

Trinidad and Tobago | Trip Report March 13-22, 2025 | by Kip Miller



Guided by Dave Ramlal and Jason Radix with Kip Miller. Our group included Rick, Marie, Trina, Donna, Soon, Sunny, Mike, Peggy, Ginny and Kathy.



Thursday, March 13 – Pax Guest House | Hacienda Jacana

Several of us arrived a day early and stayed at the historic Pax Guest House. Located high on a hill in St. Benedict, the veranda here features hummingbird feeders and scenic views over a forested valley. The hummingbirds were the first to attract our attention and we started the day with close views of nine species, including White-necked Jacobin, Black-throated Mango and the very crowd-pleasing Ruby-topaz Hummingbird. Trees adjacent to the guest house were busy with birds as well and we enjoyed views of Green-rumped Parrolet, Tropical Mockingbird, Yellow



Oriole and the first of many Blue-gray Tanagers. Our host Gerard suggested keeping an eye on the skies over the valley, as it was a good location to view soaring raptors. Indeed, he was right, and in the short time we were present we were able to see Common Black Hawk, Gray-lined, Broad-winged and Zone-tailed Hawks.

The morning flew past rather quickly and after lunch we met Dave Ramlal, who would be our primary local guide for the Trinidad portion of our tour. We loaded our gear into Dave's van and set off for Hacienda Jacana. It wasn't a long drive, but Dave broke it up with strategic stops to view shorebirds and other species at locations he promised to return to later with the full group. In late afternoon, we arrived at Hacienda Jacana and settled into our spacious rooms and soon the remainder of the group arrived from the airport. We then enjoyed a get-acquainted dinner in Hacienda Jacana's lovely open air dining area, before retiring for a good night's rest and the official start of the tour together in the morning.

Friday, March 14 – Hacienda Jacana | Atlantic Lowlands | Nariva Swamp

We began the day birding the grounds of Hacienda Jacana before breakfast. From a hilltop open area, we viewed multiple species including Crimson-crested and Lineated Woodpeckers, Streaked and Boat-billed Flycatchers, Crested Oropendola and Silver-beaked Tanager. Working our way slowly along the entrance road to the dining area we added more new species, including Guianan Trogon, Streak-headed Woodcreeper and Yellow-rumped Cacique. Arriving at the dining area for breakfast, we found Dave and our driver Paul had arrived, along with Martyn Kenefick, author of *"Birds of Trinidad & Tobago"*. Martyn planned to join us for the day, an unexpected bonus!

After breakfast, we loaded the bus and started heading for the Atlantic lowlands along Trinidad's eastern coast. Our first stop was along a side road in an area of scrub forest and overgrown fields. Nothing special it seemed, but Dave's whistled pygmy-owl imitation soon attracted a swarm of birds that included a Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Violaceous Euphonia, Yellow-hooded Blackbird and others. Continuing on towards the coast, we made stops in open areas that yielded additional species such as Savanna Hawk, White-headed Marsh Tyrant, Red-breasted Meadowlark and Grassland Yellow-Finch, a species Martyn noted was rather rare in Trinidad.

As we approached the coast, we encountered a rainstorm that caused some concern about our plans for a picnic lunch. Fortunately, just as we arrived at the beach, the rain stopped and we enjoyed an oceanfront picnic with Carib Grackles at our feet and Brown Pelicans and Magnificent Frigatebirds in view offshore. After lunch, we



worked south along the shore through the Nariva Swamp. Stops adjacent to areas of mangroves and at the mouth of the Nariva River provided views of several raptor species, including Snail Kite, Rufous Crab Hawk, Crested Caracara and Yellow-headed Caracara, along with smaller birds such as Northern Scrub Flycatcher and the handsome Black-crested Antshrike. Before returning to the lodge for the night, we made a short inland loop that provided a brief view of an American Pygmy Kingfisher, along with Pied Water-Tyrant, Limpkin, Wattled Jacana and Striated Heron. A full, but very productive first day together!

Saturday, March 15 – Hacienda Jacana | Bajnath’s Estate | Grande Riviere

Before departing Hacienda Jacana, we walked the grounds with Dave and found a nice mix of birds. A tiny, but fierce-looking Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl provided scope views in a tree overhead while being mobbed by Violaceous Euphonias, Blue-gray, Palm and Turquoise Tanagers, Bananaquits and others. Walking past the pond we saw Purple Gallinules and Southern Lapwings, while trees and shrubs nearby were host to Barred Antshrike, Black-tailed Tityra, Chivi Vireo, Northern Waterthrush and Yellow Warbler.

