



NEW YEAR'S WEEK AT THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE

DECEMBER 28, 2016 – JANUARY 3,
2017

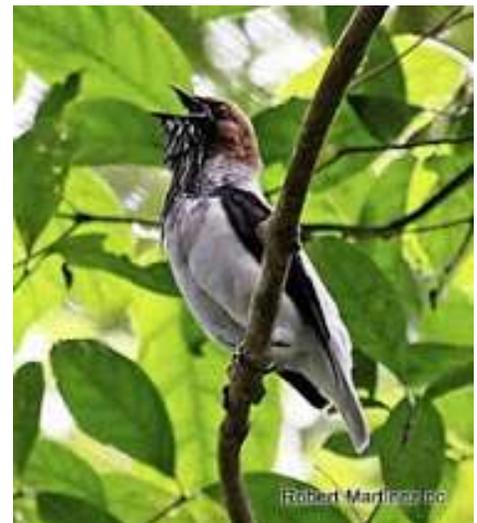
Extension to Grande Riviere to Seek Out
Trinidad Piping-Guan and
Enjoy the Beach and Scenery
Jan. 3-5, 2017



Ring in the New Year, and enjoy the holiday time at the world-renowned Asa Wright Nature Centre and Lodge, a 200-acre wildlife sanctuary in Trinidad's rain-forested Northern Range. Participants in the *New Year's Week at Asa Wright Tour* can set their own pace by selecting from options for birding and cultural field trips, as well as ample time at the Centre to soak in the ambiance of the rainforest and all its riches.



Centre naturalists lead walks each day on the grounds, and our legendary team of local guides is ready to share their expertise in several unique natural areas across the island.



What a way to start your year, many people new to the New World tropics add 40 Life Birds before breakfast!

Wed., Dec. 28 Arrival and Welcome to Asa Wright Nature Centre



Our guides will meet all flights that arrive to Trinidad's Piarco International Airport in Port of Spain, or for those spending time in the city, we can arrange a pick-up in Port of Spain. It is a scenic one-hour transfer to the Asa Wright Nature Centre and Lodge. Expect a warm greeting at the Centre, where the colors of birds rival decorations for the holiday, and hospitality is shared to make you welcome. Coffee and tea is served at 4PM, Rum Punch at 6PM, both accompanied by one of the most amazing bird shows of any eco-lodge in the world! Share dinner with other tour participants and guests staying at the Lodge in Asa Wright's cozy dining room.

In the evening, we walk the Centre's driveway through lush overhanging forest, listening to night sounds and with luck, the call of Tropical Screech Owl. If your flight arrives late in the evening, you may wish to come in the day before not to miss anything. Or, despite the late hour, come on up and get settled, knowing you will wake up to the birds!

Thurs., Dec. 29 Forty Species before Breakfast / Exploring Centre Trails

After a day of travel, enjoy a full day right at the Centre without getting into a car. Morning begins with the raucous noise of the Crested Oropendola and a host of other exotic sounds. A first-time visitor might see 20-30 life birds among the forty or more bird species often seen before breakfast! Return visitors treasure the rainbow of color at arm's length as honeycreepers and hummingbirds come in to feed.

After breakfast, we offer a guided tour of one of the several trails that traverse this rich and diverse wildlife sanctuary. On our introductory walk we should see such species as Guianan Trogon, Channel-billed Toucan, Chestnut Woodpecker, White-bearded Manakin, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, and Turquoise and Bay-headed Tanagers.



The Centre is situated in a typical valley of Trinidad's Northern Range.



These sites have been traditional centers of coffee, cocoa, and citrus plantations and many of these plants are still maintained at the Centre. Natural second-growth has taken over and festooned the abandoned plantation vegetation with vines and a host of epiphytes. The whole effect is one of being deep in a tropical rainforest. The Centre is currently involved in projects to encourage other landowners to use wise wildlife practices and we will hear more about this effort during our stay.

The afternoon will be free to allow you to relax, or enjoy the trails on an afternoon guided walk if you like. The Centre has an active outreach program to local schools, and this afternoon we hear about the recent year's activities as we enjoy our 4PM tea. Birding from the Veranda of the Asa Wright Nature Centre as the day winds down is one of the world's most pleasant and exciting ornithological experiences. Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, Tufted Coquette, Barred Antshrike, Green Honeycreeper and Bare-eye Thrush are among the many species that can be easily seen.

