

Trinidad and Tobago

23 January – 7 February 2003

Participants:

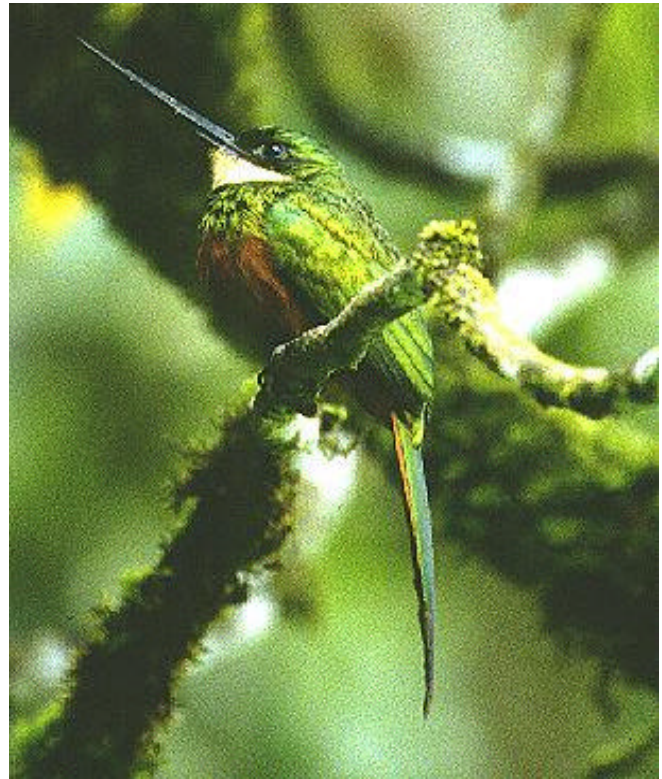
Brian and Helena Barrett

John Lloyd

Bill Hughey

John and Jenny Robins

Leader: Martyn Kenefick



Picture: Rufous-tailed Jacamar

The tour can be described in just three words: “An amazing success.” Not only did members of the tour party see 223 species (eight more than our previous best), and heard a further six, target birds were seen well by all of the group. In all, we found 189 species in Trinidad, and another 34 in Tobago. We had good pairs of eyes, great camaraderie, and good fun – essential ingredients for a good time.

Day 1: “Things running like clockwork” said John – the best possible way to describe the outward journey to Tobago, and the overnight stay at The Hummingbird.

Day 2: A dozen or so of the common species seen over breakfast before the short flight across to Piarco International Airport in Trinidad, where the group met with Martyn and made the transfer to Pax Guest House, our stay for the next seven nights. Once room allocation had been completed, Martyn attempted to run through a brief tour logistics debrief whilst sitting on the rear terrace. However, the birds had a different agenda. Discussions were repeatedly brought to a halt when first a pair of White Hawks soared overhead, then a Rufous-browed Peppershrike dallied in the pathside shrubbery, all whilst Black-throated Mangos, White-chested Emeralds and Copper-rumped Hummingbirds vied for pole position at the many feeders. A brief pre-lunch walk along the road “above Pax” probably produced the star bird of the day; a stunning adult male Blue Dacnis feeding in a roadside tree. After an enormous portion of “tuna pasta bake” for lunch, digestion was assisted by excellent close soaring views of probably two different white phased Short-tailed Hawks, a Green Hermit at the feeders and an iridescent adult male Shiny Cowbird shimmering in the sunlight. Once the heat of the day was past, a late afternoon stroll along the Parula trail on Mt St Benedict proved just how frustrating forest birding could be, especially if you are in a group. One or two of the party had tantalising brief views of a male Violaceous Trogon; certainly not everyone got onto the Streaked Xenops that clung to the underside of a branch like a Nuthatch; and it took several different Tropical Parula’s before everyone had “tickable views”. Fortunately all enjoyed close views of a female White-bellied Antbird foraging in the leaf litter just off of the path, and the manic performance of a female American Redstart – never still for a second. By the end of the day, the tally of species seen by members of the group stood at a very respectable 52.