Following the walk, we loaded the bus and said our good-byes to the wonderful staff at Hacienda Jacana. Then it was on the road to Grand Riviere in Trinidad’s northeast. While the total drive time was around three hours, Dave broke it up with several fun stops. One was along a roadside for a pair of very cooperative Bat Falcons and another was at Bajnath’s Hummingbird Estate, where we enjoyed both lunch and a few hours of fantastic hummingbird watching. Multiple feeders here attracted swarms (literally!) of hummingbirds for up close viewing. White-necked Jacobins were the most abundant of the 11 species we saw, with White-chested Emeralds, Copper-rumped Hummingbirds and Blue-chinned Sapphires also present in numbers. Some of the other hummingbirds we enjoyed here included Rufous-breasted and Green Hermits, Brown Violetear, Black-throated Mango and the tiny, but spectacular Tufted Coquette.

From Bajnath’s we continued on to Grand Riviere, first driving along Trinidad’s Atlantic coast and then rounding a corner and driving along Trinidad’s Caribbean coast to the Mt. Plaisir Hotel, our beachside accommodations for the night. Per Dave’s suggestion, we dropped off luggage in the rooms and quickly reassembled back at the bus for a short drive into the nearby forest. Here in the vicinity of an overlook platform, we enjoyed views of several Trinidad Piping-Guans, one of Trinidad’s two endemic bird species. Then it was back to hotel and while the birding for the day was over, the highlights certainly were not. After dinner, we ventured on to the beach in the light of the almost full moon and were able to see several massive Leatherback Turtles come ashore to lay their eggs. An experience none of us will soon forget and a wonderful conclusion to a great day together!



Sunday, March 16 – Grande Riviere | Asa Wright Nature Center

Following our evening with the turtles, we started the morning with free time before breakfast to enjoy easy walks on the beach and the wonderful ocean views from the rooms. After breakfast, we explored a few nearby side roads, where a Silvered Antbird showed nicely as a result of Dave's patient effort and we also found Golden-fronted Greenlet, Long-billed Gnatwren, Giant Cowbird, Olive-gray Saltator and another Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. (You can *never* have too many pygmy-owls!)

After lunch, we packed the bus and continued on to the Asa Wright Nature Center in Trinidad's Northern Range. Almost immediately upon arrival, we gathered on the famed veranda for rum punch and birding. Many hummingbirds were coming to the hummingbird feeders and the fruit feeders attracted Violaceous Euphonias, Silver-beaked Tanagers, both Purple and Green Honeycreepers and many Bananaquits. Bearded Bellbirds could clearly be heard in the valley below and species that appeared in nearby trees included Channel-billed Toucan, Orange-winged Amazon, Spectacled Thrush and Crested Oropendola. Later, after a checklist session and dinner, a few in the group joined Asa Wright guide Caleb for a night walk along the entrance road. It was both great fun and very productive. Via flashlight, we saw both Barred Antshrike and Gray-throated Leaf-tosser settled in for the night and a variety of other creatures as well, including Boa Constrictor, Southern Opossum, a tarantula and several small scorpions that glowed neon in the light of Caleb's UV flashlight.

Monday, March 17 – Asa Wright Nature Center | Blanchisseuse Road

Pre-breakfast birding from the veranda yielded many of the same birds as the previous afternoon (enjoyed with coffee or tea in hand this time), along with Little Hermit, Lined Woodpecker and Bay-headed Tanager. After breakfast, we loaded the bus for a day-long exploration higher into the Northern Range along Blanchisseuse Road. We spent the morning birding roadsides and walking a nearby two-track path and found a nice variety of birds including Chestnut Woodpecker, Piratic Flycatcher, Rufous-breasted Wren, Golden-crowned Warbler, Hepatic Tanager, and a pair of Swallow Tanagers that had just returned from their wintering grounds in South America. Lunch was in the small community of Brasso Seco, where we also enjoyed a talk detailing the local production of chocolate – complete with samples!

For the afternoon, we continued roadside birding and it was just as productive as the morning. New species recorded included Green-backed and Collared Trogons, Great Antshrike and the tiny Streaked Xenops. We also found several species of tropical flycatchers that were new for the trip, including Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Ochre-colored Flatbill, Forest Elaenia, Euler's Flycatcher, Northern Tropical Pewee and Brown-crested Flycatcher. Later, we returned to Asa Wright to conclude the day with more casual veranda birding and another nice dinner together.