Fri., Dec. 30 Lopinot Valley: Nature, Agriculture & History / Café Mariposa

Today we explore an adjacent and very peaceful valley of Trinidad's Northern Range. You can choose to hike there on an old road, now a lush trail, from the Blanchisseuse Road just above the Centre, or drive with a guide that shuttles the van around to pick up those walking. A Collared Trogon is a hopeful find on this walk.

Lopinot is a charming village resting about 20 miles northeast of Port of Spain in the foothills of Trinidad's Northern Range. This idyllic community features a gourmet cafe, historic estates, and winding hiking trails taking one to the "Charral", a stunning rock formation with challenging climbs and scenic vistas.

Charles Joseph Count de Loppinot, the town's namesake, was a French military officer who amassed significant wealth through operating large sugar plantations in Haiti, having settled there after a first attempt in Louisiana, soon to be purchased as territory in the USA. Following slave rebellions in 1791, Loppinot left Haiti for the island of Trinidad. Here, he petitioned the British governor to grant him land in exchange for his temporary service to the Crown. The governor agreed, and Loppinot ventured into the Northern Range to establish a cocoa plantation.



Loppinot's estate remained practically untouched until the Trinidadian government took over the village in 1944. The village was then officially named Lopinot. In the 1970's, sensing the town's unique characteristics and tourist potential, the government began restoring old structures. Cocoa estates flourish in the Lopinot Valley to this day.

The first cocoa was planted in Trinidad in 1525, and the plant has been deeply woven into Trinidad's cultural fabric ever since. The industry was not without hazards; in 1716, the notorious pirate Edward "Blackbeard" Teach raided a ship loaded with cocoa in the Gulf of Paria, off the coast of what is now Port of Spain.

The cocoa legacy was largely accomplished through the labors of Trinidad's large population of indentured servants, many from British Crown colonies such as East India, which allowed



British colonizers to meet the trade demands created by Europe's growing desire for chocolate. The robust cocoa economy eventually enabled many emancipated slaves to establish their own plantations. Families stayed on making Trinidad the fascinating multi-cultural nation it is today.

Cocoa is a major source of income for Lopinot and the industry is seeing a nationwide resurgence. In Lopinot, the Guerrero family runs *Cafe Mariposa* and produces an appetizing collection of cocoa products.

We hope to dine with the Guerreros this week, as they host guests in their beautiful outdoor cafe, composing inventive dishes using many ingredients found in their abundant gardens. Frozen cocoa pods enhance savory beverages and hand crafted deserts, and Cafe Mariposa serves among its repertoire a chili con carne using the local cocoa to create a uniquely Lopinot chili. The family is known to accompany meals with a song – perhaps demonstrating the local *parang*.



The community of Lopinot is recognized as a leader in artisan chocolates, with several events held by Cafe Mariposa and some sponsored by Trinidad's government. Great for holiday feasting!

Sat., Dec. 31

Caroni Marsh and the Spectacle of Scarlet Ibis



What better way to celebrate New Year's Eve than the vivid show of rich magenta displayed on the wings of thousands of Scarlet Ibis coming in to roost! The Scarlet Ibis was recently portrayed on the cover of a book about the world's most remarkable birds. This field trip has long been a highlight of Trinidad's many wonders.

We board a small boat, reserved for our group, to explore a very specialized mangrove forest that contains several genera and species of mangroves, showing classic examples of plant adaptation in this unique brackish water community. We will seek out some of its more specialized denizens — Neotropical Cormorant, Anhinga, Striated Heron, White-cheeked Pintail, Large-billed Tern, Pied Water-tyrant, Bicolored Conebill, and Red-capped Cardinal. Our day will end with the spectacular flight of Scarlet Ibis returning to their mangrove roosts at dusk, truly one of the world's most dramatic natural moments. We bring the rum punch along to celebrate, and as we return to the boat dock we will search the mangrove-lined channels for the mysterious sounding Common Potoo.

We leave after lunch, and en route we may stop at a local market, or event that seems festive on this special day. The birds are always festive, and we scan some wetlands and rice-fields en route for water birds as well.

