Trinidad & Tobago | January 4 – 13, 2026 | Trip Report | by James P. Smith

Our wonderful participants included; George and Kay, Russ and Deb, Jeremiah, Gene, Tom and Mark with the main local guides being Dave Ramlal and Jason Radix, and guest appearances from Martyn Kenefick, Mukesh (Asa Wright Center) and Zolani 'Z' on Little Tobago.

Mon., Jan. 5 | Arrivals | Hacienda Jacana

After events involving Venezuela on January 3rd it was something of a relief to finally arrive at the lovely environs of Hacienda Jacana in Trinidad. Fortunately for them, Tom and Mark had booked flights with Caribbean Air and still managed to make it to Trinidad, as scheduled, on January 3rd. For those of us on cancelled flights with American, the airline did pretty well to reschedule the remainder of the group on January 5th with Jeremiah, James, Russ and Deb arriving in late afternoon and Gene, George and Kay coming in on the evening flight and landing around midnight. The earlier arrivals enjoyed an evening stroll around Hacienda's delightful property as Little Tinamous and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls called, and evening flights of Crested Oropendolas and Orange-winged Amazons passed overhead. We gathered for a delightful dinner and the first of chef Paul's incredible meals; Lentil Soup, Stewed Pork, Spanish Rice, Steamed Veggies and plantains. The atmosphere was relaxed, warm and sticky and we drifted off to sleep to the sounds of Common Pauraques and Cane Toads...we'd finally made it to the tropics!

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Tue., Jan. 6 | Hacienda Jacana | Mexico Road | Aripo Savannah | Manzanilla Beach | Nariva Swamp and fields

Just after first light the whole group gathered outside the office at Hacienda Jacana as an immaculate day began to take shape. Travel disruptions aside, it was time to start birding in earnest. The mood brightened further with the appearance of Martyn Kenefick, co-author of three volumes of the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago, who volunteered to join us for the whole day.

A pre-breakfast walk around the property found noisy flights of Orange-winged Amazons, wonderful views of Crimson-crested Woodpecker and more calling Little Tinamous. Several wetland species could be found near lodge's delightful ponds with Southern Lapwings, Wattled Jacanas, Purple Gallinules and Striated Herons around the muddy edges. Martyn hinted that we ought to be on the lookout for hybrid Striated x Green Herons and a photo review after the trip revealed that James had photographed a pure Green Heron, a relatively common species on Tobago but extremely rare on Trinidad. Apparently, it was a new species for Hacienda Jacana too! Cocoa Thrushes were common around the property with wintering Northern Waterthrushes hugging the shores of the wetlands and streams. Gaudy residents such as Violaceous Euphonias, Crested Oropendulas and Yellow-rumped Caciques were all enjoyed before breakfast. Dave Ramlal showed up, our appointed and capable guide for the next few days along with Paul who would be our dedicated driver for the whole of our time on Trinidad. After breakfast, a couple of Red-bellied Macaws flew by the office and were photographed by a few lucky members of the group, just as we climbed into the bus.

The first stop of the day was in the lowlands at Mexico Road where we had wonderful views of a Pied Water-tyrant, a common but strikingly marked species and a delight to behold. A Gray Kingbird put on a something of a show as did a delightful Yellow Oriole and, as we climbed back into the vehicle, an impressive immature Zone-tailed Hawk cruised down the road and flew right overhead. Further along the road, a dozen or so Green-rumped Parrotlets perched up in trees and alighted in a chain-link fence, a rare opportunity to see and photograph a perky little species most frequently encountered flying over in fast moving groups.

By mid-morning it was pretty hot, the clear blue skies generating warm-air thermals as great columns of Black Vultures rose up over Aripo Savannah where a couple of Savannah Hawks perched up on utility poles by the agricultural research area. From there we explored a series of delightful rural roads as Dave took us to some of his favorite grassland and wetland habitats in the savannah. We found a whole host of interesting species here including a couple of wintering Wilson's Snipes! Yellow-chinned Spinetails gave beautiful views as did White-headed Marsh-tyrants, plus there was a fine Red-breasted Meadowlark and great views of the rather scarce Grassland Yellow-finch, all of them further highlights from this lovely area. After a glorious first morning, Dave

and Martyn brought us to an excellent spot for lunch, 'Kenny's' in Santa Grande with an impressive buffet of mostly Indian influenced dishes and refreshing fruit juices.