Tuesday, March 18 – Asa Wright Nature Center | Caroni Swamp

We started the day birding again from the veranda, where Caleb pointed out a distant Scaled Pigeon we were able to view in the scopes. After breakfast, we joined Caleb for a walk on the nature center trails. Our first stop was just below the main building, where we found Collared Trogon, Cocoa Thrush and our first Trinidad Motmot, the other of the two Trinidad endemic bird species. Continuing down the trail, we encountered a White-bearded Manakin lek that was amazing – there seemed to be displaying males all around us! After enjoying the show for a while, we continued on in the direction of several calling Bearded Bellbirds. Here, with a little searching, we were able to view several males close enough to clearly see the throat full of dangling black wattles and watch as they opened their beaks wide to belt out their incredibly loud calls. After soaking up this experience for a while, we started slowly back up the trail. As we got closer to the buildings, Caleb suggested a slight detour and we were able to find a few Golden-headed Manakins, a nice conclusion to the morning.

Following lunch, Dave and Paul showed up to take us for our evening adventure to Caroni Swamp. On the way, we stopped near the airport at the locations previously visited by those who arrived early. Here we found a nice mix of shorebirds and waders, along with Yellow-chinned Spinetail. Arriving later at the location where we would board the boat for our evening adventure, we started with some roadside birding along the canal. The short time we spent here was very productive, as we found Common Black Hawk, Tropical Screech-Owl, Straight-billed Woodcreeper and Masked Cardinal.

A bit later, it was time to board the boat and we started motoring down the canal while drinks were served. (We were really roughing it!) We soon saw our first Scarlet Ibis and continued to flush them down the canal, along with multiple Little Blue and Tricolored Herons and Snowy Egrets. In addition to these waders, we also saw other interesting species as we traveled through the mangroves, including Greater Ani, Green-throated Mango and Bicolored Conebill. Eventually, we arrived at more open area of the marsh where a flock of American Flamingos was feeding and we began to see small flocks of stunning Scarlet Ibises in flight. We then continued to a more expansive open area, where we enjoyed a most amazing dinner experience on the boat, sitting within view of another American Flamingo flock and watching as hundreds of Scarlet Ibises flew in to roost in the mangroves for the night. It was tough to leave, but before it was totally dark, we made the return trip to dock and then the drive back to Asa Wright, where we said our good-byes to Dave and thanked him for his efforts in making the Trinidad portion of the tour so rewarding.



Wednesday, March 19 – Asa Wright | Flight to Tobago | Bon Accord Ponds

Today we were scheduled to make the transfer from Trinidad to Tobago, but we had enough time before our flight to enjoy a final morning at Asa Wright – and we took full advantage of it! Before breakfast, we gathered one more time on the veranda, where we enjoyed views of Tufted Coquette, Blue Dacnis and the many other species we had seen here daily. After breakfast, we met with long-time Asa Wright guide Mukesh for a visit to Dunstan Cave, the site of the Oilbird nesting colony on the grounds. Mukesh gave us a short indoor presentation about the Oilbirds and their history at Asa Wright and then we set off down the trail together. It was a very downhill walk and the entry into the narrow cave required a bit of “footing-finesse”, but we took our time and helped each other and everyone was able to see the Oilbirds perched on their small ledges – a truly amazing wildlife experience. We then worked our way back up the trail and Mukesh was able to find a couple of Golden-headed Manakins for those in the group who had missed this species the day before.

Following a bit of final packing, we said our good-byes to the fine staff at Asa Wright and set off to the airport, where our short flight to Tobago departed on time. After arrival and luggage retrieval, we stepped outside the airport and met Jason Radix, our primary local guide for the Tobago portion of our tour. Jason cheerfully told us to get our binoculars out and ready and after just a short drive, we arrived at the Bon Accord water treatment ponds, where a roadside walk yielded a variety of birds including Pale-vented Pigeon, Eared Dove, Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night-Herons, White-winged Swallow and Caribbean Martin. We then loaded the bus and made the short drive to the nearby Centre Street Ponds, where we found many Blue-winged Teals, White-cheeked Pintails and Common Gallinules, along with a single Spectacled Caimen floating casually in one of the ponds. From here we continued on the Cuffie River Nature Retreat, our accommodations for the next three nights, where we settled into our rooms and enjoyed another excellent dinner together.

Thursday, March 20 – Cuffie River Nature Retreat | Adventure Farm

The raucous calls of Rufous-vented Chachalacas awakened us all before dawn, but surprisingly they stayed out-of-sight after sunrise in the dense tropical vegetation surrounding the lodge. Fortunately, there was no shortage of other birds and the hummingbird feeders in particular were busy and kept us occupied until breakfast. White-necked Jacobins were the most abundant species, but we also enjoyed multiple Ruby-topaz and Copper-rumped Hummingbirds, along with Black-throated Mangos and Rufous-breasted Hermits.



