

Trinidad Dragonflies & Nature

A Caligo Ventures Celebrity Tour with Dennis Paulson



December 1 – 8, 2020

Tobago Extension Dec. 8 – 10

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Tour Summary

8-Day/7-Night Tropical Nature Tour
with Dennis Paulson
\$TBD (coming soon!), from Port of Spain
Airport is Piarco International (POS)

Join us for a VERY special opportunity to explore Trinidad with Dennis Paulson, an unparalleled expert, photographer, and author on the identification and natural history of dragonflies and damselflies. The chance to travel with Dennis is exciting news for Caligo Ventures and the Asa Wright Nature Centre. Dennis' broad knowledge of nature helps you discover the amazing natural history of Trinidad in tremendous detail.

The tropical islands of Trinidad and Tobago are highly-regarded as a place to see spectacular birds at close range—particularly the colorful species almost in arm's reach observed with ease from the Asa Wright Nature Centre's famed Verandah. Equally ornate, but less well-known, the richly diverse members of the order Odonata are exciting to observe—so jewel-like and varied. Thrill to find the delicate Fairy Skimmer, the electric Guiana Scarlettail, and the spectacular Magnificent Megadarnier, while expanding your knowledge of these unique species and so many more. Recording our sightings as we go, we hope to add more to the knowledge base of the islands with every day's field sightings.

Tour Highlights

- Identify, observe, and photograph if you wish, many of the over 120 species of dragonflies and damselflies found in Trinidad—get up close to these flying jewels!
- Learn all about odonate biology: their foraging behavior and diet, their reproductive habits, and what their larvae are doing underwater
- In addition to dragonflies, Dennis helps with your sightings of tropical insects, birds, bats, and other mammals, plants and more as you survey the scenery of Trinidad's lush mountains and extensive shores, including mangroves, freshwater swamps, pocket wetlands, forest trails, gardens and agricultural fields
- Take time to witness manakin leks, army ants and tarantulas, mammals and oilbirds, and, of course, dragonflies along Asa Wright Nature Centre's extensive trails and garden paths
- Try a night hike; or check the spotlights set up to attract fanciful moths
- Experience crimson skies with thousands of Scarlet Ibis flying in front of the sunset to their roost in Caroni National Park





And along the way, take in a sample of the incredible species diversity of Trinidad, with over 480 birds, 97 native mammals, over 100 reptiles and amphibians, 617 butterfly species as well as more than 2,200 species of flowering plants that bring so many birders and natural history buffs to this two-island nation. Local expert birding guides join Dennis on all field outings.

For those that wish, there is always time for birding too! Awaken in your comfortable room at the Asa Wright Nature Centre to the call of the Barred Antshrike. Watch stunning Green and Purple Honeycreepers and up to 40 other species at feeders from the Centre's famous verandah while sipping coffee grown and roasted on the Centre's estate. Scan the forest trails for trogons, toucans, and antbirds with the guidance of local Centre guides. Hear the "gong" of the Bearded Bellbird across the forest canopy. And complete your day with a night hike or drive for secretive owls and nightjars.

Dennis is joined by our great Trinidad-based birding guides, including Dave Ramlal who has been scouting many areas for a number of years. Nancy Norman, an avid dragon enthusiast and photographer lends a hand as well. Opt to extend your time at the lovely Cuffie River Nature Retreat on Tobago for an additional two nights.

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Tues., Dec. 1 Arrivals | Verandah Time | Welcome!

Our guides meet all flights arriving at Trinidad's Piarco International Airport for a one hour drive up into the Northern Range from Port of Spain. Arrive and settle in to the quiet seclusion of the Centre. Or, for those spending time in the city ahead of the tour, we can arrange a pick-up in Port of Spain for the scenic one-hour transfer to the Asa Wright Nature Centre and Lodge.

Expect a warm greeting at the Centre, marvel at the almost tame birds that frequent the feeders. These include White-necked Jacobin, Blue-chinned Sapphire, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, and Tufted Coquette, and with luck, Long-billed Starthroat and Brown Violetear Hummingbirds; Blue-gray, Palm, White-lined, Silver-beaked, and Turquoise Tanager; both Purple and Green Honeycreepers; Bananaquit, and many more. The views of the valley (and the birds) are breathtaking.