Day 3: A sunrise start – our first stop to be a small freshwater marsh within the Caroni Rice Project. Before we even alighted from our vehicle, Yellow-headed Caracara, Savannah Hawk and Merlin were safely “in the bag”. This marsh, no bigger than a football pitch, had an amazing wealth of birds. Within an hour, we had seen no less than four different Pinnated Bitterns; Least Grebes feeding young; Pied-billed Grebes moulting into breeding dress and the prize of two Masked Ducks sitting motionlessly amongst waterside vegetation. Shame on those members of the tour party who paid scant regard to the rarest bird of all – a Ruff – which flew

over our heads (less than annual in Trinidad)! All this against an ever present accompaniment of Striated and Little Blue Herons, Purple Gallinules and Wattled Jacanas, Red-breasted and Yellow-hooded Blackbirds and Yellow-chinned Spinetails, together with both White-headed Marsh and Pied Water Tyrants. We then drove east entering the Aripo Savannah just outside the village of Cumuto. On the one hand, birds were few and far between, on the other, quality surpassed everyone's' expectations. Not five minutes into our walk, Helena spotted an adult male Crimson-crested Woodpecker drumming on a dead pine. Shortly thereafter, several Sulphury Flycatchers (very much a speciality of the area) put in an appearance, and a majestic White Hawk perched within 20 metres of us. However, there was still time for the unexpected – a juvenile Rufescent Tiger-heron sat in a streamside tree beside the track, wary and watchful but seen well by all (Martyn had seen an adult in exactly the same stream 18 months earlier). Following a brief stop to watch (and listen to) a Yellow-rumped Cacique colony, it was on to Arena Forest. Birds of the forest enjoy a midday siesta, and today was no exception. Nevertheless, we finally managed to catch up with both White-necked and Cocoa Thrushes, female Golden-headed and White-bearded Manakins (admittedly dull but instructive), Forest Elaenia and Euler's Flycatcher, whilst an adult Grey-headed Kite soared overhead. It was time to board the bus, lunch at Pax called – but not before we enjoyed a pair of Black-tailed Tityras and a male Green Honeycreeper in roadside trees. After a sumptuous lunch of pelau, plantain and salad, there was time to relax before setting out again to explore other trails on Mt St Benedict. Adult males of both Golden-headed and White-bearded Manakins were seen well; an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher bathed in a forest stream and a superb shimmering Blue Morpho butterfly flitted to and fro. We reached the forest edge with an hour of daylight left. Mimicry brought in a very tolerant Ferruginous Pygmy-owl – not only tolerant of us birders but of the hoard of Bananaquits, Rufous-breasted Wrens, Tropical Mockingbirds and White-shouldered Tanagers that scolded it mercilessly. Less than two full days spent birding and already 105 species seen.

Day 4: The day started for some with a lie in; for others Ferruginous Pygmy-owl(s), male Tufted Coquette and both Violaceous and Trinidad Euphonias were the reward for an early-morning walk up the hill behind Pax. Breakfast was interrupted by an inconsiderate Zone-tailed Hawk, and shortly afterwards, three Lesser Swallow-tailed Swifts put in an appearance for a few of us. Our destination today, the Asa Wright Nature Centre. A brief stop en route to view the forested hillsides beside a cryptophene field was meant to be an education in sorting out *Chaetura* swifts. However, the birds didn't immediately read the script. No sooner had we stepped off the vehicle, than a Channel-billed Toucan flew right at us, and over our heads. Despite being dull by comparison, we soon sorted out Band-rumped from Grey-rumped Swifts, and completed the journey up the Arima valley. The Asa Wright balcony lived up to all expectations. Small parties of both Purple and Green Honeycreepers were constantly on the tray feeders, joined at one point by an adult male Red-legged; White-necked Jacobins made fleeting sorties to the ceiling-suspended saucer feeders; all this whilst both Agouti and Golden Tegu Lizard prowled the floor looking for easy pickings. The "unusual" were well represented with a pair of Great Antshrikes and an exquisite Chestnut Woodpecker all being seen well by all. Walking quietly down the main Discovery trail proved fruitful with two adult male White-tailed Trogons perched mere feet away. A brief stop at the White-bearded Manakin lek site (with a couple of males in residence) was hijacked when a Bearded Bellbird began its unique vocal repertoire close by. We searched and scanned the layers of canopy – knew exactly where it was calling from, but saw nothing. However our patience was well rewarded with not one, but two adult males perched right out in the open, further down the trail. The heat of the afternoon was spent slowly walking the entrance road. By one of the streams, the fruiting trees held numbers of both Turquoise and Bay-headed Tanagers, and an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher. Late afternoon found us driving back down the valley for a short visit to Trincity ponds. Parties of both White-winged and Southern Rough-winged Swallows constantly skimmed the water; the pathways held both Southern Lapwings and dozing Spectacled Cayman, and a party of seven Least Grebes lazily swam by. A superb day, many target species seen, and seen well. The tour trip list increased to 125.

