



TRINIDAD & TOBAGO March 3-13, 2003

Trip Report by Adrian Binns

Day 1-5: Trinidad ~ ASA Wright Nature Center; Arima Valley, Arena Forest, Aripo Farmland; Manzanilla Beach; Nariva Swamp; Waller Field

Every time I am on the balcony at Asa Wright Nature Center I can not help but wish that we had this kind of activity back home in the States. It always brings a smile to me when I see the expressions on peoples faces and how awe struck they are, as they watch the comings and goings at the feeders for the first time. It is a wonderful place to get to know some of the countries more common species as they visit the nectar and platform feeders which hold a variety of tropical fruits and breads. The list of new species is endless....the ubiquitous Bananaquit; Silver-beaked, White-lined, Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers; Bare-eyed and Cocoa Thrush; Great Antshrike; Green and Purple Honeycreeper with a single male Red-legged Honeycreeper putting in a appearance; Crested Oropendulas; Gray-fronted Dove; Tropical Mockingbird; Shiny Cowbird and the amazing Blue-crowned Motmot which seems to be far more accommodating on these islands that anywhere else I have seen them. Red-rumped Aquoti's and Tegu Lizards pick up the scraps dropped by the birds! Hummingbirds were well represented with White-necked Jacobins, Copper-rumps, Black-throated Mangos and White-chested Emeralds putting in regular appearances at the feeders while Blue-chinned Sapphires, Green, Little and Rufous-breasted Hermits worked the flowers around the buildings. The sounds and sights of the tropics were very much in evidence as Little Tinamou's and Bellbirds could be heard calling from the forest, and the view down the valley towards the Arima plain was often peppered with Channel-billed Toucans, Orange-winged Parrots, Crested Oropendolas, a variety of swifts, and on one occasion a majestic Ornate Hawk-Eagle.

On the grounds, White-bearded Manakin leks were active, with these small 'cotton balls' sometimes as many as a dozen, bouncing a few feet off the ground from perch to perch; Violaceous Trogons where everywhere and at times very confiding; it took a while but both male and female Tufted Coquette was seen nectaring on vervain; the Oilbirds with almost fully fledged young (they are actually larger than their parents at this stage) were very noisy in their cave and "eagle-eye" Margaret found a Hook-billed Kite on a nest. Walking some of the many trails paid off with some quality species, including 4 Red-crowned Ant-Tanagers that worked their way through the underbrush; Bay-headed Tanagers; a female Collared Trogon and an Olive sided Flycatcher as we went down to Dunstan Cave; Plain Antwren, White-flanked Antwren, Euler's Flycatcher and Gray-throated Leaf-tosser; several Plain-brown Woodcreepers working the tree trunks for insects and the gorgeous Lineated Woodpecker. It is not just the birds that make this a special place, butterflies such as Coolie's, Malachites, Silver-spotted Flambeau, Cattleheart, Small Postman, Green Sweet Oils, Red Doris and the large blue morpho Emperor added color.

Leaving Asa to go to the lowlands, we stopped for a raptor spectacle, with White Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk and Common Black Hawk riding the thermals along the main ridge, while Chivi Vireos and a Trinidad Euphonia bounced about the trees. In the Arima Valley we visited the Moriche Palms at Waller Field where we got good looks at Moriche Oriole, Green-rumped Parrotlet, dozens of Red-bellied Macaw, Fork-tailed Palm-Swifts, Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird and Sulphury Flycatcher. In the early evening hours we were able to spotlight White-tailed Nightjar, Common Pauraque and Common Potoo, but could not lure in the Tropical Screech-Owl. The Aripo farmlands, with roaming water buffalo, produced Savanna Hawks, Striped Cuckoo, Red-breasted and Yellow-hooded Blackbirds and Pied Water-Tyrants.

On the way to Nariva Swamp we stopped for Yellow-rumped Caciques, which were nesting in a small village. At Manzanilla Beach we came across a Pearl Kite perched on an antenna, and on the edge of the Nariva, Plumbeous Kite, Common Black Hawk and Yellow-headed Caracara were very obliging, while Black-crested Antshrike, Turquoise Tanager, Streaked and Scrub Flycatcher took a little longer to locate.

