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## **Trinidad and Tobago Caligo Ventures Tour December 4-13, 2014**

**Participants: (Barrie and Mary Billingsley, Lars-Olof Johansson and Anita Stemyer-Johansson, Don and Susan Johnson, Dennis Riphenburg, Maggie and Joe Tieger, Woody Wheeler – trip host/escort, and Mari Wikstrom)**

**Thursday, Dec. 4      Arrive and explore at Asa Wright Nature Centre**



reserve in the Northern Range of Trinidad.

Crested Oropendola nests frame Asa Wright forest view

There is more than a little magic to this place, and a lot of history. It begins when you depart from the bustling city of Port of Spain and turn east into the city of Arima. From here, the road rapidly transitions from urban, to suburban, to exurban, to rural to tropical rainforest. Even at night you can see the bananas, palms, Heliconias, Shrimp Plants and Angel Trumpet Flowers. One of the first eco-tourism lodges in the world, the former coffee plantation that is now Asa Wright Nature Centre was set aside in the 1960s as a 200-acre nature

When you arrive, there is a small cluster of modest buildings surrounded by rainforest and trails. The main lodge has an exceptional birding verandah where guests and staff naturalists congregate for the nearly continuous show of Trinidad's abundant avifauna.

This is no coincidence. The two small adjacent islands of Trinidad and Tobago boast 477 species of birds. Situated as stepping stones between the continents of North and South America via other West Indies Islands, Trinidad and Tobago are strategically located for birds.



A dozen species of hummingbirds frequent the hummingbird feeders hung from the verandah roof. Honeycreepers, Bananaquits, Euphonias, Tanagers, Thrushes, Crested Oropendola and tens of other species add to the spectacular show. You get buzzed by hummingbirds just inches away when you sit on the edge of the verandah – so close that you can feel the wind generated by their tiny wings.

Tour participants trickled in as their respective flights and/or other island adventures led them to the lodge. They were able to decompress from their travels from faraway places like Sweden, Canada and even distant corners of the U.S. by sitting on the verandah, walking refuge trails, or by taking photos of the amazing flora and fauna on display. We all gathered at a long table for dinner in the Birders dining hall with other birder groups from around the world. Already there was much to talk about not only in terms of travels, but of birds and other natural wonders seen near the lodge.

After dinner, one of the lodge guides took us on a night hike along the lodge access road. Early on we were serenaded by the repetitive hooting of a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl. Soon after, our guide miraculously found a migrant Northern Waterthrush hunkered down for the night in dense roadside vegetation. We walked through a curtain of 40-foot tall air roots that hung like clusters of thin vines, but were in fact roots capable of absorbing moisture and nutrients from the fecund tropical air.

Our guide found critters hiding in the vegetation or in man-made structures: a Tarantula tucked into the open end of a guard rail; a scorpion resting atop a guard rail, Walking Sticks and a Katydid attached to leafy plants. Large freshwater crabs feeding in stream beds and roadside ditches, a centipede in a drain basin. Biodiversity was on full display here—even at night.

We returned to our rooms where we could still enjoy the sounds of the rainforest, mainly the crickets and stream frogs, as we went to sleep.

### **Day 2: Walk into Asa Wright Nature Centre Rainforest/Night Birds Excursion**

To kick start the day and open my eyes wide, a Yellow Oriole startled me by perching on the outside of the screen on my bathroom window to pick off bugs. Good morning indeed!

On the walk to the main lodge, scores of Orange-winged Parrots, Crested Oropendola and Palm Tanagers perched in trees and shrub along the path. Once on centre's verandah with fresh cup of coffee in hand, the bird show began anew. This morning's show included scope views of a Channel-billed Toucan along with myriad hummingbirds, honeycreepers, thrushes and Bananaquits.



Today, our lead guide, Roodal met us in the verandah and took us down the aptly-named Discovery Trail. It only took a few paces to discover a Tropical Kingbird with its yellow breast gleaming in the morning sun along with a Tropical Parula busily feeding in the tree canopy and a female White-bearded Manakin, her pink feet in sharp contrast to her otherwise plain plumage. A short distance later, we encountered a brilliantly-colored Bay-headed Tanager and a Golden-fronted Greenlet flitting through the Bamboo.