The stunning weather continued to work in our favor as we cruised through the countryside and dropped down to the Atlantic coast and the beautiful beach at Manzanilla. The first stop overlooked marshland, exactly where Dave and Martyn anticipated the locally rare Snail Kites would be present and sure enough there was a pair, the male sparring with a light morph Long-winged Harrier! We drove south along the avenue of palms amid glorious scenes of ocean and surf spied through a veil of hundreds of palms swaying in the ocean breeze. A little further south Dave paused at a fragment of mangrove habitat where we spent several minutes finding Ringed, American Pygmy and Green Kingfishers, along with Black-crested Antshrike, and the highlight, a fabulous singing Silvered Antbird. Nariva River mouth, just a little further south, was beautifully scenic but rather quiet bird-wise although we did find a nice flock of Snowy Egrets, a Common Black Hawk, and a lone Semipalmated Plover foraging on a sand bar.

Our bus was well equipped with a cooler loaded with refreshing drinks, ideal preparation for a hot afternoon as we next tackled the Casacadoux Road. The birding here was exciting as Martyn spotted a tiny Pearl Kite in the palms and Dave called in a pair of locally rare Rufous Crab Hawks which were later seen copulating. We also had great looks at Lineated Woodpeckers and, as we explored the area to the north, the sudden 'fly-past' appearance of two Blue-and-yellow Macaws caught Dave off-guard as they flew low across the fields without settling. Gray Kingbirds lined the roadside wires and birds such as Southern Lapwings, Pied Water-tyrants, and a singing Striped Cuckoo highlighted the remainder of the drive around the meadows.

The steady drive back through Santa Grande was fairly quiet until we reached the access road to Hacienda Jacana where Paul, our driver, pointed out a lovely Common Pauraque resting on the road. We arrived in good time to freshen up and settled down to another of chef Paul's fantastic meals; pumpkin soup, fried rice, green pepper salad, Sweet-and-sour chicken, chunky veg and Singapore noodles all on the menu!

Wed., Jan. 7 | Grand Riviere |Bajnath Estate | ASA Wright Nature Center

An early start saw a 4 AM departure from Hacienda Jacana with the ultimate goal of reaching Grand Riviere as close to first light as possible. The prize at the end of such an early morning jaunt was hopefully going to be views of the endangered, endemic Trinidad Piping-Guan. Known locally as 'Pawi', the guan is a large arboreal member of the *Cracidae* family and thanks to major conservation efforts the species is thankfully doing quite well in Trinidad.

Most of the drive was in darkness but as daylight broke glorious views of the rugged north-east coast of Trinidad brightened the mood and the day was even clear enough to see the island of Tobago in the distance! We soon arrived at a viewing platform built by Hadco experiences where a birding group was already present and fortunately they'd established that two or three Piping-Guans were visible in the canopy. As the light improved we had excellent views of up to five individuals of this attractive, endangered species. Guianan Violaceous Trogons and Lineated Woodpeckers showed well in the same area along with several hummingbirds including Copper-rumped, Blue-chinned Sapphire, and White-chested Emerald, all of them at close range.

Once fully sated with the guans, we descended for a breakfast on the beach at Mount Plaisir, another of Hadco's impressive properties. Dozens of Black Vultures gathered at the river mouth and several Brown Pelicans could be seen cruising and plunge diving offshore. A fabulous buffet breakfast was followed by a steady drive along the coast towards Bajnath Estate as we chanced upon a sharp-looking Common Black Hawk perched on a huge boulder along the shore. We left the coast behind and climbed the narrow winding roads through Matura National Park up to the gates of the hummingbird sanctuary at Bajnath Estate, a jewel of a location neatly tucked away in the hills of the National Park. Josh Bajnath was there to great us, an enthusiastic young man who'd built a dream-like bird sanctuary adorned with feeders lining either side of the driveway and planted an abundance of native flowering plants around the property. Needless to say, for lovers of hummingbirds it was dreamland as tens upon tens of hummers came to visit the feeders. Chief among these were several of the most sought-after species; Tufted Coquette, Ruby Topaz, Blue-chinned Sapphire and Green Hermit. One or two Brown Violetears joined the fray, and there was just as much action at the fruit feeders with White-lined, Palm and Silver-beaked Tanagers, and Purple and Red-legged Honeycreepers It was a riot of color and a photographer's delight!

