



## **TRINIDAD & TOBAGO ~ March 1-11, 2004**

### **Trip Report by Adrian Binns**

#### **Day 1: Monday March 1- Asa Wright; verandah, discovery trail**

A smooth flight had us into Port of Spain on time and once the stewardess had rescued Phil's brand new jacket before the continuing leg to Georgetown left the gate, we were on our way to Asa with Jogie and Mahese, our guides and drivers. Driving through Arima local "trash birds" included Smooth-billed Ani, scads of Tropical Kingbirds, and Ruddy Ground-Doves. Leaving the city behind we ascended up a narrow, winding road through lush rainforest to our base at Asa Wright for the next four days.

After being greeted by staff with our first rum punch we quickly threw our luggage into our rooms and headed for the fabled veranda. Birds dart in and out of the thick vegetation to visit the feeders, hummingbirds zip back and forth, and tanagers of multiple species hop from branch to branch. Several species we normally don't see from the veranda gave us good looks, including scope looks at an adult Ornate Hawk-Eagle and Bearded Bellbird in the same view! Other goodies here were a glimpse of a Long-billed Gnatwren, a young Grayish Saltator, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, male White-bearded Manakin, and who could forget brilliant looks at the male Tufted Coquette feeding at lantana and mimosa before perching in a tree for scope looks. Folks didn't know which way to look with all three Honeycreepers (Green, Purple, and Red-legged), Bananaquits, "in-your-face" White-necked Jacobins, a Crested Oropendola and Chestnut Woodpecker sparring for a prime slice of mango, and our first looks at the vividly-colored Blue-crowned Motmot. A good lesson came in the comparison of a male Shiny Cowbird and male White-lined Tanager, the latter having the habit of flicking its wing and occasionally showing white in the shoulder as well as having a two-tone bill and lacking the sheen of the cowbird.

Underneath the feeders, Gray-fronted Doves, a pair of Great Antshrikes, Bare-eyed and Cocoa Thrushes, Southern House Wren all fed while a Red-rumped Agouti kept running away with mouthfuls of bread.

The open canopy white sage tree next to the veranda hosted Forest Elaenia, 4-5 Ochre-bellied Flycatchers, and pairs of Turquoise and Bay-headed Tanagers. A Violaceous Euphonia popped in for a view and a gorgeous male Violaceous Trogon perched in an open branch of a large cecropia tree, clearly showing off his bright yellow eye-ring. Not to be outdone, a Boat-billed Flycatcher later used the same perch and showed off his massive bill.

A quick walk around the centre between showers provided us with looks at several hummingbird species including Black-throated Mango and a Little Hermit feeding at vervain flowers with a wonderful double rainbow as a backdrop. We ended the day by calling in a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and were able to watch a food exchange where one owl gave the other a juicy lizard!

#### **Day 2: Tuesday March 2 – Asa Wright NC; Verandah, Discovery Trail and Bellbird Trail**

The overnight rain storms gave way to gradual clearing as dawn broke over the valley. Bats were feeding on the papayas at the feeders before the usual birds showed up. Bananaquits, Cocoa Thrush, Green Honeycreepers, Silver-beaked Tanagers all made an appearance before the hummers. The male Tufted Coquette again put on a stellar show while we sipped morning tea— is there a nicer hummingbird anywhere? In the distance we picked out a pair of preening Channel-billed Toucans with their orange breasts and red rumps clearly visible, even at a distance. An Olive-sided Flycatcher was a new species for the trip as it perched on

bare branches a hundred yards out, as was the male Red-rumped Woodpecker that was seen lower down the tree. A Streaked Flycatcher and Yellow Oriole showed very well in the cecropia tree as did the Forest Elaenia in the white sage, while the Rufous-breasted Wren took a little while before it was seen in an opening in the mimosa tree.

Harold, one of the Asa guides led us down the discovery trail. A pair of Common Black Hawks circled overhead as we were looking at a couple of stunning butterflies - the flambeau, coolie and postman. For the last couple of weeks a Common Potoo was roosting beside the trail, and we all got see how well camouflaged a large species can be. Getting deeper into the woods, a Long-billed Gnatwren and Streaked Xenops were seen in the same area working their way through the lower levels and up a vine, respectively. A little further down the trail Slaty-capped Flycatcher appeared briefly, but the real reward was a close, calling Bright-rumped Attila. The bird was actively flying around before giving us good looks, including views of its bright colored rump. A great find for such a difficult-to-see upper canopy resident. We were now at the bellbird lek, and could not believe our luck as a male was sitting in the open 20 feet above the trail. Raising his head prominently and displaying his fifty plus wattles, he would give his loud 'boink' call at regular intervals. How lucky can we get!