After breakfast, we met with Cuffie River guide Desmond for a walk in the lodge vicinity. Birding the forest edges from the pool deck provided views of several species including White-tipped Dove, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Gray Kingbird and Chivi Vireo. We also saw Short-tailed and Gray-rumped Swifts in flight overhead and the Gray-rumped entertained us by coming low and snagging in-flight drinks from the pool. After birding the immediate lodge area for a while, we explored along the entrance road for the remainder of the morning. Winds kicked up as we were walking here and made the birding rather challenging, but we were still able to enjoy close views of several Rufous-tailed Jacamars, a tropical species that is always a crowd-pleaser.

For our afternoon birding, we traveled off-site with Jason to a location known as the “Adventure Farm”. Despite the name, there were no roller coasters or zip-lines, but there was a porch with many feeders and birds up close. In addition to lots of hummingbirds, other species we enjoyed at the feeders included Trinidad Motmot, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Spectacled Thrush and surprisingly, even a Barred Antshrike. After watching the feeders for quite a while, we followed Jason on a short walk on the trails, where we found Ochre-lored Flatbill, Fuscous Flycatcher and a few more Rufous-tailed Jacamars. We then got back on the bus and made the short drive to Fort James on Tobago’s Caribbean coastline. Scanning from the high overlook we found Laughing Gulls, Royal Terns and Black Skimmers on a pier offshore, while the open lawn of the park was host to Eared Doves, Tropical Mockingbirds and Black-faced Grassquits. Then it was back to Cuffie River, where we found a handsome male White-tailed Sabrewing at the feeders, a new species for our group and a nice conclusion to our relaxed, but rewarding day together.

Friday, March 21 – Main Ridge Forest Reserve | Little Tobago Island

After early birding on the grounds of Cuffie River, we departed with Jason for the Main Ridge Forest Reserve, an area on Tobago that has been protected since 1776. Here we made short forays to search for birds along a couple of forested trails. At the first, we encountered a Blue-backed Manakin lek and were able to see and hear several of the handsome males. Along the second, we found Red-rumped and Golden-olive Woodpeckers, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Yellow-legged and White-necked Thrushes and a migrant American Redstart. In addition to these birds, Jason pointed out a fish in a small creek crossing called a “Jumping Guabine” because of its unique ability to travel short distances overland between water sources.



From the Forest Reserve we continued down to Tobago's Caribbean coast, where we had lunch and then boarded the boat to take us to Little Tobago Island. After making the short crossing, our local guide Zolani led us up the trail to the seabird overlook with multiple stops to both rest and to talk about the island and its natural history. Upon reaching the overlook, we were greeted with views of many seabirds in the air and perched on nearby hillsides and offshore islands. A hundred or more handsome Red-billed Tropicbirds were flying about and riding the updrafts along our ridge, often coming quite close. Many Red-footed Boobies were present as well, some flying below us and others perched in the shrubs on the hillside next to nests with fuzzy young birds. Zolani also pointed out a location on a distant hill where several Brown Boobies could be seen in the scopes and he pointed out a distant island, where the Magnificent Frigatebirds were so numerous they resembled a swarm of bees in the air. After enjoying the seabirds and the scenic coastal views for quite a while, we made our way back down the trail and boarded the boat for the trip back to Tobago. The boat was equipped with glass-bottomed viewing areas, so as we were cruised over shallow areas the captain slowed and we were able to see several fish species, sea fans and corals. A very fun conclusion to our Little Tobago adventure! On the way from the boat dock to the bus, we encountered several Rufous-vented Chachalacas in the nearby trees. After hearing them frequently in the past couple of days, it was nice to finally get eyes on a few! Then it was back on the bus to begin the drive back to Cuffie River – but first with a stop for refreshments at a location where a small ice cream shop was adjacent to a bar. (Some chose ice cream, some chose beer and some it seems, chose both!) Once back at Cuffie River, we enjoyed a final dinner together and chance to share favorite sightings and experiences from the trip. Then it was off for final packing and a good night's rest before our departures for home in the morning.

Saturday, March 22 – Departures for home

After enjoying a little more time watching the busy Cuffie River feeders and a final breakfast together, Jason arrived to shuttle us to the Tobago airport to begin our travels home with fond memories of our Trinidad and Tobago adventure together. Thanks to all for joining us! - Kip

Photos: Photos: Group (Sunny Yando - SY), American Flamingoes (Marie Strassburger - MS), White-necked Jacobin (Kip Miller - KM), Red-billed Tropicbird (KM), Hibiscus Flower (Soon Cho - SC), Leatherback Turtle (MS), Trinidad tropical forests view (KM), Nesting Leatherback Turtle (KM), Lunch with the hummingbirds (KM), Brown Violetear (MS), Asa Wright View (KM), Scarlett Ibis (MS), All smiles! (MS), Blue-gray Tanager (MS), Tobago Scenic (KM), Tufted Coquette (KM), Masked Cardinal (KM), Channel-billed Toucan (KM), Rufous-tailed Jacamar (KM)