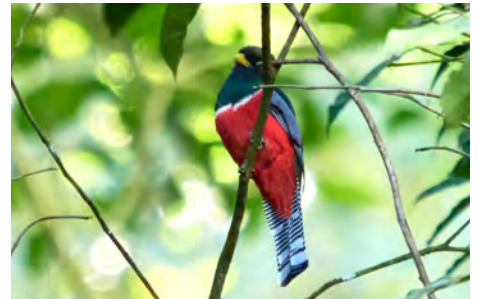


Trinidad & Tobago | Jan. 16-25, 2025 | Trip Report | Written by James P. Smith



A wonderful group of travelers with Dawn & Mike, Julia & Bill, Judith & George, Sandy & Art, Virginia and Kate, local guides Dave Ramlal and Jason Radix, and Naturalist Journeys host guide James P. Smith.



Thu., Jan. 16 | Arrivals | Hacienda Jacana

Our early arrivals treated themselves to a pre-tour night's stay at the Pax Guest House dramatically situated on Mount St Benedict offering spectacular views overlooking Tunapuna and the famous Northern Range. The gracious hosts at Pax, Gerald and Oda, couldn't have given us a warmer reception and, despite our very short stay, we were really taken care of – they kept us entertained and well fed!



An incredible variety of hummingbirds was seen from the Pax veranda and in the beds of Purple Verbena around the property, including two sought-after key species; Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird and Tufted Coquette! Barred Antshrikes and Yellow Orioles offered great views too while Gray-lined and Zone-tailed Hawks put on a fine show as we gazed across the forested valley from the balcony.

In early afternoon we met up with our main guide for the tour, Dave Ramlal, and then transferred to Hacienda Jacana, our base for the next three nights. We received a very warm welcome from hosts Joanne and Helen and settled into our cozy accommodations. Judith and George arrived just before we gathered for a delicious buffet dinner of pumpkin soup, stew chicken, flying fish (!), provisions and plantains, and coconut ice cream for dessert. All the ingredients had been locally sourced and specially prepared by on-site chef, Paul. It was warm and sticky, and as we drifted back to our rooms, the rhythmic calls of the local Common Pauragues left no doubt we were in the tropics!

Fri., Jan. 17 | Hacienda Jacana | Mexico Road | Manzanilla Beach | Nariva Swamp and fields

We met for a delightful breakfast at Hacienda's outdoor dining area, this time joined by Virginia, Sandy and Art who'd finally made it having arrived on a delayed flight the previous evening. Local guide Dave showed up for breakfast too, and Martyn Kenefick, the author of the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago and something of a birding legend in Trinidad, had already been birding on site since 6am with a view to joining us for the whole day! The lodge grounds were full of pleasing distractions with the beds of Purple Verbena outside the main office hosting lots of hummers including Copper-rumped and Ruby-Topaz Hummingbirds, Blue-chinned Sapphire and the diminutive, and much-prized, Tufted Coquette!

Paul, our main driver for the tour, arrived with his spacious coaster bus and we drove down to the tropical lowlands where impressive flocks of Black Vultures soared up on the rising thermals as the heat of the day really kicked in. Highlights included a Short-tailed Hawk, wonderful views of a perched Black-throated Mango and Long-billed Starthroat. A Boat-billed Flycatcher offered nice comparisons with a Great Kiskadee. There was an Olive-gray Saltator too and a locally rare Variegated Flycatcher.

Soon afterwards we set sail for the coast pausing briefly by a livestock farm loaded with Black Vultures at Aripo. Dave picked out a couple of perched Savannah Hawks after he'd just excelled himself by spotting a tiny Pearl Kite perched on the roadside wires right above a local garden center. The kite was so obliging it allowed us to park, walk back along the road and thoroughly enjoy the most enigmatic of small raptors.



The morning had flown by and it wasn't too long before we arrived at the scenic beach-front park at Manzanilla. Tall palms swayed in the ocean breezes as the surf pounded mile upon mile of extensive sandy beach. Dave and Paul prepared a fine picnic lunch as Magnificent Frigatebirds cruised overhead with a handful of Brown Pelicans foraging offshore, while the local Carib Grackles harassed us for the post-lunch scraps! Later, we drove south towards Nariva Swamp along Coconut Alley though Dave had spot in mind where Snail Kites could be seen from a roadside wetland. Sure enough we first saw a male kite, and then a few moments later, a female further back from the road. Dave and Martyn seemed pretty excited as Snail Kite was formerly rare in the area but now appears to be established as a breeding species in the Nariva area.

