check out a park on the coast for Saffron Finch. It is a lovely open area with scattered trees and we find three which immediately fly away before hardly anyone has seen them. It is a little frustrating as we fail to find any more but we are pleased to spot an Osprey out over the sea which circles a couple of times before suddenly turning and diving down to the water with a big splash, then flapping heavily back up into the air carrying a fish!

We move on to take a quick look at an impressive statue not far away, at the beautifully ornate Karya Siddhi Hindu Temple. The temple is a lovely pale pink colour and highly decorated and carved, looking beautiful and every carving represents something of significance to the Hindus. The most striking feature is the enormous statue to the Monkey God Hanuman, standing at 85 feet tall it is the tallest outside of India! For some, the most important feature is that there are clean toilets here and on our way to use them we discover a couple of Saffron Finches in one of the trees!

We now move on to our main event of the day, which is our visit to Caronia Swamp. We pass a Ringed Kingfisher on the way there and then arrive at the entrance where we are to get on our boat, to be told that we should head up to the visitor centre first as they have been getting regular Red-capped Cardinals there. We do so and indeed the cardinals are on a feeder showing very well indeed and after a good look we get the bonus of finding a Green-throated Mango in the mangroves as well.

We head back to the boats where Lester is waiting for us and once on board we start down the main channel into the swamp. We shortly make a stop for Lester to explain about the various types of Mangroves - Red, Black and White (they all look green to Roy!), with their different root structures and seeds. He shows us the

salt coated Black Mangrove leaves and we can even taste it! Some birds use this as a source of minerals. Then we slowly make our way down the channel, stopping a short distance later to look at a Cook's Tree Boa curled up in branches of one of the trees. It is quite an impressive sized snake, though rather plain coloured. Next we find a Tropical Screech Owl that remains perched just above our heads as we stop to have a look. We see our first Scarlet Ibis of the ride, feeding out amongst the mangroves and they almost glow in the darkness under the trees. We pass Little Blue Herons and Snowy Egrets and get good views of a Yellow-headed Caracara.

We keep hearing the call of a Straight-billed Woodcreeper, we are about to give up when we suddenly realise it is on a tree trunk right in front of us! It is very close and Lester explains that they can be hard to find because they often drop right down amongst the tree roost to feed on small mangrove crabs. They will sometimes even herd the crabs up the trees with their wings! A little further down the channel we find a group of Long-nosed Bats roosting beneath a tree trunk, then hear the high pitched calls of a Bicolored Conebill and stop to have a look. There are two birds here and something bigger with them, a tanager sized bird that we realise with shock is a baby Shiny Cowbird! Cowbirds are like cuckoos and this oversized youngster is being fed by both of the adult Bicolored Conebills, as it noisily follows them through the trees. Finally we come out into a larger open area of water and scan around finding Great and Snowy Egrets, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Tricolored Heron and on a sandy island a large flock of Semipalmated Plovers. We head slowly over to where a couple of other boats are moored and as we go the first flocks of Scarlet Ibis appear over the trees, lit up brilliant red by the low sun.

We 'park' the boat and settle to watch the show as more and more birds arrive. Rudal pours the rum punch and there is cake too and we feel incredibly privileged to be here, watching these spectacular birds while we sit back with rum punch in hand on our own boat! Flock after flock appear, some with just thirty or so birds, others with perhaps two hundred or more. And they are red!! Not just red but really red - more red than anything you can imagine - glow in the dark red!!! It sounds like bonfire night as each flock appears as everyone goes wooo and arrrhh!

The birds are all coming to roost on a large island in the lake and as they gather it looks like the trees have been beautifully decorated! A flock land in the shallow water right by the island, forming a glowing red line along the bottom of the trees, they look absolutely stunning! Lots of Tricolored Heron fly in too and a few other herons and egrets but we can't take our eyes off the stunning ibises as more and more come in and land. It is a wonderful experience watching them come in and we try to work out how many we might have seen and it must be well over a thousand birds in total with more still arriving. We take lots of photos but it is not easy to get good results with birds appearing to glow on the screen and blur in the fading light but you have to try! Then while we are still enjoying the show Lester

explains that we have to go! It takes a while to get back out and we don't want to be doing it in the dark, so with Ibis still appearing we start on our way back out, almost the last boat to leave.