**The view from the verandah beckons visitors to walk**

Continuing down the trail into even more lush rain forest, Leaf-cutter Ants were busy at work hauling leaves to their anthill along a beaten path through the woods and across our trail. Mari spotted a White-chested Thrush hopping ahead of us on the trail, turning over leaves in an effort to find insects. At this point we began to hear the startlingly loud call of the Bearded Bellbird. Thanks to Roodal's expert spotting, we all had terrific looks at several of these flashy, territorial birds engaged in a calling competition. Their ear-piercing bird call was one that everyone will remember as a part of the soundscape of Asa Wright. While being entertained by them, a White Saccharine Bat fluttered over our heads several times, feeding on insects before they could feed on us.



Golden-headed Manakin

Heading back up the Discovery Trail we paused at the manakin leks long enough to obtain a fine, albeit obscure view of a male White-bearded Manakin and soon afterward, of several Golden-headed Manakins. True to form, both species of Manakin were found close to their respective lek sites, or dancing grounds. Known for their elaborate courtship, including dances which have been compared favorably with those of Michael Jackson, manakins remain close to their lek sites after courtship and breeding.

Feeling a sense of accomplishment, we headed back up the hill toward the lodge, but first made another side trip which yielded big dividends. Roodal took us into a forest glade where two Trinidad Motmots were perched along with a Green-backed Trogon above them. Was this the grand finale, or the end of the show? Of course not!

Only a few yards from the lodge, we spotted the clearest view yet of a male White-bearded Manakin and heard him making his amazing sharp snapping sounds. These are made mechanically by snapping his wings abruptly together above his back in hyper-extended fashion. It sounds like a stick being snapped in half. Many birds were gorging themselves on tree fruits in this area, including a Silver-beaked Tanager, Bay-headed Tanager, and an Olivaceous Euphonia. To think that this was just the morning "orientation" walk! We returned to lunch at the lodge and much more exploring ahead of us in the afternoon/evening.

Our evening birding took place at Aripo Livestock Station, a state experimental farm with pastures, fence posts and forested edges aplenty where owls and night jars can be found after dusk. Prior to entering this farm, we birded near the entrance to the new Trinidad University property. Here we had good looks at White-winged Swallow spotted by Mari; as well as Short-tailed Swift, and Southern Beardless Tyrannulet spotted and then later called in by our guides. As the sun went down, we entered the farm and stopped near the entrance to search for owls. Following a diligent search by Roodal and Mukesh, we were all able to see clearly two Tropical Screech Owls sitting side by side and looking as though they had been carved out of wood. While enjoying our picnic dinner, a Peregrine Falcon flew overhead and Southern Lapwings called noisily from nearby pastures.



Southern Lapwing

At dusk we started up the road through the farm and toward the forest under the light of a nearly full moon. Early on we saw groups of Southern Lapwings in the fields. Soon after, we saw sets of eyes illuminated by our vehicle's headlights along the road. The first set of eyes belonged to a medium-sized Caiman. The next few sets of eyes

belonged to Bullfrogs and Common Pauraques. The latter flew as we approached, but not before everyone in our vehicles had a chance to see them flutter off with their white wing bands showing clearly.



White-tailed Nightjar

At our turn-around point, we started seeing multiple White-tailed Nightjars. We got out for a short walk and all enjoyed wonderful looks at a White-tailed Nightjar stilled by the headlights of one of our vehicles. As we departed, it flew off to hunt more insects on the roadside. On the way back we had a distant look at the gleaming eyes of a Common Potoo in the light, and saw another Common Pauraque near Asa Wright Nature Centre. It was a magical evening of being in close proximity to reclusive night birds.