The huge palms swayed even more in the increasingly strong winds as we headed south making several stops along the edge of mangrove swamps. A close juvenile Common Black Hawk perched in the open in total contrast to the challenging American Pygmy Kingfisher keeping low down and hidden in the mangroves! Thankfully we met with success and all of the group had pretty good views of the kingfisher. A tiny Bicolored Conebill and a ridiculously close juvenile Rufous Crab-Hawk added much to the morning while we simultaneously tried to focus on a singing male Black-crested Antshrike. The Crab-Hawk, being a young bird, wasn't too easy to identify and subsequently caused a bit of a stir among the guides but its tame behavior actually proved to be one of the key characteristics of the species. In the meantime Martyn remained at the beach and was busy spotting a Little Egret among the Snowy Egrets while White-winged Swallows hawked up and down the waterfront front offering fantastic views of their diagnostic upperparts.

We rounded off the day along the Cascadoux Road watching Savanna Hawks in the fields, and raucous Blue-and-yellow Macaws in the plantations where we eventually had decent views of a dozen or more! On the way back to Hacienda Jacana we paused to view Common Pauriques resting along the access road in the fading light and then headed back to base for another delicious buffet supper prepared by Paul; lentil Soup, pork loin or salmon, black bean and sweet potato pie, and strudel were all on offer this evening.

Sat., Jan. 18 | Hacienda Jacana | West Sumaria Trace | Scarlet Ibis at Caroni Swamp National Park

Joanne and the team once again served a delicious buffet breakfast as more meal-time distractions came to the fore with Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Blue-chinned Sapphire, Crested Oropendula and Green-backed Trogon vying for our attention as we ate.



After breakfast Dave led an enjoyable birding walk around the property at Hacienda. We began at the highest point on the site, up by the 'Main House'. It was cloudy, humid, and rain showers threatening which we skillfully managed to dodge (well almost!) as we ended up with a very productive morning overall. There was much to celebrate with views of two Little Tinamous walking around on the forest floor, a species far more frequently heard than seen, and a pair of Bat Falcons perched up on dead snags for all to see. Gray-lined Hawks called and displayed above the property while for forest dwellers such as Black-tailed Tityra, Guianan Trogon and Streaked Xenops all showed well at times, or at least far better than the Sooty Grassquit that Dave tried so hard to rustle up for us! Beautiful Southern Lapwings put on a nice display near the main office, seemingly at home on even the tiniest lawn! Dave led us off property for a short while to view a 'lek' of Little Hermits, one of the smaller hummingbird species to be found on the island and, with some effort, we eventually had wonderful views of this cute, perky little sprite. A pair of Channel-billed Toucans rounded off a very productive morning with Lineated and Golden-olive Woodpeckers on view as we ambled back to the lodge. The hummingbird show on the Purple Verbena continued to be wonderfully entertaining as Tufted Coquette, Ruby-topaz, Black-throated Mango and White-chested Emerald all came into view. After a little downtime we enjoyed yet another lovely meal at Hacienda Javana before heading out towards the lowlands and the lengthy drive down to the Caroni Swamp.

The afternoon was wild as squally rain showers pulsed across West Samaria Trace, a complex of wetlands neatly hidden behind an obscure residential area. While not the most scenic spot in Trinidad, it was certainly productive. Between the showers we found Common Gallinule, Wattled Jacana, Tricolored and Striated herons, a superb Ringed Kingfisher, and stunning views of a perched Green-throated Mango, the latter not only uncommon and but much more closely tied to lowland mangrove habitat than its widespread Black-throated cousin. A pair of Yellow-chinned Spinetails put on a fine display in the reeds where we also enjoyed views of a 'dashing' black and white Pied Water-tyrant and several handsome Yellow-hooded Blackbirds. Not to be overshadowed, a couple of introduced exotics garnered some interest with Tricolored Munias and Common Waxbills both on view at times.