As we head back up the channel the first bats are appearing. A Spotted Sandpiper flies by then as it gets darker we start using a spotlight to see what we can find. We are astonished when Lester suddenly stops the boat and backs up to show us a Silky Anteater!! It is climbing amongst the branches right over the channel and we get great views of it from underneath, where we can see its tail and little pink feet and its face but very briefly. It is as though it thinks the torch is daylight as moments later this nocturnal animal curls up into a ball again as they do all day. A little further on and we are delighted to discover a Grey-necked Wood Rail, a great find and not an easy bird to see here.

We arrive back at the jetty and thank Lester for a fantastic experience and his excellent spotting, then it is back to Asa Wright as fast as we can, arriving later than usual but with the food out and ready for us!

Day 9: All the usual culprits are on the bird feeders at the veranda before breakfast with nothing new, so it is definitely time to move on! After breakfast Dave and Rudal arrive to take us down the road to the airport and we make our fond farewells to the lovely staff here. Then we are heading down the road, passing Grey-fronted Doves and other birds as we go. Near the airport we pause to take in a Ringed Kingfisher perched on the telegraph wires which is a very nice find.

Our flight leaves early and we are soon touching down in Tobago, where we are greeted by Gary our driver. It is then a long winding drive down the full length of the island to our hotel in Speyside, where else! We check in at the hotel right on the sea front and head straight to lunch. Our original intention was to take a boat trip to Little Tobago at 2pm but by the time we are settled into our rooms and have eaten it is already after 2pm so we go for 3pm instead, which still allows us plenty of time.

We walk down to the jetty where we meet Randy, who will be our guide for the boat trip today and Troy our 'driver'. We have not gone far when Randy starts throwing small pieces of fish out the back of the boat and soon we have a gathering of Laughing Gulls following us. Then we are gawping in amazement as Magnificent Frigatebirds come in to try and steal fish from them or pick up pieces off the water themselves. Although we have seen a few already on this trip, it is only when you see them at such close range that you can really appreciate just how enormous they are!! They look incredibly menacing as they suddenly tilt and dive down to chase the Laughing Gulls, picking out a particular individual and following its every twist and turn despite completely dwarfing them. It is a truly spectacular sight and at times several are behind the boat and our cameras are clicking away like crazy! We pass

Goat Island with a small number of Red-billed Tropicbirds cruising around the top and spot our first Brown and Red-footed Boobies. Two Roseate Tern fly by and we suddenly realise as we approach the jetty on the island we never even looked for fish through the glass bottom of the boat.

The path to the top of the island is steep steps and a couple of people decide to stay at the bottom and enjoy the view and scan for seabirds from here, while the rest of us start the walk, which in the heat is quite hard work. However we take our time and there are strategic bamboo water troughs on the way up for the birds to drink and these attract a lot of birds for us to stop and look at and catch our breath. Amongst the Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers, Bananaquits, Tropical Mockingbirds and Spectacled Thrushes we are delighted to add two new birds - Chivi Vireo and Brown-crested Flycatcher.

On one stretch we pass a small group of Chickens, a smart male and a female with cute little chicks. This is an interesting spot as there is always a discussion to be had here relating to whether one can tick these birds or not! Chicken - or Indian Jungle Fowl - is not a native bird here, but then again neither is Little Owl in the UK or Canada Goose or Pheasant or several other species we are happy to put on our British list! The general rule most birders apply is that if there is a self sustaining population then it is ok to tick and the Chickens on Little Tobago have been here, with no-one adding any more since their owner left, a long time ago! Surely a good case for Chicken to be on the list! It is a shame the introduction of birds of paradise never worked or we might have been able to tick them too!