### Day 3: Birding Trinidad's Northern Range



Collared Trogon

Today we headed further into Trinidad's Northern Range of densely forested mountains which reach elevations of up to 3,000 feet. We drove as high as 2,200 feet, stopping frequently along the way for birds, butterflies and views. The weather was sunny and balmy – the norm for Trinidad thus far. We did not drive too far uphill from the lodge on Blanchisseuse road before we made our first stop: a perched Gray-lined Hawk high up in a tree snag. Once we got out and walked around, we also saw a soaring immature Black Hawk, a Zone-tailed Hawk, Trinidad Euphonia, Tropical Pewee, Turquoise Tanager and a Collared Trogon. Continuing to our next stop we walked once again in the rain forest and encountered a Stripe-breasted Spinetail and Black-faced Antthrush.

When we reached the summit of the Northern Range we stopped to take in the impressive view of the forested slopes leading down to the Caribbean Ocean. Before we could begin taking photos, Roodal called our attention to



a soaring Ornate Hawk-Eagle. We watched it for the next five minutes as circled above, calling all the while. Eventually, we were able to savor the grand view and photograph it prior to departing from this scenic stop.



At our next stop, we saw a Common Tiger Butterfly perch on a Harlequin Flower. This was beauty on beauty in excellent light. Nearby we saw more gorgeous sites, including Bay-headed and Speckled Tanagers, and an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher.

From here we continued to the picturesque tiny town of Brasso Seco. Our hosts served us a delicious lunch in an open-air eatery with sweeping views of the hillside. After lunch, we birded in town and had great looks at a Boat-billed Flycatcher, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Rufous-tailed Jacamar and a Merlin. Our birding was capped by fresh homemade, hand-churned ice cream flavored by cocoa grown nearby. Talk about leaving a sweet taste in one's mouth!



We somewhat reluctantly departed the charming atmosphere of Brasso Seco to head to more birding spots, but were soon rewarded for our effort. A Guianan Trogon perched conspicuously on a branch overhanging the road. An approaching rainstorm prompted us to get back in our vans but not before we were all able to see the Trogon well and photograph it. While a heavy thunderstorm rolled over, we drove the windy roads of the North Range, heading down slope to several well-known birding hot spots. Just as we reached the first of these, the clouds lifted and the rain subsided. As soon as we got out of our vehicles we were rewarded with good looks at a cloud of Grey-breasted Martins gathered to harvest insects after the storm. In addition we saw perching Blue-headed Parrots, a pair of Green-backed Trogons, Yellow-rumped Caciques, a Forest Elaenia and a Piratic Flycatcher. Don spotted a Magnificent Frigatebird soaring above. Dennis found a brilliant Blue Dacnis.

In a small, nearby village we had stunning looks at Blue-headed and Orange-winged Parrots feeding in the tree tops with a backdrop of mist rising in the mountains. Spectacular!

We then returned over the top of the Northern Range back to Asa Wright Nature Centre feeling quite content. It was time to turn in early to the tune of crickets, Stream Frogs and the occasionally hooting of a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl.

#### **Day 4: Aripo Savannah and Arena Forest**

Our trip into these two different ecosystems yielded new and exciting birds. As usual, we had impressive sightings on the way to our destinations. The first took place at an overlook of a large valley where Don spotted a Channel-billed Toucan on a ridge top with a stunning backdrop of Mountains and mists.

The next sighting occurred at a rural crossroads where the ever-alert Mari spotted a Lineated Woodpecker perched in a tree behind a small store that was playing Parang music at high volume. By the time we all got out to see it, the woodpecker had already flown across the road to a large dead snag. Amazingly, it was soon joined there by a Crimson-crested Woodpecker and the two were visible together in our spotting scope. It was possible to compare and contrast the two largest Woodpeckers found in Trinidad. What an unlikely yet wonderful woodpecker show!