We finished off the day with the most wonderful boat ride through the expansive Caroni Swamp, all of which is preserved thanks to the decades-old efforts of Lester (our host and Captain) and his family. Martyn Kenefick again joined us for the evening and as we cruised through mature mangrove forest. Lester found a beautiful Masked Cardinal while Dave's sharp eyes picked out a Ruschenberger's Tree Boa coiled above us on a mangrove limb and we had fantastic views of Straight-billed Woodcreeper, another mangrove specialist. As if that wasn't enough, we then steered towards a roosting Common Potoo and there was an even a Northern Scrub Flycatcher, a furtive species again, closely associated with mangroves and typically quite difficult to see well. As we moved out onto the open water Caroni Swamp became enveloped in color as flocks of pink American Flamingos and endless streams of Scarlet Ibis, Tricolored and Little Blue Herons, all headed to



roost in the mangroves and adorning the trees like festive decorations.

As flights of flaming Scarlet Ibis continued to stream past, Lester simultaneously served up the most stunning meal laced with Indian and Caribbean influences, while he recited stories of his family history and their commitment to keep Caroni Swamp conserved, preserved and special. It also happened to be Judith's birthday and we celebrated in style with a delicious chocolate cake served aboard the boat and then returned to the lodge long after dark noting several more Common Pauragues on the driveway. We settled down after another rich and rewarding day in preparation for an early start the next morning.

Sun., Jan. 19 | Grand Riviere | Hacienda Jacana | ASA Wright Nature Center

The final morning at Hacienda Jacana could only mean one thing, an early departure for Grand Riviere to search for the Trinidad Piping-Guan! The guan is one of only two endemic bird species to be found on the islands, and on this tour. We left the lodge at 4:30 AM sharing brief goodbyes with Joanne before hitting the road in complete darkness for the long drive to Grand Riviere pausing only to pick up the 'to-go' breakfasts along the way. Mike, Dawn and Julia chose a more relaxed approach and remained at Hacienda for a casual morning of birding, breakfast and photography around the lodge. On arrival at the Monte Verde Road we were introduced to a viewing platform atop a small rise in the road set amid the lush rainforest canopy. The viewing deck was replete with a covered dining area and bathrooms below and, somewhat surprisingly, the mighty Trinidad Piping-Guans were already on view as soon as we arrived! The property, owned by Hadcoexperiences, had been reserved exclusively for guests of the Asa Wright Center, particularly us! Dave and Paul organized a fine breakfast buffet of potato roti complimented by a delicious bean-salad.

The birding action was pretty much nonstop. Aside from the piping-guans, we enjoyed Silver-beaked and White-lined Tanagers Tanagers, Violaceous Euphonias and Dave worked especially hard to pick out a couple of Trinidad Euphonias for the group. The sudden appearance a couple of raptors just above the forest canopy was a surprise as they turned out to be the first Plumbeous Kites of the season!

After an incredibly successful morning we dropped down to the coast and enjoyed fresh brewed coffee while relaxing on the shore as Brown Pelicans and Magnificent Frigatebirds cruised by. A couple of distant Common Terns perched on a rocky outcrop as the surf pounded the incredibly picturesque bay and its clean, azure waters. After coffee, we received the somewhat disappointing news that our visit to the Bajnath Estate had been canceled at the last minute. Dave



improvised and we began birding in a nearby valley finding an amazing pair of vocalizing Silvered Antbirds, a young Common Black Hawk, a Long-billed Gnatwren, and a fabulous Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl as well as more of the ever-popular Silver-beaked Tanagers. We departed, traversing the staggeringly beautiful rugged Atlantic coastline, pausing for lunch at the cliff top village of Rampanalgas before turning inland toward the Arima Valley and the hallowed grounds of the ASA Wright Nature Center. We received a warm welcome from the staff and, after settling into well-appointed rooms, we met on the famous veranda finding Mike, Dawn and Julia already there and busy feasting on the sensational avian spectacle taking place at the feeders below. Moreover, we arrived just in time for “afternoon tea”, a time honored tradition at Asa Wright. At the feeders, Purple and Green Honeycreepers dazzled while scads of hummingbirds included dozens of White-necked Jacobins, multiple Green and Little Hermits, Ruby-Topaz Hummingbirds, Tufted Coquette, White-chested Emeralds, Blue-chinned Sapphires, several Brown Violetears and a few Long-billed Starthroats. After a delicious supper of local cuisine served buffet-style (Herb crusted chicken, grilled mahi mahi, garlic roast potatoes and more) we recalled the day’s adventures in the reading room and completed the checklist in this, surely one of the World’s most elegant Eco-lodges.