After an early lunch, and a little repose, we were back down the trail and took the bellbird trail. Our first species was a calling Stripe-breasted Spinetail that was eventually tracked down to a perch, but it did not stay long enough for everyone to see it. This was followed by several Golden-headed Manakins fluttering about and the snarling of the oilbirds that could be heard as we walked near the stream. A White-tailed Trogon called repeatedly and fairly close by but never showed. After a slow walk up and down the trail with little activity, we picked up the long call of the Buff-throated Woodcreeper, which was soon located working its way up a tree trunk while a second bird was on an adjacent tree. The highlight of the walk was the White-bearded Manakin lek, where 9 males were popping—a noise made with their wings and sounding like 2 marbles being tapped together, all for the attention of a female. We positioned ourselves where we could see the majority of the birds, each no more than a few feet off the ground, in motionless in an assortment of poses, patiently waiting for a female to put in an appearance. All was quiet for about 5 minutes – suddenly one 'popped', and then another and another...all hell broke out as they were bouncing about from twig to twig and back again. A female had arrived and they were there to impress, with a couple of the dominant males bouncing over her. This went on for about 5 minutes before the interest and activity died down, obviously because she was not impressed and left the arena. The males then dispersed, not doubt to feed, before returning to start all over again. On the way back up the discovery trail, a white-necked thrush was seen walking along the trail and several people that were bringing up the rear got to see a Golden-olive Woodpecker.

A short walk after tea produced a pair of Rufous-browed Peppershrikes, a Common Black Hawk, fly over Scaled Pigeon, Cocoa Thrush on a well concealed nest, and a brief look at a Squirrel Cuckoo. While enjoying our rum punch on the verandah, and with the light fading, several Oilbirds flew across the valley, including one that proceeded to go after a month. Those of us that went out for a short walk had a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl perched low in the shrubs near the main building.

### **Day 3: Wednesday March 3 – Asa to Blanchisseuse over the North Ridge**

By now we were pretty accustomed to the feeder birds, and as can be expected they all put in appearances over the hour and a half before breakfast. The Channel-billed Toucans put on a wonderful show in great light and we had all three honeycreepers at one time on a feeder as well as a new species, a female Barred Antshrike inching her way into the open in the mimosa tree.

This morning we took our time driving the winding road over the northern range in spotty on-off drizzle. Our first stop produced several Golden-headed Manakins, which took a little while for everyone to get on as they were swaying in the back branches of large tree. A distance pale-morph Short-tailed Hawk was also spotted. A little further up the road we came across a pair of Golden-olive Woodpeckers on an exposed branch and two or three Plain Brown Woodcreepers showed very well below eye level. At the top of ridge we had 3 species calling at the same time - Black-faced Antthrush, Scaled Pigeon and White-necked Thrush before a brief shower had us returning to the vans. Our next stop produced tropical pewee and a brief glimpse of a Black-faced Antthrush as it flew across the road. Continuing down towards the coast, a male collared trogon was tracked down and Steve found a pair of Speckled Tanagers, which in turn led to American Redstart, Golden-fronted Greenlet, and an assortment of tanagers. Back into the vans, and before long a Common Black Hawk

was spotted circling in the valley then landing in her nest. We all got out to scope it and had a Zone-tailed Hawk as well as a sulking Rufous-breasted Wren. Our lunch stop was at the beach with Magnificent Frigatebirds and Short-tailed Swifts circling above us, Carib Grackles in the picnic area and Brown Pelican out at sea. A short walk to the lagoon produced Gray-breasted Martins, Southern rough-winged Swallow, Tropical Kingbird, Spotted Sandpiper and several White-winged Swallows flying low of the water at close range. A bridge across the river a little further upstream had nesting Yellow-rumped Caciques and we also got to see a female Blue Dacnis.