If you arrive before nightfall, the entrance road is an easy walk, where under a lush canopy Trinidad Motmot and a host of other species can be found including land crabs and a range of butterflies. Centre naturalists are there to help identify species. Coffee and tea are served at 4:00 PM, Rum Punch at 6:00 PM, both accompanied by one of the most amazing bird shows of any eco-lodge in the world!

Share dinner with other tour participants and guests staying at the Lodge in the Centre's cozy dining room. Those that arrive late may wish to book an extra day to rest up from travel (additional cost), but you may arrive at any time you choose today. *(D)*

Wed., Dec. 2 Centre Orientation | Night Creatures

This morning begins with 6:00 AM coffee and tea served on the verandah, and a Centre naturalist on duty to help you spy as many as 40 life birds before breakfast! Tegu lizard and Red-rumped Agouti patrol the feeders for fallen fruit. After breakfast, enjoy an introductory walk on the Centre's Discovery Trail, learning more about the forest and discovering additional wildlife.

Dragonflies you could encounter include Horned Leaf-tail; Hercules Skimmer; Scarlet-eyed, River, and Oculate Dancers; Ornate Helicopter (interestingly, this species breeds in water that accumulates in tree holes); Racket-tipped and River Rubyspots. Birds you are likely to spot include Green-backed and Guianan Trogons; Channel-billed Toucan; Chestnut Woodpecker; Rufous-browed Peppershrike; and Green Hermit feeding in wild ginger and Heliconia flowers, while Small Postman, morpho, caligo, and other butterflies flutter by and leafcutter ants carry leaves underfoot. Many enjoy the challenge of spotting a Bearded Bellbird, as their distinctive "bonk!" echoes throughout the forest. Near a known bellbird lek in the trees are White-bearded and Golden-headed Manakin attending their leks closer to the ground.

After lunch, take time for a rest, or join Dennis to try your luck on a Centre trail again. Late afternoon, join a night-critters field trip to lower elevation areas, departing from the Centre round 3:00 PM. Don't worry about missing out on lodge amenities ... your rum punch and hot dinner are packed to go. In addition to the chance of finding White-tailed Nightjar, Common Pauraque, Common Potoo, Tropical Screech-Owl, Barn Owl, and Spectacled Owl (if you're lucky), we should spot a variety of large insects and arachnids, including perhaps your first Pink-toed Tarantula. *(B,L,D)*

Thurs., Dec. 3 Blanchisseuse Road | Northern Range

Today's scenic, day-long excursion takes us high into the Northern Range on the Blanchisseuse Road. Working our way up and over the pass, we make frequent stream-side stops for dragonflies, and bird and plant



identification. Highlights might include Purple and Oculate Dancers, Hercules and Carmine Skimmer, and Malachite Butterfly, along with Swallow-tailed Kite, Common Black-Hawk, Collared Trogon, Golden-olive and Red-rumped Woodpeckers, and Speckled and Hepatic Tanagers.

Stop to enjoy a local lunch in picturesque Brasso Seco, including a demonstration of chocolate made onsite from local cacao beans. Then continue through the mountains to the village of Morne la Croix, where a more open landscape and gardens can provide sightings of winged creatures large and small.

Return to AWCN before 6:00 PM for a break and the ritual of seeing sunset with rum punch in hand. Watch nectar-feeding Pallas' Long-tongued Bat at the feeders after night falls, and Greater White-lined Bat perched in the eaves; and check out the moth lights set up to attract night species! *(B,L,D)*

Fri., Dec. 4 Aripo Savanna | Valencia River | Nariva Swamp

Explore rich habitats of hardwood forest, riverbanks, and freshwater swamps. This is a full and varied day, and weather can change from hot to wet, so be prepared with rain gear. Closed-toed shoes are recommended, but no real hiking, more a day of van stops and short walks.

There are rich dragonfly microhabitats along the route, promising great variety. The Aripo area is tropical savannah, mostly wide and flat areas with ditches on the sides, making finding and photographing odonates relatively easy. Valencia River offers a wide range of species as well and is relatively unexplored, making for exciting finds, while the freshwater marshland, coastal, and beach area of Nariva makes for easy walking. Stroll through melon patches (literally) for some of the best dragonfly finds!