Mon., Jan. 20 | ASA Wright Nature Center | Blanchisseuse Road | Brasso Seco Village

The rain came down hard and heavy overnight but, fortunately, had cleared by 6:30am. After a wonderful buffet breakfast we met Dave and Paul for a full day out on the Blanchisseuse Road, a narrow dirt road that winds up the Arima Valley through pristine rainforest right in the heart Northern Range. Dave first stopped at Asha’s Parlor as the road crested at a scenic viewpoint offering glorious views across the Northern Range towards the coast. With the passage of a cold front it was also very windy and a short walk only produced a couple of fleeting Bay-headed Tanagers and Rufous-breasted Wrens as well as three noisy, flyover Blue-headed Parrots.

We found more favorable conditions downslope towards Brasso Seco and a couple of well-chosen stops found a plethora of tanagers; Turquoise, White-shouldered, Palm, Speckled, more Bay-headed and a locally rare Summer Tanager among them. A surprisingly co-operative Scaled Pigeon, several White-necked Thrushes, Tropical Parula, Red-legged Honeycreeper and a Black-tailed Tityra were among further highlights though were a little upstaged by a pair of Collared Trogons, the scarcest and most prized of the three trogon species to be found on the islands. The flycatchers of the rainforest were by no means easy and we could only marvel at Dave’s wizardry to winkle out such birds as Ochre-lored Flatbill, Forest Elaenia and the much-prized Euler’s Flycatcher.



We continued downslope to the quaint secluded village of Brasso Seco where our hosts at the “Chocolate Company” first served a delicious lunch of Callaloo and Taro pie with Callaloo leaves and Taro root to be followed by an informative but enjoyable presentation on the making of chocolate from raw cocoa. Quite naturally, locally produced chocolate bars, cocoa nibs and cocoa powder were duly purchased afterwards!

Afterwards we birded around the village of Brasso Seco finding Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and another Euler’s Flycatcher before retracing our route along the Blanchisseuse Road. Dave worked brilliantly to dig out some more skulking rainforest birds including good views of views of Great Antshrike and Guianan Trogon. Around 4pm Dave even managed to come up with ‘afternoon tea’ while we were still in the middle of the rainforest, actually up at Asha’s Parlour before we arrived back at the ASA Wright Center with enough time for yet more refreshment, showers and another glorious buffet dinner.....quite the day!

Tue., Jan. 21 | ASA Wright Nature Center | Dunston Oilbird Cave

With both Dave and Paul taking time off we had an entire day to relax and enjoy the ASA Wright Nature Center in all its beauty and glory. We were left in the trusty hands of Caleb, one of the lodge’s senior guides who first offered an excellent presentation at the Main House describing the history and conservation ethic of ASA Wright and the Nature Center itself. Afterwards, Caleb led us down the discovery trail where worked hard to get some views of the vocalizing Bearded Bellbirds between the rain showers, though we did have very good views of displaying White-bearded Manakins at a lek where some of the males were seen feasting on bright red berries and became especially animated when a female came into view! The bizarre, mechanical song of the bellbirds rang through the forest throughout the morning but they were not easy to see. True to form, our guide, using his experience and trained eye, managed to get a singing male in the scope, a least for a little while. The discovery trail held other treats too, particularly in the form of a roosting Common Potoo! Green Hermits announced their presence with sharp, piercing calls as they fed on brilliant orange-red Heliconia flowers by the forest trails.

