

# Christmas Week at Asa Wright Nature Center Dec. 20-27, 2025 | Trip Report by Mollee Brown



**Guide Mollee, with clients Evan, Susan, Caroline, Leslie, Ray, Len, and Jimmy**



## **Sun., Dec. 21    Arrival & Welcome to the Asa Wright Nature Centre**

The bustle of Port of Spain was quickly left behind as we headed to the hills. From pavement to field and onto large stretches of unbroken canopy, we wound toward the world-famous Asa Wright Nature Center. After less than an hour, we were greeted in our comfortable and newly remodeled rooms for the week. We went to sleep shortly after a lovely welcome supper in anticipation of a birdy next day.

## **Mon., Dec. 22    Birding the Northern Range from Blanchisseuse Road | Brasso Seco**

For our first full day of this tour, we gathered in waves with coffees in hand on the renowned veranda for sunrise with the birds. This viewpoint of the valley gave us a window to the morning flight of dozens of Orange-winged Amazons, plus Crested Oropendulas and Choco Toucans who bounced between treetops. But the true spectacle from this balcony is the plethora of hummingbirds and passerines that gather at the feeders here; this



is truly one of the most remarkable nectar and fruit feeder setups in the world. We got acquainted with the resident birds, but more on that tomorrow.

After breakfast, we took off for a full-day excursion along the range just north of our home base. Blanchisseuse Road produced stop after stop, from looks at the trio of trogons in the area, to a rowdy mixed flock following a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, to even our first looks at Magnificent Frigatebirds at an overlook that stretched to the ocean. A Trinidad Motmot teased us with a few calls, but we didn't luck out with views.

Our lunch was a delicious, locally-sourced feast that was followed by a presentation on cacao production, and chocolates to pick us up right as the afternoon sleepiness crept in. We made a few more stops on our way back to Asa Wright, concluding with flyover Blue-headed Parrots and an extremely photogenic pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars.

## **Tues., Dec. 23 Exploring Centre Trails**

We spent today immersing ourselves in the birds at Asa Wright. First, we took our time at the feeders to deepen our familiarization of the tanagers and hummingbirds. Green and Purple honeycreepers were among the most obvious species present, along with White-lined, Palm, and chatty Silver-beaked Tanagers. The hummingbirds were constant and varied, from numerous Copper-rumped Hummingbirds and White-chested Emeralds, to big and charismatic White-necked Jacobins and Black-throated Mangos, to more infrequent yet spectacular gems like Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird and Tufted Coquette. Plus, between the feeders and nearby flowers, we glimpsed Little, Rufous-breasted, and Green Hermits.

Moseying down the trails was slow-going as we found more forest birds, including Golden-fronted Greenlets and White-flanked Antwrens in loose foraging flocks. Our first of two main attractions started with the static-like sounds of an active manakin lek, and we crept up on several male White-bearded Manakins fully consumed by their territorial behaviors. Farther down, we reached our final target on the trail, whose bizarre song had been ringing in our ears all morning: Bearded Bellbirds. We managed excellent looks at these big, unusual cotingas.

## **Wed., Dec. 24 Oilbirds | Caroni Marsh Sunset Cruise and Feast**

The next morning, we chose a different path for a long hike to an oilbird cave that's been studied here since the 1950s. A few years ago, a fallen tree increased the light in this roost, exposing the colony to more predator



access and causing a massive decline in numbers. However, some oilbirds have since returned, thanks in part to a human-driven effort to recover the gaping hole and provide more darkness once again.

When we finally reached the cave, we waded a short way through a shallow stream for a chance to see oilbirds. And there they were, briefly bathed in red lights: the biggest nocturnal fruit eating bird in existence, the echolocating wonder that they are! We were elated about the successful excursion and rested up before our highly anticipated afternoon.

After lunch, we took a ride to the lowlands to rack up wetland species and head to coastal mangrove forests. Even in the mid-afternoon, the birding en route was great, and we found a Long-winged Harrier, Green-rumped Parrotlets, and a White-headed Marsh Tyrant.