By now we were running behind schedule, the morning's birding having been very successful, but some of the day's highlights were still to come. Rufous-tailed Jacamars were spotted leaving a railing along the road, so we stopped to locate them. Here both Violaceous and White-tailed Trogons were calling. The former was easy to find, but the white-tailed took a little while, before most got to see it through the scope. The jacamars were seen down the escarpment. They blended in well with the greenery making it tough to pick them out with bins, but the scope views were outstanding. The usual Blue-headed Parrot late afternoon roost failed to produce anything of note, but only a short distance away Scott spotted a pair in the top of a bare tree. We could not have asked for better looks. Only 50 yards away in another direction a Black-tailed Tityra perched in the open and while watching him in the bins a pair of White Hawks could be seen circling in the distance. Turing back to look at the parrots a Zone-tailed Hawk rocked its way towards us, giving us great views of its yellow cere and white tail bands. A final stop produced a Rufous-breasted Hermit on a nest, though the tail seemed like the only visible part of her body before she flew away.

After dinner, those that stayed up took a very short walk to see a very confiding Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. Several of us continued on down the path without any luck before we ran into James who was returning with a small group. He showed a group of four sleeping postman – no not some lazy postal workers, but the butterfly. As fragile as these leps are, they were being blown about in the breeze. As on most slow night walks the conversation turned to owls, including some of the local ones that might be expected before we turned in for the night. A half hour later there is a knock on my door. It was Steve and he was very excited having just heard, called in, and seen a Spectacled Owl! His enthusiasm, boundless energy, and natural instinct to explore always seem to well rewarded, and this certainly was the icing on the cake. Scott and I had to see for ourselves. A short walk up the hill, and low and behold the owl was calling. Though he was close we could not locate him with q-beam, so Steve imitated a mottled owl. The owl stopped calling. Two minutes later he flew right onto a large open fallen trunk, which Steve had had him on earlier. The sight of this large and appropriately named owl was out of this world. It was a two beer nightcap!

#### **Day 4: Thursday March 4 – Aripho Livestock Farm; Manzanilla Beach and Nariva Swamp**

After a promising night of only one rain shower, intermittent showers during the early morning verandah watch increased to steady rain by the time we made it down to the valley to Arima. New this morning was a very close Scaled Pigeon that changed people's perception of pigeons, once everyone had seen the scaling around the neck, two-toned bill, and beautiful maroon coloration.

It felt good to be in a new habitat, as most of what we saw was new for the trip. Red-breasted Blackbirds perched atop fence stakes and sang; a Savanna Hawk sat out the rain on various fence posts while we watched a pair of Ruddy-breasted Seedeaters obligingly perch on stalks; a Cocoli (white-necked) Heron showed its neck and head above the tall grass; southern lapwings gathered near the cattle pens and while looking at those a Wilson's Snipe was sighted hiding in a ditch. Our guide Mahese had found Trinidad's first record of Grassland Yellow-Finch a few weeks earlier and sure enough we had about a dozen including several males displaying at close quarters. All this was going on while one of the largest flocks of Black Vultures we had ever seen kettled around us. An upland area on the backside of the farm produced a pair of Green-rumped Parrolets and a quick moving, well-hidden Squirrel Cuckoo for the rear van. Another highlight was watching a pair of Yellow-headed Caracaras bringing sticks back to a nest.

Our lunch stop was at Manzanilla beach, where after filling ourselves on chicken, rice, beans and salad we searched for pearl kite. Scott picked out a distant Plumbeous Kite, that never really showed well and Mahese saw the Pearl Kite fly on a telegraph wire. This small raptor is always a favorite. Heading south along the Atlantic coast through a large grove of palms, we had better looks at a closer pearl kite before stopping at the north bridge of the Nariva swamp. Butterflies, including Flambeaus, Postman, and Small Blue Grecian were

working the flowers besides the bridge. A little patience paid off here with brief flashes of a flying American Pygmy Kingfisher and longer looks at Green Kingfisher. Soon after we were being hailed on the walkie-talkie and walked down to the next bridge were a Plumbeous Kite was sitting atop a dead tree waiting for its next meal to fly by. Every once in a while it would stretch its wings giving us great looks at the amount of rufous in the wings, as well as seeing the wing projection well beyond the tip of the tail. Along the channel a common black hawk was also waiting for a meal, perched over the water, no doubt searching for a crab, one of their favorite prey.

Nariva Swamp was productive with great views of Pied Water-Tyrants and White-headed Marsh Tyrants as well as Wattled Jacanas and Solitary Sandpipers; good numbers of Smooth-billed Anis; several Gray Kingbirds; a pair of lovey-dovey Plain-breasted Ground Doves. Most of the group got to see a White-tailed Goldenthrout, an uncommon and local marsh hummer as it fed on some roadside flowers. The most excitement came when we stopped to scan a wet marsh and flushed a Pinnated Bittern, which flew about 30 yards away. After a short time its head and neck appeared above the swaying grass, allowing for close studies of his neck and face pattern.