We enjoyed a little more time at the veranda feeders where Spectacled Thrush, Blue-gray, White-lined and Silver-beaked Tanagers were all on view followed by a delicious lunch and a little downtime before meeting Mukash Ramdass for the big afternoon adventure....a trip down to the Dunstan Oilbird Cave. The hike took us downslope along a narrow, winding trail and a series of small switchbacks amid the deafening chorus of endemic Trinidad Stream Frogs. In the valley below, the sight and sound of fast running water clearly indicated that we’d reached the cave which we entered two or three at



a time, not only to ease pressure on the bird, but also to keep things nice and safe for the group. Mukesh used a special red 'safe light' to highlight a single Oilbird tucked away high upon a ledge in the wall of the cave. We were fortunate indeed as the Oilbirds had been absent for some weeks only to return the evening before our visit! This weirdly fascinating species is the only fruit eating flying bird species in the World that feeds exclusively at night. In Trinidad they feed on the fruit of Oil Palms and Mukesh, not only the chief birding guide at ASA Wright but also the head gardener, has propagated numerous oil palms at the nature center from the seeds regurgitated by Oilbirds at the Dunstan Cave.

Afternoon tea (fish pies, vegetable arepas, caramel cake, and watermelon platter) was waiting at the veranda when we returned as well as a whole range of hummingbirds and tanagers. The photographers had a field day focusing on Tufted Coquettes and the many other avian gems on site.

Another wonderful day closed with a rich and varied supper (BBQ pork ribs, roast chicken, grilled shrimp, veggie fried rice and more) followed by a review of the day's sightings in the reading room of the main house.

Wed., Jan. 22 | ASA Wright Nature Center | Tobago Sewage Ponds | Cuffie Nature Retreat

A final morning at ASA Wright was a relaxed affair tempered by heavy rain showers and low clouds. Some of our group had enjoyed a beautiful White Hawk soaring over the center while the low clouds brought down an influx of swifts, some feeding so low we could look down on them from the veranda and see the all-important features on the upperparts; Gray-rumped, Band-rumped and Short-tailed Swifts were all duly noted though admittedly it's never easy to see the salient features on flying swifts!

Dave and Paul picked had already moved onto to their next group, but it was still delightful to see them in passing and wish them all the best for the next tour. With that we checked out and headed down to Piarco International Airport for our flight to Tobago picking up a 'to-go' lunch of potato and veggie roti along the way. The flight on Caribbean Air was relaxed, trouble free and even departed early arriving in Tobago on a beautiful sunny afternoon to be met our smiling local guide, Jason Radix. Jason understood our time was precious and whisked us straight up to Pigeon Point to first search for a couple of local rarities. This was easy birding. A beautiful, sandy, Caribbean beach replete with a few moored boats and flocks of Ruddy Turnstones taking shade under the majestic palms overhanging the beach. We found the rarities with ease too; a Ring-billed Gull and an immature Lesser Black-backed Gull had both taken up winter residence with the local



Laughing Gulls. There was no need for a scope either as they both were close enough for cell phone shots! Just offshore Brown Pelicans, Sandwich and Royal Terns all added to the diversity of our short but sweet visit to Pigeon Point.

Next up, Bon Accord sewage ponds was neither smelly nor unpleasant and actually full of good birds including a number new to the trip highlighted by stunning views of a Mangrove Cuckoo, thanks to a heads-up from local guide Zee. Shorebirds featured in this area and we had pretty good looks at all of them walking about the mangrove roots close to the road including Whimbrel, Willet, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitcher, Solitary Sandpiper and of course, the local Southern Lapwings. Jason worked hard to scope a locally rare Ringed Kingfisher for the group and he appeared to be genuinely excited when we found a wintering Blackpoll Warbler along the edge of the mangroves.

The nearby Center Street Sewage Ponds offered an even greater range of wetland species and again, quite a few of these were new to the tour with White-cheeked Pintails as well as some familiar North American breeders spending the winter in Tobago; Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teals, plus an American Coot of the white-shielded form, formally known as 'Caribbean Coot' but, alas, no longer awarded full species status. We enjoyed the swallows here too, many of them feeding at arm's length along the berms where we stood. White-winged Swallow were the most common, Barn was fairly plentiful with a Bank Swallow among them, while overhead the 'burbling' calls of newly arrived Caribbean Martins provided a pleasant end to the day.

