

Trinidad's Asa Wright Nature Center

Trip Report | May 9 – 16, 2025

by Greg Butcher



Compiled by Naturalist Journeys guide Greg Butcher with local guides Lester Nanan, Dave Ramlal, Mukesh Ramdass, Caleb Walker, Giselle Ragoonanan, and Randell Duberry. Our clients included David and Dottie, Eric and Karen, Lorna, Marilyn, Michele, and Eileen and Larry

We all got together for a relaxing week at Asa Wright Nature Centre. Other tours visit Tobago and stay at other lodges in Trinidad, but this trip was designed as a one-lodge special. It's a great idea, because the lodge and cabins at AWNC have been completely renovated since covid and the buffet meals are wonderful. From AWNC, we traveled north, south, southeast, and southwest to sample all the major habitats of Trinidad.

Thursday, May 8 Early Arrivals at Pax Guest House

Only Lorna and Greg stayed at Pax, but I mention it because it is a really interesting old house on a hill with a good breakfast, excellent hummingbird feeders on the porch, and good birding on the grounds. We got 30 bird species, but nothing we didn't get later. It is one of the oldest guest houses in Trinidad and is located on the grounds of Mount St. Benedict, a more-than-one-hundred-year-old monastery.

Friday, May 9 Teatime at 4 pm on the Veranda at Asa Wright Nature Centre

Seven more participants arrived on a 2 pm flight, and Greg and Lorna were taxied to Asa Wright. We all arrived in time for tea on the veranda and our first of many delicious buffet-style meals. (I don't think I'm the only one who had ice cream or Mango sorbet every lunch and dinner.) Our first hour on the veranda produced six hummingbirds that we would see every day: White-necked Jacobin, Brown Violetear, Black-throated Mango, Long-billed Starthroat, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, White-chested Emerald. The night walk was fun, but alas,



no sign of owls. Eric and Karen arrived on-time before 9 pm.

Saturday, May 10 Birding from the Veranda and Discovery Trail

Our trip was designed to be laid-back: only one lodge and lots of free time at the lodge. There is a 50-year tradition of birding from the veranda, with multiple fruit and sugar-water feeders and lots of nectar- and fruit-bearing plants all close by. We benefited from a rotating crew of four talented and friendly guides both on the veranda and the trails. The lodge and all the rooms have had extensive upgrades in the past few years, with air conditioning and all the modern amenities. This morning

we added our two favorite hummingbirds – Ruby-topaz Hummingbird and Tufted Coquette –even though the White-necked Jacobins and Brown Violetears conspired to chase them away whenever they could. Daily fruit-eaters included four species of tanagers – Palm, Blue-gray, White-lined, and Silver-beaked – and two honeycreepers – Purple and Green – and the ubiquitous Bananaquits.

We heard Bearded Bellbirds bonking from the veranda, but never did see them from there, so we enjoyed our first walk on the Discovery Trail. In addition to good views of the bellbirds, we were surrounded by dancing male White-bearded Manakins on both sides of the trail.

Sunday, May 11 Oilbirds at Dunston Cave | Asa Wright Roads and Trails

One of the most amazing benefits of staying at Asa Wright is the chance to see Oilbirds roosting in Dunstan Cave. Feel free to ask me why there is a nocturnal fruit-eating bird that uses echolocation, but it doesn't make any sense to anyone, really. Bat-envy is as good an answer as any. In any case, after a challenging hike, we all got up close and personal with a couple of Oilbirds and enjoyed watching them under the eerie red lights. We visited the parking lot in the afternoon and were rewarded with a great variety of hawks: Plumbeous Kite, Common Black Hawk, White Hawk, and Short-tailed Hawk.



Monday, May 12 The Northern Range on Blanchisseuse Road | Brasso Seco

It was finally time for us to leave the nest. Dave and Paul picked us up in Paul's van and drove us north. We started with one of the best birds of the trip – Black Hawk-Eagle – flying overhead. We got our first view of the Caribbean Sea from Las Lapas lookout, the highest point on Blanchisseuse Road. The

bathroom stop and ice cream were great additions at the stop. Like many guides, Dave whistled Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl calls to attract songbirds. We actually attracted great views of the owl! We had a good buffet lunch at Brasso Seco. After lunch, we continued to Morne La Croix, where we were surprised by a fly-by Trinidad Piping Guan. Dave was able to find where it perched, so we all got great looks. Apparently, the guan is doing well enough that it is spreading across the northern portion of the island. We also had a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars.