In the meantime, Josh's mom had been preparing a sensational lunch of traditional Trinidadian cuisine laced with Indian and Caribbean influenced dishes and complimented by some incredibly refreshing homemade citrus and sorrel drinks. There, while sipping coffee and enjoying desert, a spectacular Long-billed Starthroat put on a show only feet away as a high flying Zone-tailed Hawk cruised overhead. And then, regrettably, it was time go. Josh and his mom had been wonderful hosts and we really could have spent the whole day at Bajnath, or so it seemed.

It wasn't long before we arrived at the world renowned Asa Wright Center, the planned three nights here being one of the more eagerly anticipated portions of the trip. Afternoon tea was being served and we settled in to join other hotel guests on the fabled veranda. The feeders below were buzzing with activity including a strong

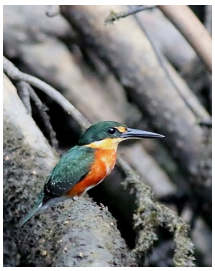
concentration of male White-necked Jacobins, plus a solid showing of Brown Violetears and the first Little Hermit of the day.

In the distance, the unmistakable mechanical notes of Bearded Bellbirds could be heard ringing across the valley as well as the trilling of Little Tinamous. Jeremiah spotted a male White-bearded Manakin, and a small flock of Blue-headed Parrots fed in the bright flame-like Immortelle Trees. And then came the highlight as a young Spectacled Owl flew in and perched in the open for an extended period, such a beautiful owl, so very rarely seen in the daytime. The day closed with a delicious Asa Wright buffet, and afterwards Jeremiah still had enough energy to join senior guide Mukesh for a night walk around the property.

Thu., Jan. 8 |ASA Wright Nature Center | Blanchisseuse Road | Brasso Seco Village

Another beautiful day dawned in Trinidad as we gathered for casual birding on the famed veranda. The sunrise brilliantly illuminated the orange, flowering Immortelle Trees in the valley below as one of the young local guides soon pointed out a Bearded Bellbird and a Green-backed Trogon, two species only rarely seen from the veranda – the day was off to a fine start!

The day's agenda would take us along the heavily forested and newly resurfaced Blanchisseuse Road, a much improved drive on previous years. This was roadside birding at its best, the Northern Range rainforest being well known for exceptional bio-diversity. Dave picked out random roadside spots as different bird families came to the fore, particularly the trogons and we had exquisite views of all the possible species in Trinidad; Guianan Violaceous, Green-backed and Collared all showed fabulously well. The flycatchers, while subtle and furtive, stirred some excitement as Dave worked hard to bring us fabulous views of true forest denizens such as Euler's and Slaty-capped Flycatchers, and there was even an Olive-sided Flycatcher, a familiar North American migrant finding a winter home in Trinidad. But if one group of birds really stood out it was the tanagers. Among the ubiquitous Palm Tanagers we found several dazzling Bay-headed and Turquiose Tanagers, and Gene was finally rewarded with his much-desired Speckled Tanager! Dave's eyes were sharp as ever as he spotted an enormous Trinidad Olive Tarantula on a rock face right next to the road where it guarded its funnel web. Channel-billed Toucans, a male White-winged Becard, Plain-brown Woodcreeper and Golden-crowned Warblers further highlighted as fantastic morning as we descended into the sleepy village of Brasso Seco for lunch. The midday lunchbreak featured a delightful buffet including rice, grilled chicken, fried fish, macaroni pie, taro root and a



refreshing citrus drink. Afterwards our hosts kindly demonstrated traditional cacao processing methods beginning with raw cacao pods through to final rich chocolate bars, some of which were keenly purchased by group members before we left. Lunch wasn't in an especially birdy spot but a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl called from time to time and a Rufous-browned Peppershrike sang throughout and eventually gave itself up for nice views.