Our final stop was at the palms along the coast road to watch the Red-bellied Macaws come into roost. With rum punch in hand we eagerly awaited their arrival. They initially arrived in pairs and then in slightly increasing groups, culminating in a large and final group that numbered 27, giving us total of about 60 birds. Seven Yellow-crowned Parrots added to the excitement giving us a 4-parrot day.

#### **Day 5: Friday March 5 – Asa verandah, Oilbird Cave, Motmot Trail, Discovery Trail; Wallerfield**

This morning began with a hermit watch which gave us wonderful looks at a female Green Hermit and a Blue-chinned Sapphire. Several pairs of Barred Antshrikes were around our rooms and a male White-tailed Trogon showed very well in the trees just beyond the feeders. Steve and Sheryl found several Lilac-tailed Parrolets feeding on figs and a White-flanked Antwren.

Harold guided us down to the Oilbird Cave, which began with nice weather, a Gray-throated Leaf-tosser and a Plain-brown Woodcreeper. Shortly thereafter the rain steadily increased and as we neared our destination the trail became a little slippery. Once there we took turns to make the final leg into the mouth of the cave and were rewarded with several pairs sitting relatively close for us to view. Their blue eyes were shining red in the dim torch light and their large size was easily visible. The cave went eerily silent when the nattily attired Mr. Comito entered – never had they witnessed quality footwear like this gracing the trail, boulders, and running stream. Still pouring with rain we made our way back, stopping for Striped-breasted Spinetail, Buff-throated Woodcreeper and Euler's Flycatcher before returning to the lodge for a change of clothes and a search for Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird in the car park. It was not long before we got to see it working the vervain. This small patch of flowers was also being used by a male and female Tufted Coquette, Black-throated Mango and an assortment of butterflies including Mimic, Gulf Fritillary and Flambeau.

After lunch we headed down the Motmot Trail to look for Rufous-breasted Hermit. Our luck held out and we were rewarded with excellent looks as it probed the red tubular flowers on one side of the road while a Green Hermit was visiting the hanging heleconias on the other. From here we headed down the Discovery Trail to check out a Double-tooth Kite's nest, but alas she was not sitting on it. A short distance further the White-bearded Manakin lek was in full swing with an estimated two dozen males vying for 2 very lucky females, and we were only feet away! A second Common Potoo was sitting above the trail, this one in better view than the previous one we saw the day before, while a male Tufted Coquette was happily nectaring from each vervain flower in one shrub.

At 4:30 we headed back down the valley to go to Wallerfield, an abandoned airstrip with a small stand of Moriche palms. Unfortunately the Moriche Orioles failed to appear but we did get great looks at a small group of 4 Green-rumped Parrolets, Sulphury Flycatchers and Red-bellied Macaws before settling down to dinner. As we began to serve ourselves a Merlin flew right by us and shortly after a large owl flew into a tree and out the back without stopping – more than likely a Barn Owl. With White-tailed Nightjars calling we began to drive the runways in the hopes of spotlighting one. The very first one we came across was very cooperative allowing both vans to get within 25 feet giving us the best looks I have ever had at the buffy collar. With a background of singing nightjars and Paurques we called in a Tropical Screech-Owl to within 20 feet as it perched on an outer

limb at eye level and walked up to Common Pauragues sitting on the edge of the runway. Only the Common Potoo was missing, but we soon spotted its deep orange eye shine in the torch beam. We watched it hawk for moths 4 or 5 times, always returning to its perch, before it flew out of sight. This was a great ending to a marvelous day.

### **Day 6: Saturday March 6 – Fly to Tobago; Bon Accord, Grafton Estate and Blue Waters Inn**

Jogie and Mahese dropped us off at the airport and after saying our goodbyes and picking up our bags we realized that the driver of the luggage vehicle had also left one of his bags in with ours. A series of comical events followed as not one, not two, not three but 4 different official persons pawned off the responsibility of getting the bag to its rightful owner and left me with having to take a fourth piece of luggage on the plane! It passed the x-ray scan with flying colors despite the 15 foot coil of cable and a rather skimpy pair of leopard patterned briefs. On the way back to the nature center the owner must have realized that that his most valuable piece of haberdashery was missing and made a quick u-turn to see if he could salvage his bag. I was summoned to the concourse where I gladly handed the man his bag and told him “Don’t worry, the briefs are still there.”