We finally arrive at the viewing platform at the top of the path and now, high above the sea, we look out to see wonderful Red-billed Tropicbirds at eye level, cruising around or chasing each other, often flying very close and hovering for a moment in front of us! We enjoy watching these stunning birds but are soon distracted by the other species down below us and our guide sets up the scope on Brown Boobies, including birds with chicks, then various forms of Red-footed Booby. These come in brown, white and brown with white tails and he finds all three together in the trees down below and on the cactus covered rocks. There is a slight breeze here making it much more pleasant as we look out at the beautiful view towards the St Giles Islands. There are occasional Magnificent Frigatebirds and then suddenly Randy calls he has spotted a couple of Sooty Terns. They are moving fast, just above the sea and will be out of sight soon but a few of us manage to get onto them before they vanish behind the rocky headland below.

We spend a long time here enjoying everything and scanning for any new birds but eventually our time is running out as the sun sinks and so we start back down. Part way down we see something crawling across the path. It appears to be a shell with legs and we are excited to see it is a Land Hermit Crab and a big one too! We see several Pale-vented Pigeons as we walk then suddenly there is more excitement

when Randy spots a couple of Scaly-naped Pigeons up ahead! This is a rare bird here and we fluster, trying to get the scope on it quickly. A third bird appears but none of them settles and they keep flying to new positions, so it takes a while before we finally get the scope views we are wanting of these rather smart looking birds with their dark plumage and pale eye ring.

As we reach the bottom of the trail we spot a Yellow-crowned Night Heron above the beach, then it is back on the boat and we start heading back towards Tobago. Again they throw little tit-bits for the gulls as we travel and we are thrilled to see a superb male Magnificent Frigatebird cruising behind us, completely black and somehow all the more impressive and menacing for that. Two Sooty Tern fly by at speed and we get very good views of Brown Boobies.

We arrive back at the hotel and have the chance to relax a little, enjoying the cool air conditioned rooms where we can escape the heat and humidity. Then we gather for the evening meal which is very different to Asa Wright, with a menu and even chips!

Day 10: We meet early at 6am to the astonishingly noisy background noise of Rufus-vented Chachalacas calling from all around and the sight of dozens of Magnificent Frigatebirds cruising silently overhead, heading out for their day. We take breakfast with us and set off towards the hills.

Our first stop is to take a look at a roosting Common Potoo. It is great to see one in daylight after watching them the other day in the dark and really get to see the markings. There are loads of noisy Orange-winged Parrots overhead too and some beautiful coloured Blue-gray Tanagers that seem brighter than on Trinidad. There are Caribbean Martins on the wires as we continue and we head higher.

We make a stop along the road and there are several Giant Cowbirds hanging around a little group of cows, even perching on their backs. There are Shiny Cowbirds too and the size difference is huge! We find several good birds here including Venezuelan Flycatcher, Black-throated Mango on a nest, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Chivi Vireo and Rufous-vented Jacamar. Above the ridge we are thrilled to see a Great Black Hawk being mobbed by a Broad-winged Hawk, two new raptors for the price of one!

The weather is lovely at this time of day, so much cooler and fresher feeling after yesterdays heat, which was apparently 35 degrees, hot even for here and apparently the hottest day of the year so far on Tobago! At our next stop we check out a tree full of fruit, apparently a favourite of Red-legged Honeycreeper. A pair of them keep appearing and disappearing and some get good views but it is a bit frustrating. We can also hear a Blue-backed Manakin calling in the bushes and we search for it initially with no luck. A female is found but she is completely eclipsed when after a while as male comes out and perches right out in the open allowing us wonderful

views of this superb bird! We add Fuscous Flycatcher and find a Red-tailed Squirrel before we move on.

We continue up to the viewpoint at the top of the road and arrive to find a noisy Rufous-vented Chachalaca perched right out in the open, providing scope filling views. We are pleased to find some much more obliging Red-legged Honeycreepers and can now appreciate just what cracking little birds they are. It is a superb view over the forest, down to the coast and a few small islands out in the sea with Magnificent Frigatebirds like dots wheeling round them. We are astonished by regular sightings of White-tailed Page Moths, a beautiful species that looks more like a black, green and white Swallowtail butterfly than a moth.