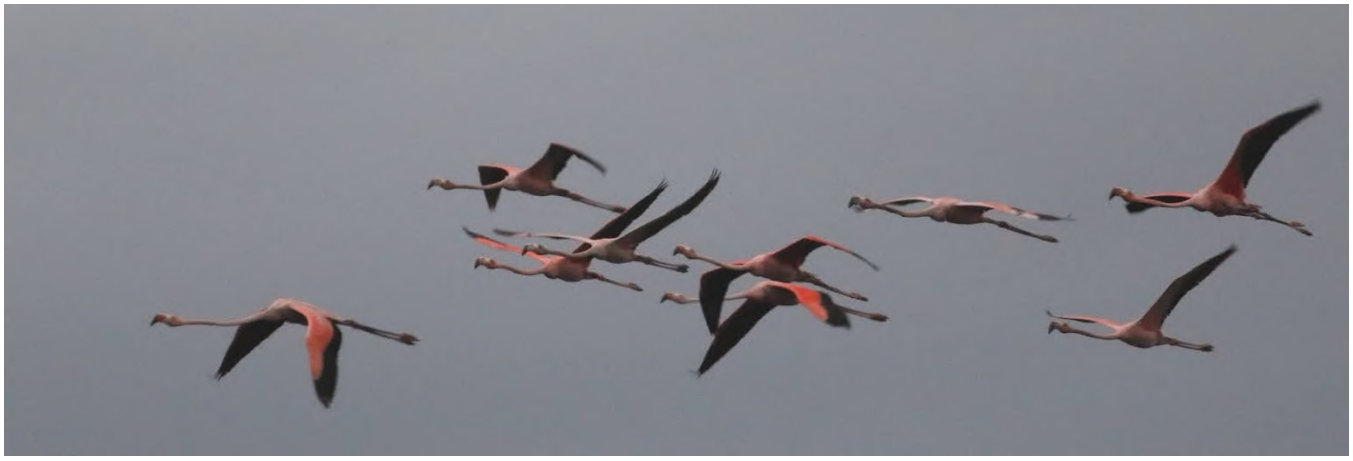
The return journey featured a major quest for Great Antshrike, a spectacular species when seen. Despite a good deal of effort, most of the group never saw the antshrike properly aside from Jeremiah who had reasonable looks at a male. By way of compensation, we did have an unusually large flock of Blue-headed Parrots, great views of White-necked Thrush, more Turquoise and Bay-headed Tanagers, and a stunning Rufous-tailed Jacamar. And even in the rainforest, Dave still managed to rustle-up some afternoon tea!

After a long day there was still enough daylight to return to the veranda at Asa Wright where the young Spectacled Owl once again put on a fine show. Dinner was a delightful buffet; crisp salads, herb-crusted chicken, stewed pork, cassava fries and more. Afterwards Tom and Gene joined a guided night walk and heard a Mottled Owl, the only one of the entire tour!

Fri., Jan. 9 |ASA Wright Nature Center | Dunston Oilbird Cave | West Sumaria Trace| Scarlet Ibis at Caroni Swamp National Park

The rain came down hard and heavy overnight but by the morning the beauty of the Asa Wright Center came into its own. We enjoyed more dazzling hummingbirds and tanagers from the famous veranda where White-necked Jacobins constantly flared vivid white tail feathers in the rain, and Tufted Coquettes seemed to dance between the raindrops busily feeding from the beds of flowering Purple Verbana.

The main objective of the morning was a hike down to the famous Dunston Oilbird Cave situated on property and only accessed under the guidance of one the lodge's long established guides. In this case, our guide was Mukesh, a resident at the center for the last 40 years…for sure we were in very good hands! After breakfast, we gathered just as heavy showers rolled in and set in most of the morning. Since the oilbirds are far from guaranteed it was something of a relief when the first group coming back up the trail confirmed their presence. The ensuing rains had already raised the water level in the cave and wet feet was going to be an inevitable part of the deal. No matter, as we quietly entered the cave in pairs, Mukesh spotlighted several Oilbirds using a



special red soft light to minimize disturbance. And what a privilege it was, the world's only nocturnal echo-locating frugivore perched up high on the ledges in the cave. We must have seen eight Oilbirds in all and Mukesh was visibly delighted to see one of them using a specially constructed platform designed to encourage nesting. As we left the cave, a Common Black Hawk perched sentinel-like above the stream waiting for land crabs to be pushed to the surface by the rapidly rising water level.

