



P.O. Box 16545 Portal, AZ 85632
Phone 520.558.1146/558.7781 Toll free 800.426.7781 Fax 650.471.7667
Email naturalistjourneys@gmail.com info@caligo.com

Trinidad & Tobago March 7 – 16, 2015

TRIP REPORT, by *Pat Lueders*

Trinidad Guide: David Ramlal

Tobago Guides: Gladwyn James and Zolani Frank

Caligo Host: Pat Lueders with Participants: Hans-Steinar, Terje, Barb, Ellen, Karen, Bernard, Carol, Mike, Sue, Susan, Jack, Eileen & Tom

Saturday, March 7 Arrivals in Port of Spain, Trinidad



Today we arrived at the pleasantly modern and efficient Piarco International Airport in Port of Spain where we were cheerfully met by local guide David Ramlal. Our first introduction to Trinidad was a short drive through the residential area of the Arima Valley and the lush rainforest that surrounds the nature Centre.

Upon arrival, we gathered on the Asa Wright Nature Centre's famous verandah to enjoy the colorful birds and sip the delicious rum punch cocktail that we would soon realize awaited us each afternoon. After introductions, we enjoyed a dinner of delicious local cuisine served graciously in the open-air (on one side) dining room.



As we retreated to our rooms for the night, we enjoyed the company of Short-tailed Nighthawks and White-lined Sac-bats as they caught insects in the lights. The sounds of the rainforest serenaded us into the night.



Watching the sunrise on the veranda while enjoying a steaming cup of coffee or tea quickly became a favorite activity for everyone! The whistle of the Little Tinamou and the activity of the White-lined, Palm, Silver-beaked and Blue-gray Tanagers at the fruit trays was mixed with the flurry of the White-necked Jacobin, Copper-rumped Hummingbird and the occasional Tufted Coquette as they vied for positions on the feeders. As dawn broke, we watched the valley for Orange-winged Parrots, Crested Oropendolas and Blue Dacnis that seemed a bit shy of the veranda.



After a delicious breakfast, we took our first walk along the nature Centre's trails to visit the leks of the Golden-headed and White-bearded Manakins. Oblivious to our presence, we enjoyed their mating dances on the forest floor at close range. David heard a Stripe-breasted Spinetail, and we watched a

pair work up the hill, coming ever closer. Bearded Bellbird were heard in the distance, and then seen once we approached their area — by far one of the most unusual avian vocalizations! As we set off back home toward the nature Centre, we managed to complete our magical morning with sightings of all three species of Trogon found on Trinidad: Green-backed, Guianan and Collared.



In the evening we sat down to a splendid catered picnic dinner near the Aripo Livestock Station where we were greeted at the entrance by a vocalizing Pearl Kite and colorful Red-breasted Blackbird. Blue-black Grassquit and Ruddy Ground Dove kept busy near the pond that was home to Yellow-chinned Spinetail and submerged Caiman.



After dinner we had an exciting encounter with a Tropical Screech-Owl, which decided to pose for us on a lamp post. Great views and picture-taking opportunities abounded. We then embarked on a dusky night drive, led by David, along the agricultural fields where we caught sight of Common Pauraque and White-tailed Nightjar as they fed, and a Common Potoo perched on a dead stump. David then found quite a surprise — a Cook's Tree Boa wrapped around a branch above the road!

After a productive evening excursion, we settled down for another good night's sleep nestled in the lush rainforest.

Monday, March 9 Blanchisseuse Road Drive / Lunch at Brasso Seco / Night Centre Walk

After breakfast, we headed north through the mountains on the Blanchisseuse Road. At the first stop we heard the distinctive call of the Black-faced Antthrush, close enough that we followed this elusive bird and eventually enjoyed great looks at him bravely defending his territory on the forest floor. Swallow Tanagers put on a show at the top of a pine tree and the expansive sky view yielded soaring Common Black Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle and a perched Plumbeous Kite. Pairs of Blue-headed Parrots made quite a ruckus as they darted through the trees.

We then stopped on a cliff to look down on Band-rumped and Gray-rumped Swifts to compare their field marks from above — what a view! Red-rumped and



Golden-Olive Woodpeckers noisily excavated cavities and an Euler's Flycatcher drew our attention by calling in the woods. Caligos, or Owl Butterflies posed on the trees.