After we have eaten we drive back down the road a little way and start our walk down the Gilpin Trace. This is a really beautiful forest walk and with the sunshine shafting through the trees is even more beautiful. There is a great variety of palms, ferns, trees, creepers and flowers and we are enjoying the walk as much as the birding!

Immediately when we enter the forest we find a Golden-Olive Woodpecker sticking its head out of a hole and looking round to see what is going on. We get excellent views of Trinidad Motmot and a singing Yellow-legged Thrush, which look rather like our blackbird. Its song is very different though and quite excitable. We find several Rufous-breasted Hermits including birds attending their strange little hanging nests, then get brief but good views of Chivi Vireo, a nice female Bared Antshrike, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher and a female Blue-backed Manakin that hops straight onto a nest!

We walk on and shortly hear the 'ti-tui' call of Stripe-breasted Spinetail. They can be very tricky to see well but this one behaves very well indeed and we enjoy great views. We find White-necked Thrush, Plain Antvireo, a brief Fuscous Flycatcher, Venezuelan Flycatcher and get our first glimpse of White-tailed Sabrewing, a must see species here! A superb male Blue-backed Manakin appears in full view and we excitedly set up the scope, delighted that it stays long enough for everyone to enjoy a good look. We get more good views of both thrush species, then find a Red-tailed Squirrel peering down at us from the bamboo. We find a male Barred Antshrike and get good views at last of a White-tailed Sabrewing, which perches in a dead tree for long enough to get a reasonable view. Walking back we see a few of the same species again including even better views of White-tailed Sabrewing, Rufous-breasted Wren and Rufous-tailed Jacamar.

Back at the bus we drive back down, with Grey-rumped Swifts flying ahead of us down the road, then make a stop at another trail where we can hear Blue-backed Manakins calling. We walk in and the trail becomes a little tricky and overgrown but eventually we find the manakins and get fabulous views of a pair of males calling and

displaying a little high in the trees, plus closer views of birds down in the lower bushes too. They are fabulous birds and we are thrilled.

Driving down the road again we suddenly put the brakes on and stop, Newton saying, "Out, out, out White-tailed Sabrewing perched by the roadside! We all jump out and for the next ten minutes enjoy absolutely superb views of a White-tailed Sabrewing perched and hunting insects at very close range, the sunshine making the feathers glittering green and blue! The best views ever!

Well pleased with our mornings birding we head back to the hotel for lunch and then some free time in the afternoon to relax and catch up on rest or chill out by the pool, swim in the sea or even do a little snorkelling. Roy C and Sara do some and see some nice fish along the rocky shore while Roy A ventures further out finding over 25 species of fish including wonderful big mixed shoals of Blue Tang, Ocean Surgeonfish and Black Surgeon, as well as lots of wrasse, parrotfish and many more but it is hard work!

We gather again at 6pm, when we enjoy a drink to toast those wonderful guests who have done more than 25 trips with Speyside Wildlife. We are celebrating our 25th year and want to tribute those who have averaged a trip or more for ever year of our existence. Arlene has done 37 holidays with us and Sue 43, so it is a toast to them and to Speyside Wildlife as they tell us all they have enjoyed every single holiday enormously!

Day 11: Hundreds of Magnificent Frigatebirds are cruising overhead as we gather at the bus in the cooler morning air, an amazing sight all gliding high overhead in the same direction like menacing stealth fighters.

We have a long drive to get to our first destination this morning and we sit back and watch the world go by, the beautiful coastal scenery and interesting villages and houses and bizarre shops and sometimes bizarre looking people too! We make a stop enroute for toilets and as we are about to leave Roy spots a White-fringed Antwren in a small bush opposite us. This is a lovely little bird and we stop to have a look as it shows very well indeed coming right out into the open and perhaps showing better than they often do in the thickets they are often found in.