After an early lunch Dave and Paul showed up at 12 noon and we headed down to the lowlands for the second portion of the day. The heavy rain continued but as we reached the Aripo area it was less intense and pockets of blue sky began to appear. Prospects looked good for our scheduled late afternoon visit to Caroni Swamp Nature Sanctuary. Paul, not only a stoic driver, was something of a closet birder and noticed a couple of perched raptors in a dead tree close to the busy Churchill Roosevelt Highway. As we pulled over, Dave became very animated exclaiming "that's a Crane Hawk, that's a Crane Hawk!". A little confusion followed as, in the same leafless tree, a Crested Caracara was sitting in the open and a tad more visible than the Crane Hawk but as things calmed down we all had awesome views of the Crane Hawk, a striking gray raptor with bright red legs and cere, and a scarce bird in Trinidad particularly in this semi-industrial setting. A brief stop by the Millennium golf course near Trincity found a Red-breasted Meadowlark teed-up high, a roosting Black-crowned Night-heron, several Tricolored Herons, a perched Ringed Kingfisher and our first Anhinga, as well as a fast moving flock of Fork-tailed Palm Swifts.

Sumaria Trace offered breathtaking looks at Green-throated Mangos, a species much more tied to mangrove habitat than the closely related and widespread Black-throated Mango. The wetlands here also harbored Purple and Common Gallinules and our first Scarlet Ibis of the trip, a dowdy immature! And then it was onto Caroni Swamp. We met up with Lester Nanan our captain and guide for the boat trip. With chief spotter Dave on the bow, and Martyn Kenefick on board for the ride, we were esteemed company. Birds were not abundant as we cruised out, though we did have fantastic views of a couple of key species, not least of which was a stunning American Pygmy Kingfisher, and there was a Straight-billed Woodpecker, an uncommon denizen of west coast mangrove habitat. As we moved out into the open bay American Flamingos came in to view with several small groups foraging and resting in the shallows. Shorebirds moved around the tidal flats in small flocks including Black-belled and Semipalmated Plovers, and Least Sandpipers.

And then it was time for the highlight of the evening as we moored at a safe distance from the main roost area. In ever darkening skies hundreds, perhaps thousands, of brilliant red Scarlet Ibis flew across the bay in small flocks to settle in the mangrove forest in front of us. It wasn't all about the ibis though as hundreds of Little Blue and Tricolored Herons, and Snowy Egrets began to stream past and several American Flamingos flew past with their peculiar, elongated flight manner. Amid all this beauty Lester served up a delicious catered meal on the boat including chicken and fish dishes, spinach pie, rice, and more while simultaneously talking us through his

family history and its relationship to the swamp, and how is grandfather was a pioneer and beacon for the conservation of the Scarlet Ibis and the Caroni Swamp we see today.

We cruised back to the dock in semidarkness little knowing that further treats lie ahead as a Boat-billed Heron flew high over the channel brilliantly spotlighted from below by Lester. Of course there were Common Pauraques and two of Lester's more miraculous finds came in the form of a couple of Common Potoos and a Grey-cowled Wood-Rail! A perfect evening drew to a close with a steady drive back in the rain to the wonderful Asa Wright Center.

Sat., Jan. 10 |ASA Wright Nature Center | Piarco International Airport | Tobago's Sewage Ponds | Cuffie River Nature Retreat

We awoke to yet another glorious morning. Most of the previous day's rain had dispersed and the promise of blue sky dawned above the forest. The feeders, once again, were buzzing with activity including most of the favorites; Tufted Coquette, Ruby Topaz and Brown Violetear, and a beautiful Spectacled Thrush. After breakfast we met up with Mukesh for a scheduled hike down the trails to an area favored area by the resident Bearded Bellbirds. Seemingly without warning, heavy clouds rolled in and we headed down the trail in steady drizzle with flowering Lobster tail Heliconia and Torch Ginger lining the trail and the songs of White-bellied Antbird and Black-faced Antthrush filtered through the forest. For those standing close to Mukesh, good views of a calling Bearded Bellbird were secured immediately upon arrival but as we attempted to move into a better position the bird flew off. Even after extended wait, it never came back to its favored perch. Tom though, had the great fortune to be in the right place at the right time and ended up with a beautiful photograph of this bizarre species and its strange, spaghetti-like black wattles.