Seek Trinidad Swampdamsel (endemic), Kennedy's and Hightip Wedgetails, Amazon Sapphirewing, Guiana Scarlettail, Red-tailed Skimmer, Dark Forceptail, Tiny Forktail, Spine-bellied Dryad, Tropical Sprite, Common Woodskimmer, Flame-tailed Pondhawk, and Band-winged Dragonlet.

Bird species could include Plumbeous, Pearl, and Grey-headed Kites, Yellow-headed and Crested Caracaras, Savanna Hawk, Blue-black Grassquit, Fork-tailed Palm-Swift, both Striped and Little Cuckoos, Yellow-hooded Blackbird, White-tailed Goldenthrout, "Moriche" Oriole, and three species of macaws including stunning Blue-and-yellow. Enjoy a picnic lunch en route, and return to AWCN for some afternoon time to relax, photograph, or explore, and dinner. *(B,L,D)*

Sat., Dec. 5 Caroni Rice Fields & Wetlands



On another full day in the field, we explore the vast area of rice fields and wetlands around Caroni. These can be dragonfly magnets! Prepare for a full day and changeable weather; we have a picnic in the field and return to AWNC for rum punch and dinner.

After dinner, share in optional networking on Tools of the Trade, dragonfly literature, identification skills, photography tips, and more with Dennis Paulson. *(B,L,D)*

Sun., Dec. 6 Arima Valley | Public Lecture | Leader's Choice

This morning, we explore a number of attractive streams that cascade along the bends in the Arima-Blanchisseuse Road south of the AWNC driveway; we visit the famous research station started by William Beebe, SIMLA, and seek Odonata in habitats along the road and at small ponds. Golden Streamskimmer, Blue-eyed Setwing, Esmeralda Skimmer, Horned Leaf-tail, Carmine Skimmer, and Red-faced Dragonlet are all possible, as is the Royal Firetip butterfly and Rainbow Whiptail lizard.

Return to the Centre in time for lunch and to join Dennis as he gives a talk on The Wonderful World of Dragonflies, open to Friends of AWNC, the Trinidad Field Naturalist Club, and members of the public. This is a terrific opportunity to enjoy an entertaining and informative discussion, as well as to meet and mingle with local Trinidad and Tobago experts and to learn of their sightings.

The late afternoon is left open as the leader's choice, networking with dragonfly specialists that live in the local area. You may return to particularly good locations, seek photographs of species missed earlier, or visit any sites missed due to weather. *(B,L,D)*

Mon., Dec. 7 Oilbirds | Caroni Marsh

In the morning, you have the option to visit the Dunston Cave to see the resident Oilbirds; this is a steep route (with handrails) but you are helped by staff. Wear sturdy shoes and bring a walking stick.

After lunch at the Centre and a brief rest, time for a true tour highlight, a trip to Caroni National Park to see Scarlet Ibis fly in at sunset to roost. We take a gentle boat ride through dense mangroves, looking for Cook's Tree Boa, Spectacled Caiman, Four-eyed Fish, and Chestnut Skimmer, Brown Setwing, and Esther's Threadtail among the dragonflies.

As you emerge into open water and approach the ibis roosting island, keep an eye out for flamingos, Great and Snowy Egrets, Little Blue and Great Blue Heron in flight. Then enjoy your rum punch and a snack while you wait for the main spectacle, which is iconic of Trinidad. Return to AWNC for a celebratory final dinner. Be sure to bring your tour highlights to share! *(B,L,D)*



Tues., Dec. 8 Departures

Depart at your leisure today, for home or on the two-day extension to Tobago. *(B)*

Join Dennis On Our Optional Extension To Tobago

Tues., Dec. 8 Tobago | Adventure Farm | Cuffie River Nature Retreat

We take a morning flight to Tobago, and are met by Jason Radix, who has been scouting Tobago's dragonfly hotspots for us to explore. Have lunch at the island's Adventure Farm, before you settle into accommodations at the Cuffie River Nature Retreat.

Take a dip in the pool and check the gardens for birds, dragonflies, damselflies, butterflies, and more. Cuffie River avian specialties include Rufous-vented Chachalaca, White-tailed Sabrewing, Short-tailed Swift, and Red-legged Honeycreeper. A stream running through the property may yield some interesting species.