We finally turn off into the well manicured gardens and golf course of a large hotel. Just inside the gates is a lake and we can immediately see several herons and egrets round the edge. A Great Blue Heron takes off and flaps lazily across the water to join a Great Egret in a tree on the far side and there are several Black-crowned Night Herons around the edge and in the trees. Green Heron is a new bird and there are Snowy Egrets and a very close Tricolored Heron. On the near shore we find a superbly spotty Spotted Sandpiper and a beautiful breeding plumage Lesser Yellowlegs. There are plenty of Moorhens, or Common Gallinule as they are called

here and Roy explains that this could be a future 'armchair tick' as it is being muted as a possible split perhaps to be called Laughing Moorhen for its rather different call.

Scanning round the rest of the pool we find a couple of Least Grebes near one shore and at the back a Cocoli or White-necked Heron. There are several Anhingas and on the grassy shores are Southern Lapwings. Further round we stop and look at a large Green Iguana out on the island, a beautiful animal in perfect condition. We get much better views of the Least Grebes and spot several Spectacled Caiman. We drive round to a spot where we eat our breakfast on the shade of a large tree and, while we eat, watch a colony of Cattle Egrets, Little Blue Herons and Tricolored Herons. A Yellow-bellied Elaenia is in the tree and there are several Caribbean Martins flying around overhead and a Grey Kingbird is perched next to a Tropical Kingbird which makes for a nice comparison.

A guy appears with a key for the gates here and we walk into an area with a large patch of sedges and rushes and a little open water. There are a couple more Least Grebes, a very close Green Heron plus another that looks almost like a Striated but perhaps not streaky enough. A single Northern Waterthrush flits into the taller vegetation and there are more Grey Kingbirds plus several Pale vented Pigeons in the tree tops and White-tipped Doves on the paths. A Chivi Vireo shows briefly then we find a Brown-crested Flycatcher that shows very well indeed. We find a Glossy Ibis, not a common bird on Tobago and the first Roy has seen on either island!

We walk over to a patch of trees, pausing to look at a couple of Green-rumped Parrotlets as we go, then in the trees soon find a family of Red-crowned Woodpeckers and a couple of Scrub Greenlets. There are Barred Antshrikes calling all around and we find a pair of them in the bushes here. We walk back through some lower trees in search of Mangrove Cuckoo with no luck, then head down the road to another pool nearby. We approach this pool together, as it is a good spot for American Purple Gallinule and they are much shyer than the Moorhens and tend to run for cover the moment you approach. We spot at least four or five as they vanish in the bushes. The pool has a good cover of beautiful water lilies including some that are brilliant pink and standing tall above the water. We are astonished when Newton spots two female Masked Ducks on the other side, sitting perfectly still and so well camouflaged that we could very easily have gone away having completely missed them, you really need to scan with binoculars despite their close proximity they are so well camouflaged.

We head down to a lovely boardwalk through some mangroves. It is very special, being a habitat like no other with all the mangrove roots overlapping and creating a wonderful texture to the forest floor. Yellow-crowned Night Herons are hunting Mangrove Crabs here and we see several, as well as Spotted Sandpiper, White-tipped Doves, Chivi Vireo, Cocoa Woodcreeper and lots of bats skimming around under the boardwalk. Back at the bus we take those who escaped the heat

to see the Masked Ducks, before moving on and driving through more of the grounds to check out a couple more pools. Here we find Black-faced Grassquit in the long grass, get a nice view of Purple Gallinule and find more birds we have seen already.

We drive towards Bon Accord Sewage Treatment Plant next via a rather nice route which has a wet ditch along the side of the road. We are delighted to get fabulous views of Solitary Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and a Short-billed Dowitcher. Further on we stop and Newton shows us a Common Potoo perched on a large branch and this is our best view yet, with its head held horizontal and looking most otherworldly with its bizarre beak and bulging eyes. The little watercourse is full of lovely little fish and huge rams-horn type snails.

We arrive at the sewage farm where there are a couple of large rectangular pools and one of these is filled with water plants and covered in Moorhens. Amongst them, and on the bank, are several Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and at the far end a lovely pair of White-cheeked Pintail. Over the water there are Barn Swallows skimming and amongst them we find a couple of Sand Martins or Bank Swallows as they are called here. There are lots of Eared Doves on the grass and Pale-vented Pigeons in the trees plus a couple of Short-tailed Swifts flying around. There are Anhingas, Least Grebes and several Snowy Egrets and other herons around the edge but we are astonished when Newton tells us there has been a Little Egret here for some time and we find it along the bank with a Snowy Egret making for a useful comparison.