After one last fabulous lunch of stewed chicken, braised beef, steamed fish, Spanish rice, callaloo and pigeon peas we loaded up Paul's vehicle and headed towards Piarco International Airport, noting several Crested Caracaras and our first Limpkins along the way. Check-in at Caribbean Air was smooth and painless. We departed on time with Jason and his driver Shaun waiting in the Tobago arrivals area to greet us, and we certainly hit the ground running! Jason emphasized the hour was late and we had little time, but we still managed to squeeze in visits to Bon Accord and Center Street sewage pools before sunset. The scene was by no means as unpleasant it might sound, both locations being productive wetlands where our bird list received a significant boost with Short-billed Dowitchers, Willet, Hudsonian Whimbrel among the new shorebirds and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, White-cheeked Pintails and Blue-winged Teals being standouts among the waterfowl. Two long staying rarities, Green-winged Teal and American Coot were located with relative ease at the Center Street ponds.

After a steady drive across Tobago we received a warm welcome from Regina, owner and host of Cuffie River Nature Retreat, a beautiful rustic eco-lodge neatly tucked away amid tens of acres of rainforest. We arrived late, after dark in fact, dropped bags in our rooms and went straight to a delicious supper of stewed chicken, rice, beans, and tofu fritters! White-tailed Nightjars, for which Cuffie River Retreat is justly known, appeared outside the rooms for those staying awake after a long but rewarding day.

Sun., Jan. 11 | Cuffie River Nature Retreat | Main Ridge Forest Reserve | Speyside | Little Tobago

The day began at 5:15 AM with the unmistakable cacophony of Rufus-vented Chachalacas coming from all around the forest, their calls echoing throughout the retreat. A White-tailed Nightjar found breakfast in the pre-dawn hours by catching moths and insects attracted the lights alongside the main lodge building and it wasn't long before flights of incredibly noisy Orange-winged Amazons flew across the wooded valleys. We gathered for casual birding around 6:30am and spent time before breakfast birding the grounds finding Rufous-tailed Jacamars, Black-throated Mango, Shiny Cowbird, Blue-gray Tanager and flocks of low passing Short-tailed and Gray-rumped Swifts. White-tailed Saberwing and Trinidad Motmot, both key species for our time on To bago, were duly found before a hearty 'Cuffie' breakfast was served.

Another immaculate day developed as we met up with Jason Radix and headed across the island towards Main Ridge Forest Reserve, quite naturally pausing for 'picture-postcard' views of Castara and Little Englishman Bays. As we climbed towards the forest reserve a Giant Cowbird was seen sitting on a cow and a Southern Lapwing by the roadside. Jason had chosen well and the first proper roadside stop was incredibly productive with a nice showing of Blue-backed Manakins, a bird completely absent from Trinidad. Somewhat surprisingly three Broad-winged Hawks soared overhead but as Jason explained, the species has become a resident breeding bird on Tobago, surprising for a raptor generally thought of as a long distance North American migrant. Rufous-tailed Jacamars put on a thrilling show here and we had beautiful views of a cooperative pair of Venezuelan Flycatchers. Meanwhile, Mark who'd been standing a little ways up the road casually announced "a fish just fell out of a tree". Really?! What on earth?! But there it was, at the side of the road in the middle of the forest, a pretty sizable fish which Jason thought had to be a marine species. The head was missing and looked like it had been eaten, leading to further intrigue. And then came the questions. How on earth could a fish of that size simply drop out of the sky?! Well, a little later on we saw a pair of Great Black Hawks soaring around and displaying. Was it possible that the fish was accidentally dropped during a food pass between male and female Great Black Hawks?! And what would be the odds of that fish landing right next to Mark in the middle of the forest? That fish could have landed anywhere and surely had to be one of the most bizarre incidents witnessed on a Naturalist Journeys tour!