Once we boarded the boat in Caroni Swamp, the real excitement set in. We took a carefully-managed canal through the mangroves, enjoying American Pygmy Kingfisher, a flock of Bicolored Conebills, and a sleeping Silky Anteater along the way. The real spectacle, however, was the world-famous gathering of hundreds of Scarlet Ibis coming into roost at a massive, diverse heron and egret rookery. Better yet, a flock of American Flamingos bustled in the water below the trees, adding even more vibrancy to the evening!

We had plenty of time to watch waves of birds arrive as the sun sank down, because we had the incredibly special treat of a Christmas Eve dinner right on the boat. With a big table laid down the middle, we passed around family-style servings, a range of festive drinks, and rum cake. Our final nightcap on our way back through the canal was in the form of nightjars: we got lights on a Common Potoo while Common Pauragues zipped around and Spectacled Caiman glared at us from the water's surface.

## **Thurs., Dec. 25      Christmas at Asa Wright Nature Centre**

Christmas dawned sunny and bright at the Centre. This was a day to relax and soak in nature's gifts, and that we did in our own special ways. Our first full group gathering was an early lunch with a beautiful abundance of food – mixed options of local customs and traditional American platters. We ate slowly and enjoyed every bite.

The afternoon was spent how each of us wanted to: whether that meant photographing birds, reading on the veranda with tea and snacks, or venturing on more of Asa Wright's trails. On the latter excursion, we picked up



more looks at representatives of some mostly South American families, such as Red-crowned Ant-Tanager and White-bellied Antbird.

There was a different type of treat later this afternoon: a surprise proposal happened on the veranda with a local birder couple! A few from our group got to witness the fun and were even recruited to help keep watch as the bridal party waited in hiding for the fiancés-to-be. We met a lot of Trinis throughout the tour who were also visiting Asa Wright, and these conversations and shared experiences made the trip even more special.

Nearly every night, we had the option to take a one-hour guided walk after dark, and several of us joined the fun this evening. We found multiple frogs, scorpions, and a handful of snakes...each night was a little different, which made them all the more fun.

### **Fri., Dec. 26 Full Day Nariva Swamp Excursion**

Our last full day was another exciting one, and this time, we were going southwest to bird agricultural lands, coastal habitats, and swamps lined with palm trees. Starting out, we had great luck with a tricky find: a handful of Grassland Yellow-Finches were quite cooperative underneath a kettle of vultures and a Zone-tailed Hawk. One of the best moments of the day was a stop for two very different raptors: petite and beautiful Pearl Kites, nearly within the same binocular view of a hefty Rufous Crab Hawk!

After a seaside picnic lunch with distant Brown Pelicans over the water, we worked along the Nariva Swamplands for more species. One after another, we added to our list; Black-crested Antshrikes provided close views, adult and juvenile Snail Kites perched side-by-side, and a Common Squirrel-Cuckoo surprised us in a close tree. Toward our turnaround point, we were graced with a flock of magnificent Blue-and-Yellow Macaws in flight, and a few landed for scope views. We headed back home feeling totally fulfilled.

### **Sat., Dec. 27 Departures/On to Enjoy Tobago!**

On our final morning, half of us headed home, while the others hopped onto an early flight bound for Tobago. This peaceful holiday tour had come to an end, but for some, the unique jewels of the sister island were still in store!



Birding at Asa Wright and the surrounding areas gave us a unique opportunity to spend time with many wonderful local guides, all passionate experts on birds and nature in the country. Thanks so much to Makesh, Sabira, Caleb, Dave, and Lester for all their guidance and warmth throughout our time together at Asa Wright Nature Center, along with all the drivers and staff who made our tour remarkable.

*Photos: American Flamingos (Mollee Brown - MB), Trinidad Motmot (Len Williamson - LW), Birding by boat (MB), Green Honeycreeper (MB), Ruby Topaz (James Prutilpac - JP), Purple Honeycreeper (JP), Spectacled Thrush (JP), White-bearded Manakin (MB), Oilbirds (LW), Scarlet Ibis (MB), Group (MB), In the field of (JP), Orange-winged Amazon (LW)*