Our next port of call is a very grand hotel on the sea front and here we ask for permission to walk through to the back of the hotel from where we can scan the rocks and see what birds are there, we are hoping for terns. We are not disappointed!! Amongst lots of Laughing Gulls we find a beautiful flock of Roseate Terns looking flushed with faint pink in their breeding finery. They are exquisite and after enjoying them for a few moments we scan through the rest of the flock and find half a dozen Royal Terns, a couple of Cabot's Tern (the recent split from Sandwich Tern which looks almost identical) and a couple of beautiful Cayenne Terns with all yellow bills (a subspecies of Cabot's)

Well pleased with our finds here we enjoy the views of these and other lovely birds here, before we head off to enjoy our lunch in the shade of the shelters and trees at the point nearby. We feed Carib Grackles on bits of sandwich as we sit looking out to see at this popular tourist spot and buy a few chips to round off the sandwiches. Out to sea there are hundreds of Magnificent Frigatebirds way out in the distance and a single Red-billed Tropicbird which is a surprise just here at the wrong end of the island.

Back on the bus we drive along the other side of the island, where we intend to make a stop to look for Brown Noddies but it is quite a long drive and well fed and warm we pretty much all fall asleep for a chunk of the journey. The scenery is lovely as we hit the coast and pass beautiful sandy bays with forested slopes above them. We eventually arrive at the spot where Newton saw four Brown Noddies the other day. They are only just arriving and he is hoping there might be more but at first we can't find any! There is a pair of Royal Terns and lots of Laughing Gulls but nothing else other than Brown Boobies passing out at sea and a couple of Brown Pelicans. We have been here some time when suddenly a Brown Noddy flies out from below us and we realise they must be perched out of site below the rocks on the near shore. It perches in view on the little island and we get lovely scope views before it flies around a little, only to vanish again under the rocks below us from where it refuses to return to view.

We continue round the coast, enjoying the views of beaches and rocky shores and make another stop to check under a bridge for Barn Owls. There are none here but we get a bonus when a Green Kingfisher appears and perches beside the stream. We move on again and make a stop at another bay some way further on where we check the rocks below, just Laughing Gulls though we do enjoy great views of Short-tailed Swifts.

The road now cuts up and over to the other side of the island and we spot several Trinidad Motmots, a Rufous-tailed Jacamar and several Grey-rumped Swifts, then make a stop to try for Olivaceous Woodcreeper. We don't have any response, though we do spot Violaceous Euphonia and Red-legged Honeycreeper and a pair of Orange-winged Parrots fly over, one of which looks very strange! It is a peculiar buffy colour with an orangey tail, though clearly still this species and presumably a leucistic bird. Shortly we arrive back at the hotel and as we drive into the grounds four Red-rumped Agoutis make a dash for cover.

We have a break before meeting up for our evening meal and afterwards we run through the checklist, before our traditional round up of the holiday in which everyone gets to say which species they have enjoyed seeing the most and name a favourite place and a 'magic moment.'

Roy suggests four species might be a nice number to choose and it is soon obvious that people have enjoyed a wide variety of species! In the end 26 different species get a mention, from manakins, honeycreepers and euphonias to kingfishers, pelicans and Magnificent Frigatebirds. Raptors include Long-winged Harrier and Pearl Kite and several hummingbirds get a mention too. Two species, however, get several 'votes' and these are perhaps fairly predictable being wonderful experiences as well as exciting species - Scarlet Ibis getting 6 votes and Leatherback Turtle just beating that with 7!