Day 5: An early-morning departure for the long drive south to Roussillac swamp, south west of San Fernando. In order to ensure no one was homesick, the heavens opened on the way down, for almost the only brief but heavy downpour of the tour. By the time we had reached Roussillac the sun was out, and it was getting hot. Whilst the swamp was not exactly heaving with birds, several "target species" were found. With Green-rumped Parrotlets continually calling from stunted trees, everyone eventually caught up with Streak-headed Woodcreeper and Long-billed Starthroat. At least three Common Black-hawks circled overhead but a particularly elusive Golden-olive Woodpecker escaped undetected. Then on to Sudama Steps, a mangrove-fringed stream, which feeds into the Oropouche Swamp. What Roussillac lacked, Sudama provided. Within minutes we were watching Spotted Tody-flycatchers, almost close enough to touch. Pairs of Northern Scrub-flycatchers and Bicoloured Conebills were enticed in, as were exceptionally good numbers of Yellow Warbler, Northern Waterthrush and American Redstart. On our return to the bus we had several flight views of an adult Red capped Cardinal – unbeknown to us, it had been performing for our driver for quite a while beforehand. Next stop, Kings Wharf, San Fernando. Not the most salubrious of birding destinations, but can be busy with seabirds if a high tide coincides with activity at the nearby fish abattoir. We quickly found three 1st-winter, and one 2nd-winter Lesser Black backed Gulls but a sudden rain squall (and thoughts of lunch) prevented close scrutiny of the 500 or so (presumed all) Laughing Gulls. After a long drive north, to the central plain, we forsook our sandwiches in favour of sampling the delights of roti in La Horquetta, enjoying a well-earned rest before criss-crossing Caroni ricefields in the heat of the afternoon. At this time of year most of the fields are best described as arid. Nevertheless, we managed to find four unseasonal adult Fork tailed Flycatchers replete with full tails, a couple of very obligingly close Least Sandpipers, a juvenile Savannah Hawk sat in a trackside field, prolonged flight views of two Limpkins, and as a fitting finale, close but brief flight views of a Striped backed Bittern. The tour list now stands at 144

Day 6: Up and out for sunrise again, passing a Peregrine sat in a tree on the highway – first port of call a “doubles” stand. What can prepare one better for a day in the field than curried channa, kutchela and hot pepper in a deep fried split peas and flour sandwich! Then onward, as high into the northern range as the road goes. We reached the tracking station at Morne Bleu in glorious sunshine and were soon looking down on immaculately coloured Speckled and Bay-headed Tanagers, watching two Blue-headed Parrots squawk across the sky, all whilst a female Black-throated Mango built her minute cup nest in a fork of a nearby tree. A rather quiet walk along the Blanchisseuse Road between Morne Bleu and Las Lapas still produced no less than four Golden-olive Woodpeckers, a male Plain Ant-vireo foraging in a bamboo clump and numerous Golden-headed and White-bearded Manakins. Walking down Las Lapas proper was much more eventful: two White Hawks majestically soared low overhead; a pair of Dusky-capped Flycatchers came within a few feet of us; a Slaty-capped Flycatcher flew to-and-fro from the underside of a bank with nesting material in its beak, and a superb adult male Hepatic Tanager fed in the low canopy over the path. A brief pre-lunch stop at Brasso Seco junction added an Olive-sided Flycatcher perched high on a dead branch, and another two Golden-olive Woodpeckers fed in the canopy. Lunch (mere sandwiches today) was taken in the shade at Morne la Croix, with a Grey Kingbird sat on roadside wires beside us – the moment everyone started eating, a male Green Kingfisher flew low and fast in front of us. This could well be an altitudinal record in Trinidad. A leisurely afternoon drive to the Caribbean coast was interrupted by a female Rufous-tailed Jacamar perched beside the road, and an adult Grey Hawk sat atop a telegraph pole. Eventually we reached our final destination, Maracas beach, or more specifically Richard’s Bake n’ Shark – now a firm favourite for Birdfinders clients. Whilst today was really a half day’s birding, due in part to very hot and sunny conditions, what we lost in quantity, was more than made up with excellent views of target species. The tour list now stands at 153

Day 7: An dawn start saw us drive west, through Port of Spain to reach the yachting marina at Chaguaramas. There we boarded a boat for Chacachacare, the largest and westernmost of the Bocas Islands. After an hours journey across a millpond Gulf of Paria, we set off on foot for the lighthouse at the north-eastern end of the island. This was our first birding in dry scrub forest and the walk was hot and thirsty work. Raptors kept us entertained with single White Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Zone-tailed Hawk and Peregrine soaring in the thermals. Flycatchers were well represented with a good number of Mouse-coloured Tyrannulets and several of both Bran-coloured and Brown-crested Flycatchers. At the summit we took our lunch in the shade overlooking the island of Patos and the Venezuelan mainland whilst several Tropical Parulas foraged in the canopy above our heads. (Sandwiches just aren’t a patch on Bake n’ Shark.) The walk back down the hill was rewarded with both Streaked Saltator and a few White-fringed Antwrens. The return boat journey became just a little choppy as we crossed the “Dragons Teeth (the stretch of water between Chacachacare and Huevos); closer to the island of Monos a small pod of dolphins was a welcome sight, and Brown Pelicans and Magnificent Frigatebirds followed us all the way back into dock. A day of few but specialised species – the tour list increased to 158.