Crimson-crested Woodpecker

Following these serendipitous sightings, we continued down slope from the mountains to the lowland plains and the Aripo Savannah. Here amid the tall grasses, we found Yellow-olive Flycatcher, Blue-black Grassquit, Masked Yellowthroat, Grayish Saltator and a soaring Short-tailed Hawk. Moving to another location with mixed deciduous trees and savannah, we found Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Black-crested Antshrike, White-winged Becard and a Savannah Hawk. Continuing on to a third location that was heavily shaded by trees in a moister area, we spotted a Long-billed Gnatwren, a Bran-coloured Flycatcher, and the exotically-named Streaked Xenops.



From here we headed up slope to the Arena Forest which includes abundant Caribbean Pines. The area has been logged in the past and now is a second-growth forest. As described by an interpretive sign: "Presently the main thrust aims at biodiversity, conservation, sustainable development and ecosystem management." When we arrived at the Forest picnic area, we were accompanied by a family of three Green-backed Trogons.



After a pleasant lunch served in the shade on this hot, humid tropical day, we walked across the road where Roodal and Mukesh endeavored to find a Striped Cuckoo for the third time today. This time they were successful. Not only did they find it, but it was perched in the open where we all could watch and photograph it as it made its repetitive, plaintive two-note call.

Without having to get back in the van, we walked into the nearby forest on an inviting broad pathway. A Tropical Pewee flitted through the underbrush and perched high where everyone could see it. The guides then began calling for a White-bellied Antbird. After a few tries, they received a definitive response. We patiently waited, trying to hold still and be quiet until a male appeared 20 yards from where we were standing. His dark hood contrasting with his white breast and rufous brown mantle made a fine display.

Trinidad Guides Roodal and Mukesh

Buoyed by our successes, we headed back up to our always welcoming lodge where cold drinks and more casual birding awaited on the verandah.

## Day 5 – Arima Agricultural Station and Nariva Wetlands

On a partly cloudy and cool warm morning, we set out for the Arima Agricultural station once again, but this time in daylight. Soon after entering, Joe spotted a Savanna Hawk perched in a distant tree. In a small, muddy pond, we found three species of sandpipers: Least, Spotted and Solitary. Roodal pointed out a Zone-tailed Hawk soaring amid Black and Turkey Vultures – a clever hunting technique to surprise their prey that otherwise would not be alarmed by the presence of vultures.

Walking a short distance along the road, we encountered Yellow-chinned Spinetail, calling with a ratchet-like-sound similar to that of a Kingfisher. Several Grassland Yellow Finches moved through the tall grasses, perching occasionally to give us good views. A Pied Water Tyrant and White-headed

Marsh Tyrant perched confidently in the same area. A few Green-rumped Parrotlets flew into a large tree, perching conspicuously on open limbs as they chattered away.

On the way to Nariva Wetlands, we stopped for a brief visit to a local nature center that had Green Macaws, Howler and White Capuchin Monkeys, and Green Sea Turtles on display. We then forged on to a lunch spot in a shaded restaurant and bar where we were able to purchase refreshing cold beverages.

Nearby, we drove to a portion of the Nariva Wetlands. As soon as the landscape opened up to marshlands, Mukesh spotted a Crested Caracara perched on a large tree. Soon afterward, we saw a Yellow-headed Caracara perched on a water drum 50 yards ahead of us on the road we were walking. As we approached areas with standing water, the first wading birds of our trip began to appear: Striated, Great Blue and Little Blue Herons; Great, Cattle and Snowy Egrets, and several Limpkin. A flock of at least a hundred Black-bellied Whistling Ducks flew overhead and then landed on a nearby pond where we enjoyed good scope views of this handsome, colorful duck.

While taking an afternoon siesta and enjoying rum punch drinks in the shade, a Long-winged Harrier flew directly overhead. Within a few minutes, a Merlin flew and perched in a nearby tree while a Yellow Oriole perched nervously 20 yards below it in the same tree. Plastered onto an agricultural dam near us were dozens of Brazilian Long-nosed Bats that Dennis spotted. This turned out to be a sensational spot for our siesta.



Brazilian Long-nosed Bats

From here we headed “home,” taking note of roadside birds on the way back. Among these were a Broad-winged Hawk and a Northern Waterthrush – the latter just as we were approaching the Asa Wright Nature Centre.