After a short uneventful flight to Tobago, we were met by Adolphus James and his son Gladwyn and it was onto Bon Accord Sewer Ponds where Caribbean Martins, Anhingas and Eared Doves were all around us. A pair of Least Grebes graced one of the ponds while a pair of White-cheeked Pintails flew between ponds before settling down for all of us to see well. Another White-cheeked Pintail was spotted leading her 9 chicks along the edge of a bank, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible by staying low in the water. A Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs side by side made for a good identification lesson in separating the two species. Common Moorhen, Great Egret, Southern Lapwing, Brown-crested Flycatcher and both Night-herons rounded out the sightings at the ponds but it was the Little Egret in the mangroves that was a great find. Along the perimeter road in a wet area that held puddles of water between low vegetation we found Whimbrel, Wilson’s Snipe, Willet, Snowy Egret and Yellow Warbler.

At Grafton Estate we began by watching the feeders, where a Rufous-vented Chachalaca was calling from high above the feeders and Blue-gray Tanagers, Copper-rumped Hummingbird and Bananaquits were sharing the sugar water with Red-crowned Woodpeckers. Down the main trail we had great looks at several Yellow-breasted Flycatchers as well as a pair of White-fringed Antwrens that were working the fallen bamboo. Our first Chivi Vireos were spotted in the canopy but the light was poor and a Scrub Greenlet flew out of the same area and lower making it easier to see what the natives call the ‘nothing bird’.

After a late lunch at Blue Waters Inn, those that were not happily swimming or lying on the beach joined the leaders for a walk up the hill on the trail above the Inn. The view from here is truly spectacular, overlooking the bay, Goat Island, Little Tobago and beyond. Both grassquits, Black-faced and Blue-black showed well, the later calling incessantly before doing his ‘Johnny jump up’ act. Another pair of White-fringed Antwrens was seen as well as a female Barred Antshrike. A lone Broad-winged Hawk was working the ridge occasionally coming into view on several occasions during the walk. A bird was heard begging, which turned out to be a juvenile Chivi Vireo. We watched as the mother came in briefly to feed it.

### **Day 7: Sunday March 7 – Main Ridge and Gilpin Trace; Blue Waters Inn**

Our first stop was along the Roxborough to Bloody Bay Road, where Adolphus had his own stash of bamboo walking sticks secretly tucked away in the undergrowth. The road was very productive with a Fuscous Flycatcher perched on a branch of an overhanging shrub at a bank cut-away; Venezuelan Flycatcher putting on a great show for all to see the narrow rufous outer webs of its tail which is the best distinction from the more extensive rufous tail of the Brown-crested Flycatcher, and 5 Rufous-tailed Jacamars, including 4 females—all patiently sitting along the roadside at various places waiting for fly-by insects at close range so that they could run their sorties. Another rufous tailed species, the Streaked Flycatcher flew into a heavily leaved tree and we got our best looks of the trip at a pair of Golden-olive Woodpeckers.

After exchanging our shoes for well advised wellies from an enterprising local entrepreneur who assured us that it would be the best decision we ever made (though at \$4 a pair maybe not the best investment we had ever made) we began our hike through the rainforest on Gilpin Trace. Despite the forest’s proclivity for

moisture, we enjoyed a beautiful and rainless morning. Amongst the dense undergrowth a Stripe-breasted Spinetail's two noted call was heard. It took it little while but in the end she showed well as she worked the embankment on the far side of the creek. White-tailed Sabrewing is endemic to the Tobago rain forest and Adolphus had a nest with 2 very young babies close to the trail. As we were zeroing in on the nest the mother came in to feed to the chicks before flying only a short distance to rest on a bare branch. Adolphus heard a White-throated Spadebill which was eventually spotted hopping about the undergrowth before flying across the trail to continue playing cat and mouse with the group as we followed her further down the trail. Eventually all got to see this small, inconspicuous, and hard to find bird. This was a good day for viewing Yellow-legged Thrushes. In all we had about half a dozen great sightings most of which were of males. We came across a small Blue-backed Manakin lek with about 4 males displaying most of the time out of sight, but occasionally one would show and even once one came down low for all to see exceptionally well. After watching a Rufous-breasted Wren and another spinetail in full view we came across a pair of Plain Antvireos. On the way back Adolphus tried calling in an Olivaceous Woodcreeper, but though it did respond once it was never tempted to show itself to us. The morning's birding was excellent and though the trail was muddy in certain areas those that wore wellies were probably grateful they did while at the same time amazed to find that Phil and his trusty docksiders remained unscathed.