Our guide then found an ant swarm close to the road, and we enjoyed the avian activity surrounding it, including Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Great Antshrike, Plain Antvireo and White-bellied Antbird. David was quite pleased to then find a fruiting tree with feeding Turquoise and Speckled Tanagers which were just

beginning to return to the area. Nearby, Golden-crowned Warblers were seen busily carrying nesting

material.

The charming village of Brasso Seco was our location for lunch today. At the visitor's Centre under a covered ramada, we were treated to local cuisine prepared by members of the cooperative who took the time to describe our food and its preparation. Smooth-billed Ani were seen from the ramada and Yellow-rumped Cacique fed young that were hidden close by in their hanging bag-like nests.



We returned to the Centre after a fabulous day of birding. After dinner we joined Barry, an Asa Wright guide, for an evening walk around the grounds. We managed to hear the calls of the Mottled and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl ... and Barry found the pygmy-owl perched low in a tree for all to see. What luck! Views of a Boreal Tarantula and Forest Gecko topped off an exciting day.

Tuesday, March 10 Nariva Swamp

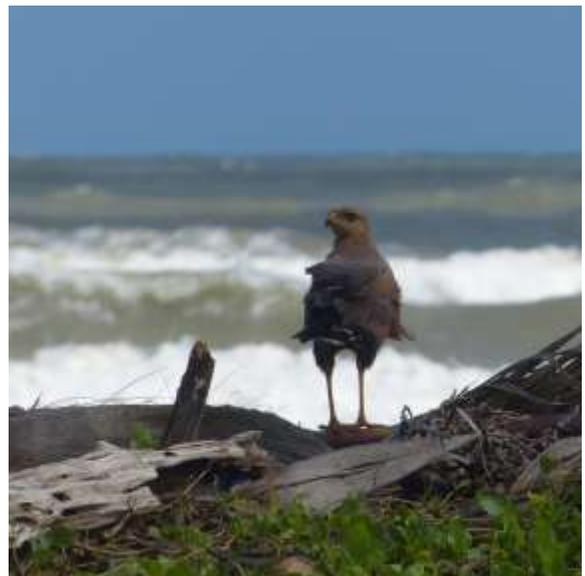
Another morning, another new sighting as we enjoyed our morning beverages on the verandah. This morning we had scope views of a Double-toothed Kite perched on a tree in the valley!



We left the nature Centre after breakfast for an all-day trip to Nariva Swamp, the largest freshwater herbaceous swamp in Trinidad. After only a short time on the road, David heard a Trinidad Motmot, and much to our delight, we caught sight of it after a short search! The drive also yielded Savanna Hawk, Black Hawk Eagle and a Zone-tailed Hawk — a very

productive drive. We also caught sight of a first-of-the-season Red-legged Honeycreeper in a glorious flowering tree.

This afternoon we picnicked on the beach at Manzanilla and were surprised with a Leach's Storm-Petrel as it fed close to us along the shore. Magnificent Frigatebird kept our eyes to the sky as they soared above. Not a bad lunch!



Continuing on to the swamp, our drive along the scenic “Coconut Alley” yielded Yellow-headed and then later, Crested Carcaras. We stopped a few times along the route to catch sight of Green-rumped Parrolets, Silvered Antbird and Barred and Black-crested Antshrikes for comparison.



We arrived at the swamp after catching glimpses of Purple Gallinule and Wattled Jacana, and hearing the Red-bellied Macaws in the palm trees.

To the surprise of all, a pair of Blue-and-yellow Macaw flew across the field and landed on a dead stump! Traveling for better views of these magnificent

roosting Macaw, we also enjoyed Yellow-hooded Blackbirds and Yellow Oriole. We certainly enjoyed a very colorful afternoon!

Wednesday, March 11 Aripo Savannah / Arena Forest

This morning the veranda didn’t disappoint, yielding a Scaled Pigeon, White-tipped and Gray-fronted Dove and Agouti under the tray feeders. On the way to Aripo Savannah, David chose some stops along the road to see a Boat-billed Flycatcher, White-flanked Antwren, Bran-colored and Streaked Flycatchers and a Squirrel Cuckoo.

As we arrived at the Savannah, a remnant of once major lowland habitat, we found soaring Broad-winged hawk and a perched Merlin. Near the active agricultural areas we also found a Masked Yellowthroat, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, White-winged Swallow, Grassland Yellow-Finch and Giant and Shiny Cowbird.



After a picnic lunch where we enjoyed the sights and sounds of the Arena Forest, we returned to the nature Centre to enjoy our rum punch on the veranda (of course!) and sightings of jewel-toned hummingbirds like the Blue-chinned Sapphire and Green Honeycreeper.