### Day 6 – Yerette Hummingbird Sanctuary and Caroni Wetlands

Mornings at Asa Wright always feature a surprise sighting. Today’s was a Broad-winged Hawk perched on a dead branch plainly visible through a spotting scope. Following a leisurely morning of birding from the verandah, we met up with our guides and headed down-valley.



The first stop was a brief walk near several ponds where we all saw well Yellow-hooded Blackbirds, along with a Pied Water Tyrant and on the way out, a Ringed Kingfisher. From here we drove to a private home in St. Joseph with a spectacular hummingbird feeding area called Yerette, an American Indian word for hummingbird. The owner, Theo Ferguson, shared his knowledge, passion



and outstanding photographs of hummingbirds with us. He and his wife have landscaped their home to be a hummingbird haven and have a staggering number of feeders for them – 50 on the day we visited. Theo greets everyone cordially then asks them to be quiet and listen to the buzz and occasional chirps of the scores of hummingbirds frequenting his feeders.

During our stay we saw a dozen species, including new trip hummingbirds: Ruby Topaz, Green-throated Mango and Brown Violetear. Theo left us with a message to enjoy and help protect hummingbirds. He pointed out that hummingbirds are a principal pollinator of plants worldwide. After a picnic lunch surrounded by tens of hummingbirds and Theo's beautiful photo presentation, we headed to Caroni Swamp.



As soon as we pulled up to the dock where our boat tour of Caroni Swamp begun, an Osprey flew overhead . This turned out to be a good omen for things to come.

Once in the boat, and a short distance down the canal into the extensive Mangrove swamp, we saw an American Pygmy Kingfisher and a Tree Boa, the latter wrapped around a tree branch in a resting pose.

As our boat passed through a long, narrow Mangrove channel with branches occasionally touching us, Maggie spotted a Red-capped Cardinal. Then the guides spotted a Boat-billed Heron that most of us saw high in the trees. Farther down the channel, Dennis saw our first Scarlet Ibis, the national bird of Trinidad, standing out in sharp contrast to the brown mangrove roots. At the point where the channel opened up to larger lagoons, our guides found a Common Potoo perched motionless, well camouflaged against the tree bark.



As we pulled into the lagoon, flocks of Tri-coloured Herons, Cormorants and Scarlet Ibis were flying toward a distant island. As we drew closer to this island, an incredible sight came into view: the green tree canopy of the island was spotted with thousands of Scarlet Ibis roosting there, interspersed with Tri-coloured Herons and Snowy Egrets. As the sun went down we watched flock after flock of Scarlet ibis fly to and roost on the island. All agreed that this was a phenomenal wildlife spectacle. It put an exclamation point on another full and inspiring day on Trinidad.

## Day 7 – Rare Oilbirds and Short Trip to Tobago

Our final day at Asa Wright Nature Centre began with a hike down a steep trail to the Dunston Cave where Oilbirds nest. This nesting site is the most accessible cave in the world for this rare species that inhabits Columbia, Venezuela, Guyana, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Trinidad. The only nocturnal fruit eating bird in the world, Oilbirds venture out of their caves at night and eat oily fruits, then return to spend the day in their cave dwellings. Our hike took us through tropical rainforest, down a long series of steps. On the way Mukesh pointed out a Tent Bat that was roosting underneath a Philodendron leaf. He also called out a Gray-throated Leaf Tosser that everyone saw living up to its name by alternately tossing leaves and then perching momentarily.



Last but certainly not least, Mukesh picked up a Leaf Cutter Ant carefully, and demonstrated to us just how effortlessly it could lop off a sizeable leaf stalk with its pincers. Impressive!



The steps continued downhill into a lovely fern grotto with a stream flowing through it through a narrow cavernous area. This is where the Oilbirds nest. Mukesh led us close to their nesting site, three at a time, to minimize our impact. We all saw them well with the help of a flashlight. Periodically, the birds emitted a loud eerie call that would work well as a sound track for horror movies -- a sort of choking sound. Hearing and

seeing these rare birds was unforgettable.