Day 8: A busy morning visiting a number of mangrove and mudflat sites on the west coast. Our first port of call was the mangrove at Cacandee. Creeping along the extension track from Bernard Trace, we built a bird list slowly but surely. Firstly Yellow-chinned Spinetails, Bicoloured Conebills, Yellow Warblers and Black-crested Antshrikes flitted in the bushes whilst Scarlet Ibis and Common Black-hawk glided overhead. Our patience was rewarded with excellent close perched views of both Ringed and Pygmy Kingfishers, Brown-crested Flycatchers and Mouse-coloured Tyrannulets; a Lineated Woodpecker flew over and we tried in vain to get Brian decent views of somewhat elusive Rufous-browed Peppershrikes. On leaving, we flushed a Merlin out of a roadside tree, which took its anger out on an unsuspecting Tricoloured Heron cruising by, and continued our drive southwards. After a fruitless search for Saffron Finches, we reached the creek at Carli Bay where a dozen or so Yellow-crowned Night-herons stood out on the mud accompanied by good numbers of Willet and Hudsonian Whimbrel, a couple of Greater Yellowlegs and a Semi-palmated Plover. Further north, at Orange Valley, the tide was covering the mud at a rate of knots. We found our first Royal Terns perched on offshore buoys, an adult and a 1st-summer Lesser Black-backed Gull, but little else new. We arrived at Waterloo to find Black Skimmers accompanying the flocks of Laughing Gulls, dozens of Ruddy Turnstones resting on moored fishing boats, more Royal Terns and distant views of a group of shorebirds that were probably Red Knot, ut at that range, and in that heat haze, no one could be sure. Our final planned stop was at the high tide roost at Brickfields – unfortunately most of the waders appeared to be sheltering from the scorching sun just inside the mangrove. We saw parties of small *Calidris* waders rushing to and fro, but none, save a single Least Sandpiper, at identifiable range. A distant white speck sat on a post caused a drive back to Waterloo, and confirmed initial identification that it was indeed a winter-plumaged Gull-billed Tern. Back to Pax for lunch – an incredibly filling soup of beef and dumpling followed by Cherry and Coconut ice cream. By mid-afternoon we were retracing our steps back to the mangrove in time to board our boat into Caroni Swamp. The initial journey down the Blue River was relatively quiet, save for perched Merlin and Peregrine, however once we turned south into the reserve we were quickly watching a pair of Cooks Tree Boas (at too close range for Jenny’s liking!) and a cuddly ball of rufous fluff that was a Silky Anteater, fast asleep wedged in a tree fork. Birds were few and far between, but the quality was assured: first a Common Potoo was seen well perched 20ft up on a broken branch and finally a party of four Greater Anis made their way through the mangrove canopy. The heron and ibis roost lived up to everyone’s expectation – wave after wave of Scarlet Ibis, Snowy Egret, Tricoloured and Little Blue Heron and Neotropic Cormorants flew into the single island roost site and single Great Blue Heron and Great White Egret gracefully soared over. A lively day with 74 species seen, and a further seven heard. The running total for the tour has increased to 175