After dinner, we took another evening walk in the delightful tropical air. On our walk, Barry spotted a sleeping Northern Waterthrush, we found a Rufous-breasted Hermit on her nest and we again heard the Tropical Screech Owl and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl calling into the dusk.

Thursday, March 12 Yerrete Hummingbirds / Caroni Marsh

This morning on the veranda we enjoyed newly familiar species: Cocoa and Spectacled Thrush, Green and Purple Honeycreeper and the striking Violaceous Euphonia. After breakfast we travelled to Yerette, an idyllic private home in Trinidad's Maracas Valley, only recently opened to the public. The property's feeding stations offer unparalleled views of the island's 13 recorded species of hummingbirds — we enjoyed views of all 13 by the end of our visit, including Little Hermit, Ruby-topaz, Long-billed Starthroat and the rare Brown Violetear, spotted by Barb and Ellen.



Although hard to depart such a spectacular location, we embarked from Yerrete and travelled to the famous Caroni National Park, a specialized mangrove forest system that contains several species of mangroves. Before we boarded our boat to travel along the canal, David spotted a Northern Scrub-Flycatcher and a Bicolored Conebill. To the delight of the group, a Masked (Red-capped) Cardinal is seen near the road.

We then boarded our boat and slowly cruised through the Caroni mangroves as our driver pointed out a sleeping Silky Anteater and a pair of roosting Gray-necked Wood-Rail. Straight-billed Woodcreeper vocalized and were spotted near the water as Fork-tailed Palm-Swift flew



overhead.

The captain then navigated to the middle of the bay to await the highlight of the day: the arrival of thousands of Scarlet Ibis returning to the island to roost. As an added bonus, Snowy Egret and Little Blue Heron are spotted in the crowd. A Peregrine Falcon stirred up the group as it flew through the trees. What a treat to have the opportunity to experience this truly magical spectacle of nature!

Friday, March 13 Oilbird Cave Tour / Flight to Tobago



Today was our final morning on the Asa Wright Nature Centre veranda, and departure was bittersweet after such a magical week in Trinidad. However, the best adventure was saved for last — the visit to Dunston Cave. This beautiful riparian grotto located on the sanctuary offered incredible views of a 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.

We arrived at the beautiful grotto and followed Barry's directions, taking turns moving to the front to view seven nesting Oilbirds at the entrance to

the cave. Many more were seen further back, roosting for the day. What a magical way to conclude our visit to the Centre!



We then departed from Asa Wright to travel to the airport outside of Port of Spain, where we boarded our short flight to Tobago. The food court at the airport serves local cuisine and some of the group enjoyed the local favorite, doubles (a flatbread sandwich of curried chick peas and other toppings — yum!).

Upon arrival in Tobago it's easy to notice a far more

Caribbean feel, in contrast to Trinidad's continental combination of natural and cultural history. We were greeted by our guide, Gladwyn James, and quickly settled in his comfortable bus for the journey across the island to Blue Waters Inn. Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird and Laughing Gull were seen along the ocean surf, and Cattle Egret, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and Southern Lapwing fished on inland ponds. Gladwyn pointed out Eared Dove



on the electric lines as we travelled through quaint coastal villages.

We checked into the picturesque, beachfront Blue Waters Inn and enjoyed a welcoming rum punch at the Shipwreck Bar — a welcomed gesture after leaving the beloved Asa Wright verandah behind. The Inn is situated on 46 acres of pristine waterfront with gardens that are backed by dry forests. We had the entire Batteaux Bay to ourselves. After we wandered the beach and enjoyed a delicious dinner, we fell asleep to the sound of the ocean beneath our rooms.

Saturday, March 14 Glass-Bottom Boat Tour to Little Tobago Island

After our “wake-up call” from the local Rufus-vented Chachalaca, we took a walk around the property of the beautiful Blue Waters Inn before breakfast. White-tipped Dove, Brown-crested Flycatcher and a Yellow-bellied Elaenia were quickly sighted in the open area around the grounds. Closer to the wooded area we found Barred Antshrike and a female White-fringed Antwren. As we walked along the drive, we managed quick glimpses of a Black-faced Grassquit and a Scrub Greenlet. On our return to the Inn, much to our delight, Barb spotted the male White-fringed Antwren, a beautiful bird seen on Tobago but not on Trinidad.