From there, we swung by the reserve visitor center where Jason offered a fascinating précis of the geography of Tobago and Little Tobago Islands. Gilpin Trace was up next where we enjoyed pleasant stroll trail through Tobago Rain Forest habitat, a route evidently popular with hikers. We found nesting White-tailed Sabrewings, some rather skittish Stripe-breasted Spinetails, Yellow-legged Thrush, and a Golden-olive Woodpecker that eventually gave itself up for decent views. Jason spotted an American Redstart, and we had nice looks at the Jumping Guabine, the only fish on the world that can move across land from stream to stream, capable of surviving out of water for several hours.

As we entered the delightful seaside town of Speyside it soon became clear election fever was very much on the minds the locals - the reds (People's National Movement) versus the blues (Tobago People's Party). For us though, things were a little more relaxed as we enjoyed a delightful lunch under the palms by the Caribbean with fish and chicken dishes served with rice, french fries and salad, and cake for dessert. Our 'whistle-stop' tour continued to the Blue Waters Inn where we boarded a small glass-bottom boat for the short but choppy crossing to Little Tobago escorted by high energy guide Zolani, otherwise known as 'Z'! After a brief orientation we climbed the trail through the forest until the first clearings revealed Red-billed Tropicbirds courting, calling and chasing each other just above the tree tops. There was more to come as Zolani brought us to a magnificent viewing platform overlooking steep sided, heavily vegetated cliffs with views across the bay and Giles Island in the distance. Huge numbers of Red-footed Boobies, Magnificent Frigatebirds and Red-billed Tropicbirds cruised around in front of the platform many of them at eye-level or below, including both white and brown morphs of Red-footed Booby. There was even a Red-billed Tropicbird sitting on a nest just below the viewing deck neatly tucked away between the shrubs and grasses, on a nest of nothing more than a shallow scrape in the ground. Brown Boobies were present too, the bright yellow feet and crisp white belly sharp being distinguishing features from the rather similar brown-morph Red-footed Boobies.

As it happens, we were so very fortunate to have the entire island to ourselves with no other groups or tourists around. Zolani was in fine form too as he recalled his adventures working with a BBC film crew from several years prior recording amazing footage for the 'Life of Birds' series with Sir David Attenborough. We sat for some time just enjoying the place itself and drinking in the extraordinary views before us. As we descended back down the trail, the primary focus shifted to seeing a Scaly-naped Pigeon. In terms of Trinidad and Tobago, this species is only found on Little Tobago, generally regarded as a remnant population from the Lesser Antilles. Fortune wasn't going in our way as we walked along the dock toward the boat but suddenly Zolani's deck-hand spotted a large, dark pigeon in the forest above the docking area and sure enough, several Scaly-naped Pigeons came into view. The views weren't amazing but certainly good enough and the photographers in our party returned several diagnostic images.

Zolani proved to be something of a wizard when identifying fish through the glass-bottom boat as we cruised back across the bay to the Blue Waters Inn, and on arrival at the dock we were greeted by a fairly large flock of Ruddy Turnstones as well as a Little Blue Heron and a Belted Kingfisher. It was a pretty wild drive back to Cuffie River Retreat as election fever gripped the island and we passed masses of caravans and flotillas involving hundreds of vehicles heading back towards Speyside, almost all of them in support of the TPP, the blue party. The atmosphere was jovial and carnival-like as deafening music blasted from boom boxes on the floats. Things quietened down a bit as we approached Cuffie River Retreat as one, three and then four White-tailed Nightjars flew up the road behaving much like the Common Pauraques we'd seen in Trinidad.

Mon., Jan. 12 | Cuffie River Nature Retreat | Adventure Farm | Fort James

Rufous-vented Chachalacas again provided an ample alarm as their calls rang out from every corner of the Cuffie River Nature Retreat and again, flights of Orange-winged Amazons crossed the beautiful forest highlighted by flowering Immortelle Trees. Most of the group gathered by the raised pool deck, the height advantage being a huge plus as we watched Red-crowned Woodpeckers, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers, and Northern White-fringed Antwren all feeding at eye-level or below. The feeders in front of the main lodge building were active too, with Rufous-breasted Hermit, Ruby-Topaz and Copper-rumped Hummingbirds and the much prized and sought-after White-tailed Sabrewing.