Enjoy a delicious dinner in Cuffie River Nature Retreat's beautiful open dining room. This intimate forest retreat has just ten rooms, providing a wonderful (and birdy!) getaway. *(B,L,D)*

Cuffie River Nature Retreat was recognized as the 2011 "Sustainable Property of the Year" by the Tobago House of Assembly.

Wed., Dec. 9 Explore Tobago

A full day to seek out dragonflies—much less work has been done on Tobago, so our sightings are carefully recorded. There are wetland areas to visit on both sides of the island, and stunning views of the sea. Head first for Bon Accord Sewage Ponds, the Tobago Plantations, and Plymouth and then continue exploring. Longing for more beach time? Talk to Caligo's travel planners about extending your stay at the Blue Waters Inn on the northeast end of the island. *(B,L,D)*

Thurs., Dec. 10 Departures

Today we return to Port of Spain in Trinidad to catch international flights. Your departure from Cuffie River is timed accordingly; please make sure your shuttle is arranged the day before. Flights home must be AFTER 10:00

AM; if you have an early flight you need to spend a final night at an airport hotel in Trinidad. Please discuss this with your travel planner, who can make suggestions. Those leaving on the red-eye flight through Houston have a full day on the island, returning early evening to the airport on Trinidad to hook up with those late flights. More field time! (B)

Itinerary subject to change due to weather, road condition, access, and other real-world factors. The order of the trips may also change. Should a location or region become unviable, we make every effort to visit an equivalent location or region.



Guide Dennis Paulson

Dennis Paulson grew up in Miami, exposed to subtropical nature in all its glory while southern Florida was still largely unspoiled. He received his Ph.D. in Zoology from the University of Miami in 1966 with a study of the dragonflies of southern Florida, and shortly thereafter he moved to Seattle, where he has lived ever since. He retired as the Director of the Slater Museum of Natural History at the University of Puget Sound, where he also taught in the Biology Department. Dennis has taught at three universities and continues to teach adult-education courses in many venues. He has also led nature tours and traveled on his own to all continents, and he has studied and photographed dragonflies and birds worldwide and published over 75 scientific papers on his favorite animals. He is an avid nature photographer, with many photos published in magazines, books and interpretive displays.

Dennis' published books include *Dragonflies and Damselflies of The West*; *Dragonflies and Damselflies of the East*; *Dragonflies & Damselflies: A Natural History*; *Shorebirds of North America: The Photographic Guide*; *Shorebirds of the Pacific Northwest*; *Exotic Birds*; and *Alaska: The Ecotravellers' Wildlife Guide*. Beyond these interests, he is a well-rounded naturalist with a broad knowledge of plants and animals of the world.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Group Size

This special Celebrity tour has a maximum of 14 participants; two vans are used for transport.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$TBD DBL / \$TBD SGL** based on double occupancy, from Port of Spain, Trinidad. Tour cost includes airport transfers, accommodations for 7 nights, all meals, professional guide services, park and program entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost of the tour and extensions do not include: round-trip airfare to and from Port of Spain, Trinidad; items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar; or gratuities for guides and personal services.

Cost of the Tobago post-tour extension is **\$TBD DBL / \$TBD SGL** per person, based on double occupancy—limited availability.

Travel Information

Please make air travel plans only after the minimum group size of 6 has been reached. The airport for this tour is Port of Spain, Trinidad (POS). Most major airlines service this very centrally-located airport. Plan to arrive on or before December 1 and depart on or after December 8, for the main tour, or AFTER 10:00 AM on December 10 if you are participating in the post-tour extension. If you wish to arrive in Trinidad early, or extend your visit on Tobago, we can assist you with bookings and plans.

Photo Credits

Amazon Sapphirewing, Nancy Norman (NN); Barred Antshrike, Carlos Sanchez; Blue-eyed Setwing, NN; Purple Honeycreeper, Peg Abbott; Claret Pondhawk NN; Hightip Wedgetail, NN; Guiana Scarlettail, NN; Raquet-tipped Rubyspot, NN; AWNC Verandah, Hugh Simmons Photography (HSP); Golden Tegu, Ted Beedy (TB); AWNC Verandah, HSP; Amazon Sapphirewing, NN; Royal Firetip, NN; Group at AWNC, HSP; Pond Amberwing, NN; Pallas' Long-tongued Bat, NN; Mangrove Buckeye, NN; Hercules Skimmer, NN; Scarlet Ibis, TB.

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