After our delicious breakfast on the outdoor veranda, we met our boat captain and guide, Zolani Frank. The Inn’s resident Ruddy Turnstones were feeding on the beach as we boarded Zolani’s glass-bottom boat for our short trip across the bay, around scenic Goat Island, to Little Tobago Island, one of the nation’s most significant wildlife sanctuaries.



After landing, a short hike across the island yielded multiple Chivi Red-eyed Vireo, White-tipped Dove, a Peregrine Falcon and soaring Magnificent Frigatebird and Red-billed Tropicbird.

We emerged at a lookout tower on the cliffs where there were nesting tropicbird close to our feet. Zolani expertly pointed out the nests of Brown and Red-footed Booby, and he explained the dynamics between the frigatebird and tropicbird as we observed their feeding behavior. On our return trip, the glass-

bottom boat explored the coral reef and the colorful marine life that is found near Goat Island.

After a successful morning of birding, we spent our afternoon swimming, snorkeling and walking the beach — all activities that are readily available at this beautiful seaside resort.

Sunday, March 15 Gilpin Trace / Tobago's Main Ridge Forest Preserve

This morning we set off on our morning walk and added a nesting pair of Red-crowned Woodpecker, found on Tobago but not Trinidad. Ellen spotted a Trinidad Motmot and we enjoyed close looks at the colorful and unusual Rufous-tailed Jacamar.



We met Gladwyn and again boarded his comfortable and spacious bus to travel high into the mountains to the historic Tobago Main Ridge Forest Preserve, the world's oldest legally protected forest, and home to 210 species of birds. As we entered the forest, Gladwyn pointed out the James Trail, named for his famous father Aldophus James, a birding pioneer on the preserve.

The Gilpin Trace Trail, a narrow path through this beautiful forest, is home to many Tobago specialties that fed close to the stream that parallels the trail. Stripe-breasted Spinetail, Olivaceous and Cocoa Woodcreeper, White-throated Spadebill and Ochre-bellied and Fusious Flycatcher were vocalizing and flying around us.

Gladwyn pointed out the nests of many of the local hummingbirds that were nesting in the forest. However, our target was the White-tailed Sabrewing, a large hummingbird once thought to be extinct. Gladwyn heard the Sabrewing's vocalization, and — what luck! — we found one perched along the trail, showing off for excellent looks and photos. What an exciting bird to find and observe in this magical habitat!



Returning to the bus, we found the Blue-backed Manakin and managed fleeting glances at a Venezuelan Flycatcher. We were lucky to find another pair at the visitor's Centre, as well as three soaring Great Black Hawk. A local Tobago woman was selling delicious cakes at the Centre — a wonderful treat at the end of such an enjoyable day.

Our special farewell dinner included stories of the many adventures we shared, followed by an attempt to pick our favorite birds of the trip (which was, of course, almost impossible). However, some species that were mentioned were the Scarlet Ibis, Trinidad Motmot and the Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, but it really was too hard to choose just one.

Monday, March 16 Departure for Trinidad / Return to the U.S.

We enjoyed one last morning walk on this island paradise and then said our farewells before we headed for the Tobago airport. Gladwyn briefly detoured to a canal near the airport for us to add Blue-winged Teal and Great Blue, Little Blue, Tricolored and Green Heron to our Tobago list, and the last birds we saw before departing were a pair of White-cheeked Pintail.

The short, scenic flight to Trinidad returned us to Port of Spain and our flights to the United States, ending our stay in this most delightful area of the world, an area to which we will surely return!



Photo Credits:

Verandah at AWNC, Bird Bar AWNC, Bud Ferguson; Crested Oropendola, Silver-beaked Tanager, Alex Vargo (AV); Copper-rumped Hummingbird, Golden-headed Manakin, Peg Abbott (PA); Tropical Screech Owl, Alan Gertler; Caligo, Buck Snelson (BS), White-bellied Antbird, PA; Achiotte Fruit, BS; Guide David Ramal (DR), PA; Savannah Hawk on the beach, DR; Silvered Antbird, Blue-chinned Sapphire, PA; Green Honeycreeper, BS; Brown Violetear, Mukesh Ramdass (MR); Long-billed Starthroat, DR; Scarlet Ibis, PA; Masked Cardinal, Greg Smith; Oilbird, ALVA; Brown Pelican, Mahlon Hale; Blue Waters Inn, Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Red-billed Tropicbird; Rufous-tailed Jacamar, PA; Trinidad Motmot, MR; Thick-billed Euphonia, Ruby Topaz, Pearled Kite and Yellow Oriole, DR.