Out of eleven people eight of us choose Asa Wright Veranda as their place of the trip, which is well deserved given the wonderful experience of sitting there and enjoying the masses of birds coming to the feeders every day. Magic moments include the Scarlet Ibis Roost which is not surprising but with by far the most votes is the astonishing experience of watching the Leatherback Turtle laying it eggs, several people commenting that it was so wonderful to watch the whole process, from coming out of the sea through the whole nest digging and egg laying process to covering the area and finally going back into the sea. It really was a very moving experience and deserves so many mentions for sure. It is lovely to hear what people have enjoyed and thanks to everyone for making it a great trip and good fun.

Day 12: After so many early starts it is nice to have a very relaxed start to the day, even if the reason is because we are going home and therefore leaving the hotel mid-morning. We enjoy plenty of time for a relaxed breakfast and to pack before Gary arrives to take us to the airport, where we arrive with plenty of time to check in for our flight back to Trinidad and then on to London, where temperatures are a full 25°C cooler!

Birds

Least Grebe
Red-billed Tropicbird
Brown Booby
Red-footed Booby
Brown Pelican
Neotropic Cormorant
Anhinga
Magnificent Frigatebird
Great Blue Heron
White-necked Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Egret
Little Blue Heron
Tricolored Heron
Cattle Egret
Green Heron
Striated Heron
Black-crowned Night-Heron
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
Scarlet Ibis
Glossy Ibis
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck
White-cheeked Pintail
Masked Duck
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Grey-headed Kite
Swallow-tailed Kite
Pearl Kite
Double-toothed Kite
Plumbeous Kite
Long-winged Harrier
White Hawk
Common Black-Hawk
Great Black-Hawk
Savannah Hawk
Gray-lined Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Short-tailed Hawk
Zone-tailed Hawk
Black Hawk-Eagle
Yellow-headed Caracara
Crested Caracara
Rufous-vented Chachalaca
American Purple Gallinule
Common Moorhen
Gray-necked Wood Rail
Limpkin
Southern Lapwing
Black-bellied Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Black-necked Stilt
Wattled Jacana
Greater Yellowlegs
Lesser Yellowlegs
Solitary Sandpiper
Spotted Sandpiper
Willet
Hudsonian Whimbrel
Ruddy Turnstone
Western Sandpiper
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Laughing Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Black Skimmer
Royal Tern
Large-billed Tern
Roseate Tern
Cabot's Tern
Cayenne Tern
Yellow-billed Tern
Sooty Tern
Brown Noddy
Feral Pigeon
Pale-vented Pigeon
Scaled Pigeon
Eared Dove
Scaly-naped Pigeon
Ruddy Ground-Dove
White-tipped Dove
Gray-fronted Dove
Blue-and-yellow Macaw

Red-bellied Macaw
Green-rumped Parrotlet
Blue-headed Parrot
Orange-winged Parrot
Yellow-crowned Parrot
Squirrel Cuckoo
Striped Cuckoo
Smooth-billed Ani
Barn Owl
Tropical Screech-Owl
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl
Common Pauraque
White-tailed Nightjar
Rufous Nightjar
Common Potoo
Oilbird
Chestnut-collared Swift
Short-tailed Swift
Band-rumped Swift
Gray-rumped Swift
Fork-tailed Palm-Swift
Rufous-breasted Hermit
Green Hermit
Little Hermit
White-necked Jacobin
Black-throated Mango
Green-throated Mango
Ruby-topaz Hummingbird
Tufted Coquette
Blue-chinned Sapphire
White-chested Emerald
Copper-rumped Hummingbird
Long-billed Starthroat
White-tailed Sabrewing
Green-backed Trogon
Guianan Trogon
Collared Trogon
Trinidad Motmot
Ringed Kingfisher
Green Kingfisher
American Pygmy Kingfisher
Rufous-tailed Jacamar
Channel-billed Toucan
Red-crowned Woodpecker