Tuesday, May 13 Aripo Savanna | Turtles at Matura Beach

We started our morning on Blanchisseuse Road just outside the entrance to Asa Wright and were rewarded with great looks at 3 skulkers: White-flanked Antwren, White-bellied Antbird, and Gray-throated Leaf-tosser. In the savanna, our good luck with raptors continued with Savanna, Gray-lined, and Zone-tailed Hawks. We had great looks at a responsive Black-crested Antshrike. Folks were excited by our first Yellow-hooded Blackbirds. Unfortunately, we had unsatisfying looks at two of the savanna specialties: Fork-tailed Palm Swift and Red-bellied Macaw. We saw both of the large woodpeckers: Lineated and Crimson-crested. We had 3 parrots flying around: the ubiquitous Orange-winged Amazons, Blue-headed Parrots, and the tiny Green-rumped Parrotlets. And toucans (Channel-billed) – everyone loves a toucan!

At Matura Beach, we all got nervous when the first hour after dark went turtle-less, but soon the word came – a big female Leatherback right at the end of the trail. We spent over an hour with her, watching her deposit about 100 eggs. What a treat!

Wednesday, May 14 Trincity Sewage Treatment Ponds | Caroni Swamp!

After a late night with our turtle, we slept in the next morning. Our first stop after lunch was Trincity Sewage Ponds. We didn't really see the ponds, but it was an urban wetland with Ringed Kingfisher, Wattled Jacana, Southern Lapwing, and 3 species of herons (Black-crowned Night, Little Blue, and Tricolored) and 3 species of egrets (Great, Snowy, and Cattle). I'd never heard of Sumaria Trace, but it is an agricultural wetland. It included a flock of 19 American Flamingos, an immature Scarlet Ibis, a Yellow-crowned Night Heron, a Pied Water-Tyrant, 5



Yellow-chinned Spinetails, and two new non-native species: Tricolored Munia and Common Waxbill. Arriving at Caroni Swamp, we got 3 new species: Gray-cowled Wood Rail, Masked Cardinal, and Golden-olive Woodpecker. Then the highlight of our trip was the boat trip (with dinner!) out through the mangroves into the swamp. We saw several good birds in the mangroves: seven Greater Anis, an American Pygmy Kingfisher, a pair of Straight-billed Woodcreepers, and five Bicolored Conebills. At this time of year, the flamingos outnumber the Scarlet Ibis – our count was 75 to 21—but we still enjoyed all the wading birds in the air, on the water, and in their roosting trees, plus a Large-billed Tern. We had good luck in the mangroves after dark: Barn Owl, Short-tailed Nighthawk, Common Pauraque, and Common Potoo.

Thursday, May 15 Nariva Swamp & Manzanilla Beach

Our first stop in the lowlands was at Valencia Farms, where we picked up Red-breasted Meadowlarks and Grassland Yellow-Finches. We had lunch at Manzanilla Beach with Magnificent Frigatebirds and found a few shorebirds on the beach with the Black Vultures: Semipalmated Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, and Semipalmated Sandpiper. A lot of Nariva Swamp has been drained for agriculture and housing, but we found good birds in what is left. The Limpkins and Snail Kites are presumably after the same snails, and they shared airspace with a Long-winged Harrier, Gray-lined Hawk, and 5 Savanna Hawks. We had both White-headed Marsh Tyrant and Pied Water-Tyrant. And we enjoyed a Silvered Antbird that peeked out of the mangroves at us.

Friday, May 16 Departures & Last Day at Asa Wright Nature Centre

Eric and Karen left early in the dark, but the rest of us enjoyed early morning birding at Asa Wright. Lorna left before lunch, but the rest of us picked up a few goodies before our dinner and 8:30 pm departure. My last checklist included 5 good birds for our memories: Green Hermit, Tufted Coquette, Guianan Trogon, Long-billed Gnatwren, and Turquoise Tanager. Then it was off for home!

Photo Credits: Scarlet Ibis, Golden Tegu, AWCN Verandah, Oilbird Hike, Leatherback Turtle, American Flamingos (Kip Miller).