Oilbirds



Reluctantly, we then packed up our bags and departed from the Asa Wright Nature Centre and its magnificent verandah to head for Tobago. Roodal and Mukesh delivered us to the airport in plenty of time to catch our flight. We said fond farewells to these outstanding guides who made our experience on Trinidad so rewarding.

A short flight took us to Tobago over a 25-mile stretch of the ocean. At the airport we were met by Gladwyn James who loaded us on to his bus and promptly drove us to a small pond. Here we quickly found three new species for the trip: Anhinga, Black-crowned Night Heron, and Common Moorhen. One Anhinga had a fish that it had speared with its bill held high above the water. This, as Gladwyn said, was a good way to “whet our appetite” for birding on Tobago.



Rufous-vented Chachalaca

The rest of the drive to the Cuffie River Retreat took us on a winding road through steep forested hills with quaint villages on ridge-tops. Along the way, Don spotted two Trinidad Motmots. Dennis spotted several Rufous-vented Chachalacas, Tobago's national bird which are prized as game birds and a food source.

Thanks to regulations and the establishment of several large forest preserves on the island, their population appears to be stable.



White-winged Sabrewing

Upon arriving at the Cuffie River Nature Retreat, we saw several White-tailed Sabrewing hummingbirds on feeders. Having only spent a short time on Tobago, we were already enjoying its different species and relaxed atmosphere.

As dusk fell, Joe and Mari took advantage of the salt-water swimming pool with a scenic view. Joe quipped that he could "bird all day from this pool." We settled into our new accommodations, complete with a different sound track of exotic bird and insect sounds, including the raucous chatter of Chachalacas.

### Day 8 – Gilpin Rainforest Trail and Little Tobago Island

Early in the morning before breakfast, a number of us watched the hummingbirds at the feeder, including Copper-rumped, White-necked Jacobin, Rufous-breasted Hermit, and White-tailed Sabrewing. A surprise visitor to the hummingbird feeders was our first Red-crowned Woodpecker, lapping up sugar water.



this free ecological service.

At the renowned Gilpin Trace trail, we descended into the moist, cool and lush rainforest. On an exposed bank prior to entering the deeper portion of the forest, Gladwyn pointed out the adjacent Motmot and Jacamar burrows. It was hard to picture these long-tailed, ornate birds flying in and out of relatively small holes in the earth. Farther down the trail, we found both male and female Yellow-legged Thrush. Their yellow legs and eye ring really stand out in the dark forest.

Gladwyn met us for our morning walk in the tropical rainforest. On the drive there, we saw Chachalacas, a Great Black Hawk, several Gray Kingbirds and Trinidad Motmots. We then entered the forest area, which has been protected since 1776 – a remarkable conservation legacy. According to Gladwyn, the primary motivation to protecting it originally was to keep the watershed intact. To this day, the forest still benefits Tobago with



Gladwyn called in a male Plain Antvireo high in the forest canopy. He was soon joined by the female as she gleaned through leaves in search of insects.

As we returned back to the Gilpin Trace trailhead, a real show-stopper of a bird gleamed 15 yards from the trail: A Blue-backed Manakin. Its powdery-blue lower body, contrasted against a dark blue top accentuated by a blood-red crown, made this tiny bird stand out as one of the trip favorites.



Blue-backed Manakin

A short drive wound us through forested hills to the Atlantic Oceanside town of Speyside. Here we stopped for lunch at an open

air restaurant prior to taking a boat to Little Tobago Island. Despite choppy seas, we made the crossing to the island, and with boat guide Zolani's expert assistance, boarded and de-boarded everyone under less than ideal conditions. Once on the island, however, the walking conditions and views of birdlife and tropical island scenery were ideal. Little Tobago Island is one mile long and comprises 500 acres. It was at one time private property owned by a British settler, William Ingram.