The swamp produced several Yellow-chinned Spinetail, including one at a nest, White-headed Marsh Tyrants, Wattled Jacana's with babies, Striated Heron, a brief look at White-tailed Goldenthrout but the highlight was getting to see a Pinnated Bittern as it stalked prey, again thanks to Margaret. At Arena we worked the forest edge for 2 calling White-bellied Antbirds, getting brief glimpses and while having lunch saw Savanna Hawk, Black-tailed Tityra, Piratic Flycatcher and Grey-headed Kite.

Day 6-8: Tobago ~ Bon Accord Sewer Plant; Grafton Estate; Turtle Bay Hotel; Blue Waters Inn; Roxborough-Bloody Bay Road; Gilpin Trace; Little Tobago

On Tobago, we were based at Blue Waters Inn in the northeast corner of the island, where we were able to relax and enjoy the secluded cove, swimming, snorkeling and kayaking. Caribbean Martins and Eared Doves were a common sight along the way and in Speyside a small lagoon had Green Kingfisher and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron while the grounds at Blue Waters had very confiding Rufous-vented Chachalacas; Pale-vented Pigeons, White-fringed Antwrens, Barred Antshrikes, Great Black Hawks, one kiting just over our heads and several families of Black-throated Mango's, feeding young.

A short distance away we visited the rain forest at Gilpin Trace where the endemic White-tailed Sabrewing put on a wonderful show, flashing its white tail as it flew by, Yellow-legged Thrush moved about the upper canopy and the stunning Blue-backed Manakin was seen at its lek. The Roxborough-Bloody Bay Road produced good numbers of Giant Cowbirds; a close Rufous Jacamar hawking insects; a Great Black Hawk perched beside the road and several Streaked and Brown Flycatchers but no Venezuelan!

Little Tobago is only a short ride in a glass-bottomed boat across crystal clear water. Our colorful guide Wordsworth pointed out corals and the abundant marine life as Red-billed Tropicbirds fly overhead. On the gentle walk towards the top of the island, the bamboo water trough half way up was full of birds including Yellow-bellied Elaenia; Brown-crested Flycatchers; Blue-gray Tanagers; Bare-eyed Thrushes; Shiny Cowbirds and Chivi Vireos, while further up we came across an Audubon's Shearwater nest, with an egg in it, though the parent had retreated into her burrow and a tropicbird sitting beside her well grown chick - these were almost the last to raise young this season. From our vantage point we picked out a White-tailed Tropicbird circling in with large numbers of Red-bills, and watched Brown and Red-footed Boobies (actually four subspecies in all - White, White-tailed, Brown and Black-tailed White) flying back and forth over the crashing surf.

Day 9-11: Trinidad ~ Pax Guest House and trails; Point-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust; Waterloo; Caroni Swamp Bird Sanctuary

Based out of the Pax Guest House, a St. Benedictine Monastery overlooking the Arima Valley, we spent a day in the lowlands visiting the Wildfowl Trust, where colorful Red-capped Cardinal and Saffron Finches were seen very well along with a Streak-headed Woodcreeper, followed by some shore birding along the mudflats at Waterloo, where large numbers of herons and egrets were joined by Red Knots; Short-billed and 3 Long-billed Dowitchers; Willets (both eastern and western); Black-bellied, Wilson's and Semipalmated Plover; Royal and Gull-billed Terns.

Our final stop was to Caroni Swamp Bird Sanctuary, where our boat ride was magical, with Cooks' Tree Boa, a sleeping Silky Anteater, Caiman, Common Potoo, Green-breasted Mango, Greater Ani and Bi-colored Conebill all being seen very close to the boat. But it was the sight of several thousand Scarlet Ibis that will be most memorable, as they came in, in small groups into the mangroves to roost at sunset.

At Pax, Rufous Nightjars calling at dinner and Piratic Flycatchers at breakfast serenaded us! Short-tailed Hawks, White Hawks and a Zone-tailed Hawk were seen from the guest house, while Yellow Orioles and Grayish Saltators were frequently seen near the feeders. Along the Old Donkey Trail we came across Blue Dacnis, Golden-headed Manakins, Turquoise Tanagers, Trinidad Euphonias, Rufous-breasted Wrens, Streaked Xenops, Long-billed Starthroats, Golden-crowned Warblers, Bay-headed Tanagers and Rufous-browed Peppershrikes while hearing Bright-rumped Attila and White-tailed Trogon.....these truly are paradise islands.