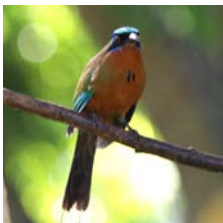


Thanksgiving in Trinidad & Tobago | Nov. 19-28, 2023 | Trip Report | by Kelly Vandenheuvel



With guides Kelly Vandenheuvel, Dave Ramlal, Lester Nanan and Jason Radix and participants: Liz, Raj, Susan, Wavell, Dale, Fran, Monique and Jean



Sun., Nov. 19

Arrivals | Hacienda Jacana

Guests that arrived earlier had the chance to get to know one another at dinner on the first evening. The rest of us arrived later in the evening. We all got checked in at Hacienda Jacana to get some sleep before our first day in the field.

Mon., Nov. 20

Nariva Swamp | Manzanilla | Night Birding

The whole group met for a delicious breakfast that was served in Hacienda Jacana's outdoor dining area, then we headed out for a full day and evening of birding. Dave Ramal picked us up and took us into the tropical lowlands where we saw a Channel-billed Toucan, then on to an agricultural area where we saw a couple of



Savanna Hawks and Cattle Egrets following a tractor plowing the fields. We also saw a Zone-tailed Hawk. After some good morning birding, we drove east to the coast at Manzanilla where we had a nice picnic lunch at the beach and saw Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans. From there we drove through Coconut Alley where there are now very few Coconut Trees because they have been removed and replaced with watermelons.

We saw Ringed and Belted Kingfishers as we birded on one of our stops along the road. We drove around the Nariva Swamp where we saw a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Gray-cowled Wood-Rail, Black Skimmer, Limpkins, Southern Lapwings, Anhingas, Southern Lapwings, Purple Gallinules, and so much more. As the afternoon continued, it was time to head to the unused airfield for dinner, followed by some night birding. Lester set up a wonderful catered dinner with rum punch for all. He even brought a chocolate cake for dessert. After dinner, we went for a drive and saw a few nocturnal birds including Common Pauraque, White-tailed Nightjars and a glimpse at a Mottled Owl. Everyone was ready to head back to their rooms after a long, successful day of birding.

Tues., Nov. 21 Birding at Hacienda Jacana | Caroni National Park

We had a change of plans for the first part of the day because of higher than usual tides in the Gulf of Paria. After consulting with Lester and Dave we decided to bird at Hacienda Jacana for the morning. Martyn joined us, and Dave did an orientation of the grounds with us. Everyone was pleased to see so many birds like Tufted Coquette for the second morning in a row, Copper-rumped Hummingbirds, Blue-chinned Sapphires, a Gray-cowled Wood-Rail, a Guianan Trogon, a Red-rumped Woodpecker, Great Kiskadees and Green Honeycreepers. We all headed down for a delicious lunch then had the pleasure of meeting Rachel who brought her beautiful hand-made products for people to purchase.

Everyone was thrilled to receive a \$25 credit from Naturalist Journeys, and we all bought some great gifts! Afterwards we headed to Caroni National Park. Before boarding the boat, we did some birding along the road where we saw our first Scarlet Ibises and two Tropical Screech-Owls. Then we met up with Lester who had set up the boat with a table and red tablecloth in the middle. We cruised down the river and saw quite a few more birds including Ringed Kingfisher, American Pygmy Kingfisher and a Straight-billed Woodcreeper. We also saw two Ruschenberger's Tree Boas along the way. Lester brought us to the perfect spot to view hundreds of Scarlet Ibises flying into their night roost, quite the sight to see! Lester served a catered dinner that we all enjoyed together before heading back to Hacienda Jacana for our final night.



Wed., Nov. 22 El Suzanne Rain Forest | ASA Wright Nature Center

Three of our more adventurous guests, Jean, Liz and Raj, woke at 3:30 a.m. to drive with Dave to Trinidad's northeast corner at Grand Riviere in hopes of seeing the endemic Piping Guan. They were not disappointed either as they ended up seeing 25 plus! The rest of us packed our bags in preparation for our move to ASA Wright Nature Center. The whole group met up at El Suzanne, nestled in the Tamana Rainforest, where we were hosted by Dianne at her home and were served a wonderful homemade lunch on her terrace. While we were there, we saw Blue-gray, Silver-beaked and Palm Tanagers, Crested Oropendolas, Orange-winged Parrots and Yellow-rumped Caciques just to name a few.