Red-rumped Woodpecker
Golden-olive Woodpecker
Chestnut Woodpecker
Lineated Woodpecker
Crimson-crested Woodpecker
Stripe-breasted Spinetail
Yellow-chinned Spinetail
Streaked Xenops
Plain-brown Woodcreeper
Straight-billed Woodcreeper
Cocoa Woodcreeper
Great Antshrike
Black-crested Antshrike
Barred Antshrike
Plain Antvireo
White-flanked Antwren
White-fringed Antwren
White-bellied Antbird
Black-faced Antthrush
Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet
Yellow-bellied Elaenia
Ochre-bellied Flycatcher
Slaty-capped Flycatcher
Yellow-breasted Flycatcher
Northern Scrub Flycatcher
Tropical Pewee
Euler's Flycatcher
Fuscous Flycatcher
Pied Water-Tyrant
White-headed Marsh-Tyrant
Venezuelan Flycatcher
Brown-crested Flycatcher
Great Kiskadee
Boat-billed Flycatcher
Streaked Flycatcher
Piratic Flycatcher
Sulphury Flycatcher
Tropical Kingbird
Gray Kingbird
Bearded Bellbird
White-bearded Manakin
Blue-backed Manakin
Golden-headed Manakin
Caribbean Martin

Gray-breasted Martin
White-winged Swallow
Southern Rough-winged Swallow
Barn Swallow
Bank Swallow (Sand Martin)
Rufous-breasted Wren
House-Wren
Long-billed Gnatwren
Yellow-legged Thrush
Cocoa Thrush
Spectacled Thrush
White-necked Thrush
Tropical Mockingbird
Chivi Vireo
Scrub Greenlet
Golden-fronted Greenlet
Rufous-browed Peppershrike
Tropical Parula
Northern Waterthrush
Masked Yellowthroat
Golden-crowned Warbler
Yellow Warbler
Bananaquit
Bicolored Conebill
Speckled Tanager
Turquoise Tanager
Bay-headed Tanager
Blue Dacnis
Green Honeycreeper
Purple Honeycreeper
Red-legged Honeycreeper
Trinidad Euphonia
Violaceous Euphonia
Blue-gray Tanager
Palm Tanager
Swallow Tanager
Silver-beaked Tanager
White-lined Tanager
Crowned Ant-Tanager
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Grayish Saltator
Red-capped Cardinal
Blue-black Grassquit
Black-faced Grassquit

Sooty Grassquit
Saffron Finch
Grassland Yellow-finch
Red-breasted Blackbird
Yellow-hooded Blackbird
Carib Grackle
Shiny Cowbird
Giant Cowbird
Yellow Oriole
Yellow-rumped Cacique
Crested Oropendola
Feral Chicken!

A final total of 229 including the chicken!

Mammals

Red-rumped Agouti
Red-tailed Squirrel
Silky Anteater
Common Opossum
Forest Rat
Small Indian Mongoose
White-lined Sac-winged Bat
Brazilian Long-nosed Bat

Reptiles and Amphibians

Leatherback Turtle
Golden Tegu Lizard
Green Iguana
Common Ground Lizard (Zandolee)
Rainbow Whiptail
House Gecko
Variegated Gecko
Cook's Tree Boa
Spectacled Cayman
Marine Toad
Trinidad Stream Frog

Other things!

Chevron Tarantula
Hercules Beetle
Praying Mantis
Leaf-cutter Ants
Lantern Bug (Click beetle)
Crickets
Harvestmen
Stick Insects
Katydid
Pseudo-Scorpion
Mountain Crab
Mangrove Crab
Fiddler Crab
Land Hermit Crab
Forest Flatworm
and lots more!

Butterflies (Thanks to Roy and Sara for the list)

Caligo
Sulfur spp. (one possibly Orange Barred)
Heliconia sara (small blue)
Postman
Owl Butterfly (Giant)
Flambeau
Cattle Heart
Little Postman (Rather tempting to call it "Neil!")
Blue Morpho
Tiger Wing
Monarch
Clearwing spp.
White Peacock
Torquatus (Low down to side of "bus stop" at lunch in Trinidad)
Renata Satyr ("Ringlet type")
Jaune d'Aubricot (seen almost daily in Trin.)
The Gold Rim
Common Yellow (small black dots on UW)
Gulf Fritillary (as in Costa Rica)
Hanno Blue (as our Common Blue - near Oil Bird caves)

White-tailed Page moth