Sun., Jan. 1

New Year's Day at Asa Wright, in Multi-Cultural Trinidad



Trinidad is one of the most multi-cultural nations in the world, and one of their secrets to getting along is to jump in and celebrate ALL the holidays. There are lights on homes of Hindus, music and song in the streets, and on this day, family feasting. All of this and you can wake up to watch Agoutis!

We spend the morning enjoying gifts from nature, watching and tallying up species that we see from the verandah. In the afternoon, fueled by a lovely lunch, we walk down to the Dunston Oilbird Cave, a beautiful riparian grotto located on the sanctuary, to view the

breeding colony of the fascinating nocturnal Oilbird. This is one of the most accessible Oilbird caves in the entire world and access is limited to protect this rare species. On the short but steep hike to the cave, we could see some of the secretive birds of the deep forest such as Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Black-faced Antthrush, White-bellied Antbird, and Gray-throated Leaf-tosser.

Finding butterflies in early January reminds us we are in the tropics.



Mon., Jan. 2 Free Day or a Birding Tour to Nariva Swamp and Trinidad's East Coast



You are totally welcome to spend another full day enjoying Asa Wright Nature Centre, with walks by the Centre naturalists and time viewing on the Verandah. For those who wish to see more of the country and its special birds and mammals, we wind our way out of the Northern Range to Trinidad's east coast and the Nariva Swamp, the largest freshwater herbaceous swamp on the island. This field trip starts with a stop in the morning at the Agricultural Station, also featured in our Night Birds outing – it is a place well worth a couple of stops! Here you may find White-headed Marsh Tyrant, Pied Water Tyrant, rare Pinnated Bitterns, Savanna Hawk, Bat Falcon, Red-breasted Blackbird, Southern Lapwing, and Green-rumped Parrotlet.

We then continue on to the east side of Trinidad, which hosts an ecosystem very different from that of Caroni on the west side. Here, where the Nariva River reaches the sea, freshwater environments are comprised of herbaceous swamp and swamp forest, dotted with a few patches of mangroves such as the area around Bush Bush Creek. Along the edges are "palm islands," where the tall Moriche Palm is common. Here too we will see a unique mangrove community, made up primarily of the stilt-rooted

rhizophora mangrove, which often reaches a height of 80 feet. Limpkin, American Pygmy and Green Kingfishers, Black-crested Antshrike, Green-throated Mango, and a mix of other species can be found.

This field trip to Trinidad's East Coast and the Nariva Swamp is a very full but rewarding day. Along the route, you'll pass Manzanilla Beach with its swimming beaches and picnic pavilions, and south of here one travels through long lines of coconut trees, often with Yellow-headed Caracara or possible Pearl Kite perched in them. A mangrove area nearby can prove fruitful for the more elusive species such as Silvered Antbird, Bicolored Conebill, and Least Bittern. An expansive open area with small ponds and flooded fields known as the Melon Patch hosts Wattled Jacana, and possible Pinneated Bittern and Azure Gallinule, and – it is possible here to see Red-bellied Macaw. If we do not find some desired species here, there are alternate locations to check on the way back to the Centre.



We have an excellent chance to observe both Red Howler and White-faced Capuchin Monkeys at Bush Bush Research Area, a unique upland island within a region of surrounding lowland grassy savanna similar to the Florida Everglades. There, while walking a circuit under the tall canopy, we will keep an eye out for Moriche Oriole, White-flanked Antwren, recently reintroduced Blue and Yellow Macaw, as well as the forest's populations of primates.

This evening or perhaps another during the week, we will invite a steel-drum band in to perform for us at the Centre!

Tues., Jan. 3 Departures, or Extension to Trinidad's Northeast Coast at Grand Riviere to Seek Out Trinidad Piping Guan (or continue on to Tobago at your leisure)

Our week of nature, birding, and enjoying Trinidad's festive culture comes to an end.

We do offer a two-night / 3 day extension to Grand Riviere to seek out the endemic Trinidad Piping-Guan in lush forests in a pristine valley of the Northern Range that extends almost down to the sea. Our beachfront lodge is delightful, with excellent food including handmade artisanal cheeses. The species mix of birds is different here, and our lodge is adjacent to a small Trinidadian village.