After lunch we drove to ASA Wright Nature Center where we were greeted by the friendly staff, and then got settled into our rooms. We all met up on the veranda an hour later to view the many birds coming to the feeders. We saw Little Hermit, Ruby-topaz Hummingbirds, Tufted Coquette, White-chested Emerald, Blue-chinned Sapphire, Bananaquits and more. After sunset we all enjoyed a delicious, locally sourced dinner together. A couple of the guests joined Caleb for a night walk after dinner.

Thurs., Nov. 23 Thanksgiving Day at ASA Wright

We spent the entire day at ASA Wright Nature Center today. After breakfast, we met with Mukesh on the veranda. He did a short presentation for us in the main house, then took us out on the grounds for an orientation of the property. We birded as we learned about the history of ASA Wright. We saw many Tanagers including White-lined, Silver-beaked and Blue-gray as well as Blue Dacnis and both Purple and Green Honeycreepers. We continued down the trail to Dunstan Cave to see the Oilbird colony. Sadly, there was only one that was partially visible. Apparently, the birds have moved farther back into the gorge or left the location due to the new quarry. We enjoyed the nice hike to and from the cave, then returned to the dining room for lunch. After lunch, we went back out on the trail with Mukesh for more birding. We caught some great views of a couple of Bearded Bellbirds as well as a Yellow Warbler, White-necked Thrush and Boat-billed Flycatcher. Later in the afternoon we headed back to our rooms to get ready for dinner. We were treated to a beautiful Thanksgiving meal with turkey and all the fixings! The chef and staff made sure we had everything we could possibly want for a very special holiday celebration.



Fri., Nov. 24

Birding Blanchisseuse Road | Brasso Seco Village

Dave and Lester picked us up shortly after breakfast for a day-long excursion into the Northern Range on Blanchisseuse Road. We made plenty of stops along the way, finding Cocoa Thrush, White-necked Thrush and Spectacled Thrush in addition to Trinidad and Violaceous Euphonias, Crested Oropendola, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Shiny Cowbird, American Redstart, and more. Once everyone was settled in at the “Cocoa Factory” in the quaint village of Brasso Seco, we were shown how to make chocolate from raw cocoa. Lunch was served following this interesting and informative presentation, and everyone had the opportunity to purchase their locally made chocolate, cocoa nibs and cocoa powder. Many more birds were seen on the scenic drive back to ASA Wright Nature Center including Tropical Parula, Golden-crowned Warbler, Tropical Mockingbird and Crimson-crested Woodpecker. We arrived back at ASA Wright shortly before another delicious dinner. After dinner and reviewing our checklist, several of us headed out for a night walk with Mukesh. We saw a beautiful Chevron Tarantula and a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl along with some other cool night critters.

Sat., Nov. 25

Hummingbird House | Flight to Tobago | Cuffie River Nature Retreat

Dave picked us up after breakfast and we drove to the lush and sacred Maracas Valley, nestled in the northern range of Trinidad, to visit Yerette, the Hummingbird House also known as Theo’s place. There were SO many hummingbirds, it was amazing! We saw dozens of Ruby-topaz Hummingbirds, Black-throated Mangos, Tufted Coquettes, Copper-rumped Hummingbirds, White-chested Emeralds and Blue-chinned Sapphires. The owner of the home, Theo, had dozens of feeders in his yard, and they were all packed with hummingbirds. Theo sat with us on his patio sharing hummingbird facts and describing their physiology as we viewed the birds in his yard. Afterwards, his wife, Gloria, served us a beautiful homemade lunch. There was more than enough food for everyone including chicken, fish, salad, soup, bread, coffee, tea and soft drinks. After lunch, Dave took us to the airport for our flight to Tobago. We thanked him for a wonderful week of birding and said our goodbyes. We arrived in Tobago in the early afternoon, and met our local guide, Jason, who took us birding for the next couple of hours. We visited the Bon Accord and Canaan Sewage Ponds where we saw Common and Purple Gallinules, a Sora, lots of Wattled Jacanas, Whimbrels, Spotted Sandpipers, Greater Yellowlegs, both Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, and many others! It was dark when we were dropped off at the Cuffie River Lodge and greeted by the hospitable owner, Regina. Everyone settled into their rooms before meeting in the dining room to enjoy another delicious dinner together before retiring for the night.