Jason dropped us off at the Cuffie River Nature Retreat at dusk where we were warmly greeted by site owner and proprietor Regina Dumas before settling into our well-appointed cozy rooms and meeting for another marvelous supper. White-tailed Nightjars could be heard and sometimes seen putting a show on either of the building as we settled down for the night in yet another outstanding eco lodge.

Thu., Jan. 23 | Cuffie Nature Retreat | Adventure Farm | Fort James

A cacophony of Rufous-vented Chachalacas was more than an adequate alarm at 5:45 am as their raucous calls rang out from every corner of the Cuffie Nature Retreat! Noisy flights of Orange-winged Parrots crossed the horizon while we casually birded around the retreat before breakfast. In particular, the hummingbird feeders in front of the lodge building were very active as stunning Ruby-Topaz and Copper-rumped Hummingbirds dashed back and forth, and we had our first sightings of the much sought-after White-tailed Sabrewings. After a fine breakfast of fresh fruit, cereal, bacon and eggs, we met up with local guide Desmond for a mid-morning bird walk. Desmond is the resident birder and naturalist at Cuffie and was more than eager to share his obvious knowledge. We weren't the only guests staying at the retreat and our



morning walk just happened to overlap with two other guests who would be led by William, another local guide. We walked the undulating entrance road outside of the property gate finding among other things, a Northern White-fringed Antwren, a couple of fine male Blue-backed Manakins, soaring Great Black Hawks, and outstanding views of Rufous-tailed Jacamars. However, the most surprising event (to some) was a constant flight of Magnificent Frigatebirds high overhead and heading northeast. William indicated it was an annual phenomenon over the island and fairly typical to see at this time of year. Over the next 90 minutes, we must have seen 300 or more frigatebirds streaming to the northeast, sometimes rising on thermals of warm air currents and kettling in exactly the same manner as raptors during migration.

After a fine lunch we headed down to the lowlands to a spot called the Adventure Farm, a small, discreetly hidden nature preserve where the proprietors host multitudes of hummingbirds (and birders!) and other bird species coming to their feeders. This was comfortable armchair viewing with many birds at point-blank range, too close in fact for the bigger photographic lenses. But the hummingbirds once again dazzled us, and this was the first place where we all got really good looks at the endemic Trinidad Motmot. After the feeder experience, Jason led us on a short but profitable walk around the farm's trails finding White-tipped Dove, Ochre-lored Flatbill, and a skulking Fuscous Flycatcher, the latter being a life bird for many in our party.

We finished off the afternoon atop the rugged clifftop headland at Fort James where we were able to look down into a cove on an Anhinga drying its wings, as well as a Black-bellied Plover on a distant beach, and the underrated Eared Dove with a pair perched and preening on the side of the cliff. Brown Pelicans with a few Brown Boobies streamed past the headland, while in the clifftop grasses we eventually had good looks at several Black-faced Grassquits.

Back at the Cuffie Retreat another delicious supper was followed by a review of the day's birding in the cozy lounge area. Later there was an impromptu gathering on the upper balcony of the retreat as several in our party tried (with some success) to see the White-tailed Nightjars vocalizing at the back of the lodge building.

Sat., Jan. 24 | Cuffie River Nature Retreat | Gilpin Trace and the Main Ridge Preserve | Little Tobago Island

The last full day of the tour began with relaxed pre-breakfast birding and photography around the retreat. Regina had been up early preparing the coffee that would fuel our activities until breakfast. The birding out towards the pool area



was especially productive, the elevated position offering wonderful views across the river valley and mature rainforest. It was here where we had most of the morning's success, the prize being very good views of Venezuelan and Streaked Flycatchers, as well as Brown-crested Flycatchers and other members of the flycatcher family such as Ochre-lored Flatbill and Ochre-bellied Flycatcher. The Streaked Flycatchers in particular put on a memorable show just below the balcony of the pool area and had probably just arrived for the breeding season. Another noteworthy species was a singing Chivi Vireo, a species very closely related to and formally lumped with Red-eye Vireo. A Northern Waterthrush gave us the runaround for a little while but did eventually settle and showed quite well below the pool area. Meanwhile back at the feeders White-necked Jacobin, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Ruby-topaz, and White-tailed Sabrewing all showed and there was quite the commotion at breakfast when a couple of Trinidad Motmots appeared at the fruit feeders just across from where we dined.