Our lunch stop was overlooking Bloody Bay and the Seven Sisters, a group of rocks off the coast that the French once used as target practice. A Red-legged Honeycreeper flew by several times but the highlight was a pair of Great Black Hawks that were gliding over the coast occasionally putting their legs down and at one point putting on a great show by flying right along the ridge in front of us.

The late afternoon Blue Waters walk began with a Northern Waterthrush working its way up the driveway wall and a Blue-crowned Motmot sitting in a regular spot having a bit of a kip! No new species were picked up, but we did see our first Tropical Buckeyes of the trip as well as a yet unidentified satyr species.

#### **Day 8: Monday March 8 – Blue Waters Inn; Little Tobago; Transfer from Tobago to Trinidad**

A pre-breakfast walk around the grounds produced Blue-crowned Motmot, confiding White-tipped Doves, and a few raucous Rufous-vented Chachalacas that were detected stalking up and down the tree limbs. Good views of Northern Waterthrush walking on the ground allowed us to discuss the finer points of waterthrush identification. Also seen on the grounds were a Spotted Sandpiper and male and female Black-faced Grassquits. We got to see a female Barred Antshrike and frame-filling scope views of the beautiful burgundy colored Pale-vented Pigeon. In the open canopy the elusive Chivi Vireo put in a brief appearance before being displaced by a pair of "Mop-headed Flycatcher" – oops, I mean Yellow-bellied Elaenias. Along the beach several dozen Ruddy Turnstones, some with color bands roamed their way along the wet sand dodging the numerous Portugeuse Man-o-Wars that had washed ashore overnight.

The ever-colorful Wordsworth Frank took us out in his glass bottom boat viewing a wide assortment of tropical fish (who could forget the super males?) and corals including a huge Brain coral. Groups of 3 or 4 Brown Boobies were noted flying low over the water past the stern as the weather turned to steady light rain. The walk up Little Tobago was uneventful with the exception of a Chivi Vireo or two and a waterthrush chipping. The feeders for some reason best known to the forestry department had been taken down and consequently the activity was non-existent. The view from the first overlook gave us our first close up looks at Red-billed Tropicbird. By the time we had reached the second overlook, which luckily has a roof over it, the rain was coming down harder. Seabird colonies remain one of my favorite birding opportunities and though it was the end of breeding season we did see an almost fully fledged juvenile Red-billed Tropicbird at a nest as well as several adults with young at another location. Despite the rain it was fabulous to see the scenery with rocks and cliffs below us and tropicbirds flying at so close at eye level. From here we found an adult Brown Booby perched on a branch showing off its large yellow webbed feet and demarcation on the belly as well as several Red-footed Bobbies on nests. 3 morphs were seen including brown, white-tailed brown and white, the later only seen at sea.

## **Day 9: Tuesday March 9 – Pax verandah; Caroni Rice Fields; Waterloo mudflats; Point-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust and Caroni Swamp**

The all day field trip to the central southwestern part of the island began with a Long-winged Harrier at the Caroni rice fields. Seen quartering the fields for a while before descending on prey, the size of the bird was noticeably larger and longer winged than our Northern Harriers. A stop at the wetlands produced Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Neotropic Cormorant, Pied Water Tyrant, Osprey, a couple of Peregrines, and an assortment of herons and egrets including side by side comparisons of Little and Snowy Egret with a immature Little Blue not too far away which made for a great identification lesson. Our last morning stop was to the Waterloo mudflats at low tide, where we picked up about 14 species of shorebirds. Here Willets, Whimbrels, Royal Terns, Black Skimmers were joined by hundreds by Laughing Gulls. Three Lesser Black-backed Gulls were an excellent find and the highlight was a group of a dozen Large-billed Terns with their striking upper wing pattern reminiscent of a Sabine's Gull that came in to land on the old rotting pilings. Other shorebirds, all in winter plumage included small numbers of Red Knots, Western and Semipalmated Sandpiper, Semipalmated Plover, Black-bellied Plover and one Short-billed Dowitcher with a gammy leg. Tucked away in the mangroves was a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron and a juvenile Yellow-crowned Night Heron, allowing us to discern the difference in posture and wing pattern.