After a fine breakfast of fresh fruit, cereal, toast, bacon and eggs, we met up with local guide Desmond Wright, the resident staff naturalist at Cuffie River Retreat. Desmond was fascinating and fun to watch with his unique and effective approach to mimicking bird vocalizations….and it worked! Over the course of a very pleasant two mile walk we enjoyed views of furtive flycatchers such as Ochre-lored Flatbill and Fuscus Flycatcher, as well as Northern White-fringed Antwren, Scrub Greenlet, Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Cocoa Woodcreeper. Desmond tried to find a couple of roosting White-tailed Nightjars in the bamboo thickets but on our visit, the birds weren't home. However, a Common Potoo was spotted on its favored roosting spot swaying in the bamboo stands and a real treat to observe as the only other sightings on the trip had been nocturnal. A Tobago Racer was seen briefly, as was a Trinidad Ameiva which sat in the road for a while showing its beautiful emerald green head and upperbody. Great Black Hawk, Green Kingfisher and Trinidad Motmot were further highlights on the return leg of a fabulous walk. By noon, the final election results had been announced too and the TPP (blue party) won all 15 seats!

After a delicious lunch we joined Jason for the drive down to the lowlands and the 'Adventure Farm', a neatly hidden private nature preserve hosting dozens of hummingbirds and other bird species at the feeders. This was 'armchair' viewing at its best, watching from the porch with most birds showing at point-blank range. Hummingbirds dazzled once again, but the views of birds such as Red-crowned Woodpecker, Barred Antshrike, Banaquit, Spectacled Thrush and Trinidad Motmot were truly extra-ordinary. After the feeders, Jason led a short

but rather quiet walk around the trails where a few foraging White-tipped Doves were the highlight.

We finished off the afternoon atop the rugged headland at Fort James where several Black-faced Grassquits showed well as soon as we stepped out of the bus. Viewing the bay below found an Anhinga drying its wings, Laughing Gulls and Royal Terns resting on the moored fishing boats, and White-winged Swallows and Eared Doves offering some of the best views of the whole tour as they perched and preened on the chain-link fence above the cliffs. An ensuing shower closed play for the day and we headed back to Cuffie River Retreat while Jason entertained us with tales and videos of the local 'goat racing' scene, a sport taken very seriously on Tobago! After a delicious supper of mainly Indian influenced dishes, and after the rain, White-tailed Nightjars vocalized and hunted from the driveway right alongside the main lodge building.

Tue., Jan. 13 | Cuffie River Nature Retreat | Departures

And just like that the tour drew to close. Tom, Mark, George and Kay opted for the 7AM flight out of Tobago and left Cuffie Retreat with Jason at 5AM. For the rest of the group there was enough time for further birds to be found around the retreat, not least of which was a Great Black Hawk perched in full view in a Cecropia right in front of the viewing deck by the pool and Trinidad Motmots called from the surrounding forest. A couple of low passing Magnificent Frigatebirds came as something of a surprise and, after one last delicious breakfast, Jeremiah even found time for a final dash along the entrance road to check the White-tailed Nightjar roosting spot….and met with success! Shortly after 10am, we said goodbye to Regina and her wonderful staff and sped away (with Jason) to ANR Robinson International Airport for our respective journeys home cherishing the memories of a truly epic Caribbean adventure.

James P. Smith
Northfield, MA

Our wonderful group - Little Tobago Island (James P. Smith - JPS), Red-billed Tropicbird (Kay Simmons - KS), Tufted Coquette (KS), Green-rumped Parrotlet (JPS), Ruby-topaz Hummingbird (KS), Green Honeycreeper (KS), White-chested Emerald (JPS), Spectacled Owl (KS), Views from the Verandah at Asa Wright Centre (JPS), Green-throated Mango (JPS), Birding by Boat (KS), American Pigmy Kingfisher (KS), American Flamingo (KS), Scarlet Ibis roost (KS), American Flamingos (JPS), Trinidad Motmot (KS), Bearded Bellbird (Tom Koontz), Red-crowned Woodpecker (JPS), Castara Bay - Tobago (JPS), Rufous-tailed Jacamar (KS), Watching Great Black Hawks (JPS), Red-billed Tropicbird (KS), Blue Waters Inn (JPS), Ruby-topaz Hummingbird (KS), Jason Radix (center) at Cuffie River Nature Retreat (JPS), Banaquits (JPS)