Arriving on Little Tobago Island



Red-faced Tropicbirds Soar Over Little Tobago Island

Ingram released Birds of Paradise on the island that survived here until Hurricane Flora wiped them out in 1963. This hurricane had a major impact not only on the island's flora and fauna, but on its entire built environment. Trinidad and Tobago are still recovering from the devastation. Since then, Ingram donated the property as a nature reserve, which it still is today. On the way up to the top of the island, Zolani spotted a small, colorful Ocellated Gecko at the base of a tree. He also pointed out burrows where Audubon's Shearwaters nest.

Climbing up a steep pathway, we arrived at a spectacular sea and island viewpoint on top. There we watched hundreds of Red-billed Tropicbirds soar by, occasionally harassed by a handful of Frigatebirds seeking stolen food. Two species of Boobies: Brown and Red-footed were nesting on the sea cliffs. We had good scope views of these birds and watched in awe as these remarkable birds soared by at eye level. This was yet another phenomenal wildlife spectacle.



Afterward, we returned to Speyside and drove through town, country, and along the ocean to return to Cuffie River Nature Retreat. Along the way, Gladwyn stopped at an abandoned dock where numerous Royal Terns were gathered. Travelling through Tobago is always colorful, interesting and full of surprises. We saw adults and kids walking along the roadside carrying machetes; a man balancing a 20 lb. fuel tank on his head; and a construction worker bending rebar with his bare hands. Cars, pedestrians, dogs and chickens share the roadways. Vehicles communicate with a frequent beeping of horns, much the same as birds making frequent contact calls to one-another as they fly about.

Back at the lodge, we had an excellent home-cooked dinner before catching up on our bird list and heading to our rooms for a much-needed rest after our big day.

### Day 9 – Birding Cuffie River Nature Retreat with expert guide, Desmond Wright



On our last day of guided activities, we enjoyed a leisurely start with a three course breakfast. Even before we met up with our guide, most saw a Red-legged Honeycreeper in an Orange Tree behind the lodge, inserting its bill directly into an orange to extract juice from it.



Frangipani Hawkmoth Caterpillars



White-fringed Antwren

After breakfast, our new guide, Desmond Wright, arrived. As we strolled down the quiet access road to Cuffie River Retreat, Desmond told us about the brilliantly striped and colored caterpillars that adorned low-lying plants on the grounds: Frangipani Hawkmoth Caterpillars.

Sauntering along the road looking and listening as Desmond went through his amazing repertoire of bird call imitations, he first found for us a White-fringed Antwren. Soon afterward, Don spotted Brown-crested Flycatchers.



Rufous-tailed Jacamar

As we continued up the road, a chattering sound came from high above: a Great Black Hawk. Desmond said that it was a male, and the chattering was meant to call females. Sure enough, several minutes later a female flew in to join it and the two soared together.

Turning off the road and onto a grassy pathway, we came very close to a confiding male Jacamar. This was the best look we had yet of this striking species that eyed us in between short flights to fly-catch prior to returning to its perch.

Just beyond the Jacamar, a Red-rim Butterfly fluttered by and then perched for another great photo opportunity. Then, in response to Desmond's repeated excellent call imitations, several Blue-backed Manakins called back.

Desmond said that Manakins have up to ten different calls. The call and response between Desmond and the Manakins went on for a while. Then there was silence. Just as we were about to turn around and head back, there was movement in the canopy – a Blue-backed Manakin! It was great to see this iconic species of Tobago for a second time in two days.

We thanked Desmond and departed for an afternoon of free time to read, swim in the pool, bird, photograph and nap. It was a good time to reflect on just how amazing this entire trip has been on these ultra-biodiverse islands.

At our final dinner together, Cuffie River Retreat host and founder Regina regaled us with the story of how this place came to be under her leadership. She said that it now is the place she dreamed it would be. It was a dreamy place for us too, and the perfect spot in which to conclude our journey.



**Day 10 – Return to Port of Spain, Trinidad & Departure**



Blue-chinned Sapphire



Trinidad Motmot



Smooth-billed Ani



Golden-olive Woodpecker

**Trip report by Woody Wheeler ← Most of it written here**