Lunch was taken at the Point-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust where Peafowl roamed the grounds and Yellow Orioles seemed to light up every tree. Our lunch was first interrupted by a Streaked-headed Woodcreeper that flew into the tree under which we were eating and then a pair of rare Saffron Finch, which look similar to the Yellow Warbler which we had just created a false alarm by flying right by us. The feeders held an assortment of species including Shiny Cowbird, Yellow Oriole, various tanagers and thrushes, but it was the stunning Red-capped Cardinal in all its glory that impressed us the most. We watched it fly to a perch just over the pond and body bathe by smacking down into the water and flying up to a perch. Black-bellied Whistling Ducks carpeted the water while Purple Gallinules walked over lotus leaves. Common Moorhens, Muscovy Duck and a Striated Heron were all seen well, while a Lora Snake was spotted on the corrugated roof of a shelter. Two rare dark morph Short-tailed Hawks was a surprise. A male Ringed Kingfisher flew back and forth over the pond several times but never called. Yellow-hooded Blackbirds came to the feeders along the pond and allowed us to get relatively close.

Sean, a young looking sixteen year old boy who was full of enthusiasm was our boat driver to the trip into Caroni Swamp. We started with two 4-eyed Fish or Mud Skippers and views of perched Green-throated Mango's. A surprise was a calling antshrike along the banks which turned out to be a beautiful female Black-crested Antshrike. Numerous Bicolored Conebills darted across the bow, and finally one settled in for most of the group to see – it was female. Around the next corner a male showed well, but all too briefly. A Straight-billed Woodcreeper called from deep in the mangroves (it sounds like a Pileated Woodpecker) and as luck would have it 20 minutes later a bird flew low into the mangroves and landed on a horizontal branch a foot about the water. It worked its way along it into the vegetation and then up a tree trunk. Manoeuvring the boat we all got on the bird at one time or another. The true spectacle here is watching the shockingly bright colored Scarlet Ibis coming into roost. We hugged the mangroves several hundred feet from the roost and watched as groups of Snowy Egrets and Tri-colored Herons came in low over the water and Scarlet Ibis at various heights into the mangrove island. The egrets and herons soon vanished deep into the mangroves while the ibis lit up the island – truly an unforgettable spectacle.

## **Day 10: Wednesday March 10 – Pax Guest House to Old Donkey Trail**

A pre breakfast walk along the road leading to the retreat, which gives one spectacular views of the Arima Valley, produced head height looks at Zone-tailed Hawk giving us a chance to compare it to the numerous Turkey Vultures that soar along the ridge. The yellow cere and legs clearly visible and when it banked one could see the light colored tail bands. A light morph Short-tailed Hawk was kiting high above us, and even tucked its wings in and swooped down several hundred feet on what was no doubt an unsuspecting passerine. Returning to the guest house, a pair of Piratic Flycatchers was observed at close quarters checking out a Yellow Oriole's hanging nest, in the hopes of using it as their own nest site. Once the nest has been constructed they will hang around the nest and harass the orioles until they abandon the idea of nesting in it themselves, and then the lazy flycatchers can use it.

At breakfast the excitement was over a White Hawk, the first of many seen today, that caught Carol's eye through the window. She was gradually soaring away up the valley but not before we all got great looks and this black and white raptor. Then we heard all kinds of commotion at the feeders, but the feeders were empty! It was evident that a group of some 20 birds were mobbing a snake. It turned out that it was a 4 foot Red-tailed Boa Constrictor that was in the process of consuming a female White-lined Tanager.

The mornings walk was down the Old Donkey Trail where even the protected forest was not immune to today's wind. Our first birds turned out to be a pair of Tropical Parulas that were very cooperative as they worked the outer limbs of a trees occasionally singing, about 40 feet away from us. Golden-crowned Warblers were heard chipping in the understory and were coaxed in with various squeaks and pishes allowing about half the group to get decent looks before they moved across the trail. At the bridge over the very poorly defined stream, a Buff-throated Woodcreeper put in a short appearance. At the manakin lek there were 3 Golden-headed Manakins, one of which showed very well in the scope; a pair of Purple Honeycreepers that came in to investigate as well as a Long-billed Gnatwren that was calling just out of sight. On the way back we heard a group of visiting school girls long before we saw them, and eventually met them at the bridge. All the noise did not seem to phase a half dozen birds bathing in a shallow pool, the majority being male and female White-bearded Manakins.

Reaching the guest house, a quick scan of the ridge east of the complex produces a close immature and distant adult Peregrine.