We spend mornings birding, and we have afternoons free to enjoy the lodge, beach and town (or more birding if you prefer). A portion of the drive over from Asa Wright Nature Centre is on the North Coast with scenery reminiscent of a tropical "Oregon" Coast with rugged rocks stacked offshore, attracting waves and spray.

On Sunday, those leaving from AWNC may schedule flights out at a time convenient to you, keeping in mind you need to be at the airport at least two and half hours ahead of your flight. Afternoon flights are thus easier on you, but if you have to take an early flight to make it home (often so for the American or United flights) we will get you to the airport in time.



For those departing after the extension to Grand Riviere on Trinidad's Northeast coast, it is a 2 to 2 ½ hour drive to the airport – so again we recommend afternoon departures. For those that require the early morning flight, a very early morning (middle of the night, about 3:30AM) transfer can be arranged, but it makes for a very long day. We suggest instead you extend the day at the beach and lodge, take a late afternoon transfer back to an airport hotel for the night, and go out early the following day.

Wanting to do the New Year's week but still see Tobago? If you plan ahead we can likely find space for you at one of two delightful lodges we work with in Tobago after the New Year - ask us for details.

Grand Riviere Extension
January 3-5, 2017

Two nights at Grand Riviere is just a great way to continue birding, and also be in a totally new environment. It is a beautiful area, and its pristine forests provide a secure stronghold for the Trinidad Piping-Guan. Once hunted to near extinction, the Trinidad Piping-Guan has been the focus of considerable local conservation efforts. The species has responded well, slowly increasing in numbers and visibility. Scrutinize the wild nutmeg trees that are their preferred feeding habitat. Visitors to the Pawi's territory also occasionally catch sight of Bat Falcon, Zone-tailed Hawk, and Gray-headed and Plumbeous Kites.



On the way to Grand Riviere, we bird at the Aripo Agricultural Station, where species of the savanna abound. Enjoy Savanna Hawk and possible Bat Falcon, and water-loving birds such as Pinnated Bittern and White-headed Marsh Tyrant. The birding is excellent in Grande Riviere, and the morning foray may reveal 60 or more species. Much of the birding is done from a wide, forested track, where you can easily look out from superb viewing areas. Having hopefully found the Pawi, we continue driving down a steeply wooded slope into riverine forest, where we continue birding. Admire Lilac-tailed Parrotlet, Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Silvered and White-bellied Antbirds, Black-tailed Tityra, and Trinidad Euphonia.

The food and hospitality of Mt. Plaisir are excellent. We rise early for birding, and early-afternoon is free for time to explore and enjoy the beach. Our hotel manager, Piero, runs a gourmet cheese factory, and those who wish can sample with delight.

We go back out in the afternoon for another birding session with a local expert guide, either to the same or a new location based on our success this morning.

Please note: the order of our activities or locations may change according to what is open on what days during the holiday week. Island time rules!

PHOTOS

Many thanks to Robert Martinez allowing use of the amazing collection of photos taken at Asa Wright Nature Centre. They brighten this holiday tour itinerary and show you what is possible to see. Thanks to Robert for sharing his keen eye and expertise. Trinidad Piping-Guan by Peg Abbott, Grande Riviere scenic, Mukesh Ramdass.



COST OF THE JOURNEY

Cost of the journey is \$1695, based on double occupancy, from Port of Spain, Trinidad. Tour cost includes airport transfers, accommodations for 6 nights, all meals, professional guide services, park and program entrance fees and miscellaneous program expenses. Single supplement is \$355.

Cost of the 2N/ 3D extension (Special rate for New Year's tour) \$675 per person, double occupancy.
Single supplement is \$170.00

Cost of time on Tobago – please ask us about your options.

Cost of the tour and extensions do not include: round-trip airfare to and from Port of Spain, Trinidad, items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar; or gratuities for guides and personal services.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

The airport for this tour is Port of Spain, Trinidad (POS). Most major airlines service this very centrally-located airport. Plan to arrive on or before December 28, and depart on or after Jan 3, 2017 for the main tour, on or after Dec. 29 for the extension (please book flights AFTER NOON on Jan. 5 due to the drive time back to the airport from Grande Riviere). If you wish to go on to Tobago, we can assist you with bookings and plans.

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