Jason came to pick up us around 9am and we sped away toward the rugged and incredibly picturesque northern flank of the island. Birds were few along the route although Jason had us watching out for Giant Cowbirds among the cattle along the side of the roads, and we took the opportunity for scenic photos above the picture-postcard resort town of Castara. It was actually quite late by the time we reached Main Ridge preserve and we birded along the road first thing finding such beauties as Blue-backed Manakins, Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Northern White-fringed Antwren.

The walk down Gilpin Trace was on a muddy, forested trail where a Golden-olive Woodpecker got things off to a fine start. The birding was quite challenging in the forest though most of us got binocular views of Rufous-breasted Wrens which had been elusive, and Bill quite brilliantly spotted a pair Red-rumped Woodpeckers, the only sighting of the entire tour! There was intrigue too, as Jason showed us a tiny fish, the Jumping Guabine in a crystal clear stream, a fish equipped with ability to 'breathe' through its skin and travel (when needed) over the forest floor to the another pool or stream. As walked backed up the trail a White-tailed Sabrewing was found building a nest quite close to the track and Stripe-breasted Spinetails called quite frequently from the gully below. A Yellow-legged Thrush gave hard synthesized calls as it flew up the valley though we could have really used better views, or at least as good as the White-necked Thrush seen above the trail a little earlier.

After cold beverages we dropped down to the incredible scenic seaside town of Speyside for a seafood lunch close the beach at the renowned Bird Watcher's Restaurant and Bar, and then moved across to the nearby to Blue Waters Inn



where Jason placed us in the hands of another capable guide, Zolani. The short but choppy crossing to Little Tobago Island was made in a glass-bottomed boat and once on the island Zolania ('Zee') described its history and biology with great enthusiasm as we slowly made our way up the trail to a spectacular lookout with the most magnificent vista overlooking an azure bay and guano-stained seabird cliffs. Hundreds of Red-billed Tropicbirds cruised through the air right in front of us, and Zee showed one of them nesting in a shallow scrape below the same platform on which we stood. Red-footed and Brown Boobies, and Brown Pelicans soared around too and in the most incredible show. Magnificent Frigatebirds were active and in full piratic mode forcing the odd tropicbird to regurgitate its catch. A pair of Peregrines surveyed the scene and Zee was in good form recalling his adventures with a BBC film crew as they spent days recording footage for the famous 'Life of Birds' series with Sir David Attenborough.

After cruising back to the Blue Waters Inn we had a lengthy drive back to the opposite side of Tobago, though Jason did pause to buy everybody ice cream along the way. We arrived at the Cuffie Nature Retreat after dark but still in good time for another delicious supper and the final bird tally in the lounge.

Sat., Jan 25 | Cuffie River Nature Retreat | Tobago International Airport

Somehow the tour had flown by. After one last Cuffie breakfast it was sadly time for departures. Kate was the first to head out while majority of the group left with Jason for a late morning flight. Virginia, Sandy and Art still had most of the day to relax and do more birding around the retreat before leaving the island later in the day. To their credit Caribbean Airlines had us depart early arriving at Piarco International Airport with generous amounts of time for our respective flights home. A fabulous tour with an exceptional group of folks had come to an end, as did a wonderful introduction to the magical islands of Trinidad and Tobago.

Photos: Tufted Coquette (George Chapman - GC), Brown Pelicans (Michael Freeman - MF), Blue-gray Tanager (MF), Collared Trogon (MF), View (James P. Smith - JPS), White-necked Jacobin (MF), Barred Antshrike (JPS), Caroni Swamp (Julia Ragland - JR), Green-backed Trogon (MF), Green-rumped Parrotlet (MF), Turquoise Tanager (MF), Long-billed Starthroat (MF), Common Potoo (MF), Blue-chinned Sapphire (MF), Southern Lapwing (MF), Red-crowned woodpecker (MF), Rufous Tailed Jacamar (JR), Scenic (JPS), Group Birding (JPS), Red-billed Tropicbird (MF), Scenic (JR)