Sun., Nov. 26 **Cuffie River Lodge | Adventure Farm | Fort James**

We spent the morning at the Cuffie River Nature Retreat. Most of us were up before breakfast to view the hummingbirds on the feeders just outside the dining area where we saw White-necked Jacobins, Green Hermits, Black-throated Mangos and more. A flock of Orange-winged Parrots could be heard and seen in the trees behind the lodge. After breakfast, Desmond, the groundskeeper and expert guide, took us down the trail for an orientation and birding. A Great Black Hawk was spotted soaring far above, and we found Barred Antshrike, White-fringed Antwren, Cocoa Woodcreeper and Blue-backed Manakins.

We returned to the lodge for lunch, and then had some time to ourselves before Jason took us to Plymouth to visit the Adventure Farm and Nature Reserve. We had a leisurely walk on the trail up to the main house where we saw lots of birds including the famous Trinidad Motmot who put on quite a show for us. We also saw a couple of Tropical Mockingbirds, Blue-gray Tanager, Palm Tanager, Blue Dacnis and Purple Honeycreeper. Of course, there were many more hummingbirds on the feeders including Brown Violetear, White-tailed Sabrewing and White-chested Emerald. Then we jumped back on the bus for the short drive to Fort James, which is situated right on the beach. We saw Brown Pelicans, Royal Terns, Black Skimmers and Magnificent Frigatebirds. Just before sunset we drove back to the lodge for dinner, then did some night birding from the lodge where a White-tailed Nightjar made an appearance.

Mon., Nov. 27 **Main Ridge Reserve | Speyside | Little Tobago Island**

We woke up to the sound of Chachalacas vocalizing in the shrubs and trees around the Cuffie River Lodge. After an early breakfast, we headed out for a full day of birding, sight-seeing and a boat trip to Little Tobago Island. We drove through the mountains of the Main Ridge Forest Reserve making stops along the way to walk the rainforest trails where we saw Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Red-crowned Woodpecker, White-fringed Antshrike, Blue-backed Manakin and more.

We stopped at the Visitors Center, and saw the new monument dedicated to “Man and Biosphere Reserve” as part of the environmental protection movement for Tobago’s forests. We continued our drive through the reserve down to the coastal community of Batteaux in Speyside. We enjoyed a nice lunch at Bird Watcher’s Cafe then made our way to Blue Waters Inn. Here we boarded glass-bottomed boat that would take us to Little Tobago Island. Once we arrived, we learned some of the history of Little Tobago, and then we slowly made our way up the trail to the top of the mountain. At the summit we were greeted by hundreds of Red-billed Tropicbirds soaring through the air right in front of us. They put on an incredible show! We even saw an

occasional Magnificent Frigatebird swoop down to grab a Tropicbird, forcing it to regurgitate the food it had in its crop! We also saw Red-footed and Brown Boobies and Brown Pelicans. We sailed back to the “mainland,” then made our way to the opposite side of Tobago to the Cuffie River Lodge for our farewell dinner.

Tues., Nov. 28 **Departures**

After breakfast, we all said our goodbyes, and bid farewell to Trinidad and Tobago.

Photos: Group (Kelly Vandenheuvel - KV), Channel-billed Toucan (Elizabeth Harrison - EH), Scarlet Ibis (SN), Purple Honeycreeper (SN), Trinidad Piping-Guan (SN), Bananaquit (SN), Trinidad Motmot (SN), Squirrel Cuckoo (SN), Orange-winged Parrots (SN), Green-backed Trogon (SN), Spectacled Thrush (SN), Red Peacock Butterfly (Wavell Fogleman - WF), Green Honeycreeper-Bananaquit-Purple Honeycreeper (SN), Pink Flower (KV), Bearded Bellbird (EH), Green Honeycreeper (SN), Caterpillar (EH), Copper-rumped Hummingbird (SN), Lineated Woodpecker (SN), Caiman (SN), Scenic (KV), Ruby Topaz Hummingbird (SN), Silver-beaked Tanager (SN), Barred Antshrike (SN)