By the time we were ready for our afternoon walk, a number of fires were visible in the plain as well as behind the fire tower. We took the Tower trail to look for Long-billed Starthroat, and as luck would have it, one was perched on the same branch that we had it one the previous year. Though the light was poor as we were looking into the sun, we managed to position ourselves well enough to catch glimpses of the blue cap and rose gorget to go along with the post-ocular white spot and white-moustachial stripe. At one time we actually had 3 birds! Other species seen here included a Yellow-breasted Flycatcher perched in the open under a pine branch; female Blue Dacnis; White-shouldered Tanager; Zone-tailed Hawk and a very close Short-tailed Hawk hanging above the Art Gallery and heard birds included a White-bellied Antbird and Rufous-breasted Wren.

### **Day 11: Thursday March 11 – Piping Guan; Pax: up the road to the trail heads**

The Piratic Flycatcher greeted us with its plaintive whistle as we walked out the building and Gerald led us to a roost tree that has been good for owls, and low and behold a group of 4 Tropical Mockingbirds where mobbing a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, before it decided to head for a more secluded tree. It turned out to be good day for raptors, with the usual vultures, Common Black Hawk, Zone-tail Hawk and light morph Short-tailed Hawk which was joined by a pair of Double-toothed Kites. Our target this morning was the Trinidad Euphonia which had eluded us the previous day. Boat-billed Flycatchers were more conspicuous today with several seen very well and we did hear a Trinidad Euphonia close by. After checking every small bird we noticed a small navy and yellow bird dart into the same tree as a Boat-billed. Once located, we could see that it was our target species, showing very well for the group as well as calling at regular intervals. Then another euphonia flew in to the adjacent tree and that turned out to be a Violaceous, allowing us to make the comparison between the two. A small flycatcher-type bird was spotted below the euphonia, which turned out to be a Southern Beardless Tyrannulet. This one spot at the last bend in the road above the monastery turned out to be a great success. The Long-billed Starthroat was seen in the same general area as the previous evening and we got cracking eye level looks at a group of 5 Turquoise Tanagers.

Steve, Rosemary and Sheryl opted for an early start and headed to the north east corner of the country to look for Piping Guan, a rather localized arboreal species endemic to the island. Steve writes.....traveling along the coast we witnessed large flocks of Black Vultures perched at several river mouths. Osprey and frigatebirds were noted sailing along the coastline. As we headed inland toward the rainforest Boat-billed Flycatchers were heard and at a couple of streams running parallel to the road, several Silvered Antbirds were giving there very loud calls. They were found fairly quickly, although they remained in dense foliage at the edge of the river. The narrow, muddy road going back to the guan site did not look easily passable, especially when we got to a steep hill just before reaching our destination, but with slow going we made it easily. A Little Tinimou was calling just off the roadside here. We made it up to the site shortly before 7 AM, after about two and a half

hours driving. Shortly, one of the Common Piping Guans was located, although two had been seen just a few minutes earlier by another group in a close tree. However, the first birds of note here were two very cooperative Plumbeous Kites perching and flying around our heads the whole time we were present. A pair of Channel-billed Toucans were also very cooperative at a nest hole only 25-50 yards away. Also noted within 150 yards of the immediate area of the guans were White-shouldered Tanager, several Giant Cowbirds, many Yellow-rumped Caciques and smaller numbers of Crested Oropendolas. Zone-tailed and Gray Hawks were also close flyovers here. Violaceous Trogon put in a quick but nice look. Squirrel Cuckoo and Rufous-breasted Hermit also but in a quick flyby, appearance, and the elusive Rufous-browed Peppershrike was also heard. Two Scaled Pigeons perched atop a tree for great looks near the toucans.

Traveling the roads to our next destination, Cuncura along the ocean, we saw both Common Black and White Hawks, and heard Streaked Flycatcher and lots of Golden-fronted Greenlets. Once at Cuncura, while waiting for the Trinidad Euphonias, we were rewarded with sightings of two flyover Swallow-tailed Kites, 2 Turquoise Tanagers, Barred Antshrikes, Yellow Orioles, more Yellow-rumped Caciques (more later along roadsides), a Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Carib Grackles, Shiny Cowbirds, one Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird, two Gray-fronted Pigeons, many Short-tailed Swifts, a female Golden-headed Manakin, and a great look at the only Pale-breasted Spinetail of the trip! While heading home we also noted a pair of Black-tailed Tityras.