Day 9: “I didn't realise they do breakfast here!” quipped Brian in recognition of a civilised start to the day. We then said our goodbyes to Pax, boarded the minibus with our new driver Ivan, and set off towards the east coast of Trinidad. Following a couple of roadside Savannah Hawks, and a brief “doubles stop” for Martyn’s breakfast, we arrived at Wallerfield, a disused American airforce base with, in its heyday, the longest runways on this side of the Atlantic. Perched up on a tree right beside the entrance track was a Pearl Kite, the smallest raptor in South America. Unfortunately the hoped for Moriche Oriole did not appear, but a male Ruby-topaz Hummingbird flitted nearby. The drive east continued to produce perched raptors: both Grey and White Hawks and Yellow-headed Caracaras were seen beside the road. Eventually we arrived at the western boundary of Nariva swamp, and climbed the steep slope of Brigand Hill to view the swamp, the Atlantic Ocean, and a million coconut palms, all against a backdrop noise of howling Red Howler monkeys. The walk down the hill found us our first Red-eyed Vireos of the tour, and finally ended Brian's frustration with an obligingly close Rufous-browed Peppershrike. Both manakins, Yellow-rumped Caciques and Turquoise Tanagers made up the supporting cast. We next walked Caltoo trace, a riverside pathway flanked by Swamp Immortelles. Small groups of caciques fed voraciously alongside up to 100 Giant Cowbirds; a Masked Yellowthroat showed itself only to Bill and Martyn, but we all enjoyed a Solitary Sandpiper alongside a small pool. Lunch was taken on Manzanilla beach. A leisurely affair (back to sandwiches again) in the shade – it was simply too hot to venture out in the field. By 2.30pm, we were driving slowly down Cocos Bay Road, scanning the pals, and seeking out any raptors that were sheltering from the sun. The road was quiet, two Savannah Hawks and an Osprey were our meagre return. South of the Nariva river mouth, we explored small patches of mangrove on either side of the road. A pair of Green Kingfishers perched obligingly on one side, a Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, female American Redstart and Bicoloured Conebill on the other. As the afternoon began to cool we turned into Kernaham trace and slowly drove around the various grass and watermelon fields. Sadly no Azure Gallinule nor any Dickcissels. All too soon it was time to make the long drive north to Rampanalgas, and to Jasmynes Ocean Resort, our base for the next two nights. Much of today had been taken up by travelling – birding was only possible during the hotter parts of the day, but we still managed to add a further four species to tour tally which stands at 179.

Day 10: No holiday is complete without a traumatic incident and it was our turn this morning. Having all gathered for a 05.30 departure, we found both front doors locked and the security staff nowhere to be seen. We ransacked the kitchens to find at least the food part of our packed breakfasts, and were left with no option but to leave by a fire escape. But following every low, there is a high! We arrived shortly after dawn at Montevideo, just south of Grande Riviere with adrenaline aiding the forced march at double quick time up the hill. There awaiting us were no less than three Trinidad Piping-guans (Pawi) on view, right out in the open. They stayed for 45 minutes; we were treated to their wing “whirring” gliding display flight and the male whistling to his companion(s). Not content with Pawi, we also enjoyed perched Channel-billed Toucans and Scaled Pigeons. A walk down the trail to the river was interrupted by a cacophony of Violaceous Euphonia alarm calls – the focus of their anger being a pair of Ferruginous Pygmy-owls perched at the edge of a tree, basking in the early morning sunlight. Another couple of toucans flew between exposed perches, a trio of Black-tailed Tityras dashed around the treetops, and then suddenly two Swallow-tailed Kites appeared over a ridge, allowing everyone to enjoy their acrobatic display flights. Our first (and only) Piratic Flycatcher sat (unusually) silent atop a Secropia tree, no doubt eyeing up the local Yellow Oriole nest, and two Double-toothed Kites, an adult and a juvenile, lazily soared over. On reaching the river, we flushed a Cocoli Heron (unfortunately only seen by Helena and Martyn) but watched the first of a few Squirrel Cuckoos to be found that morning. The long and rather tiring walk back was enhanced by a pair of Grey-headed Kites gliding across the valley, and a large flock of swifts high up – mostly Short-tailed, but with a few Chestnut-collareds thrown in for good measure. Having “breakfasted” beside the bus, (performing noble charity work to the assembly of dogs gathered around begrudging us every mouthful) we set off due east to Galera Point – the north east tip of the island, where the Caribbean meets the Atlantic. By now the sun was pretty fierce, and birds were thin on the ground. We managed a fine male Caribbean Martin (Galera is the only place in Trinidad where this bird is found), and a couple of Ruby-topaz Hummingbirds, but little else. It was time to head back to JOR for lunch of barbecued chicken and more vegetables than you can count and a well-earned siesta. But not for some – John, the elder statesman of the group, put us all to shame by spending the afternoon in the swimming pool. One of our best days for seeing target birds – tour list 188.

Day 11: A final Trinidad early morning hike, in the dry scrub forest behind Jasmynes. This yielded a small number of birds. Pride of place goes to (sadly) fleeting glimpses of Little Hermit, seen by most of us. Male Ruby-topaz Hummingbird was well in evidence but few other small birds were present, save for the common four tanagers. Frustration point of the tour so far was watching a silhouetted large raptor – never close and always edging closer to the brightest of the sunlight. Was it a Black Hawk-eagle? Very possibly. Having settled our bar bills, we bade farewell to Jasmynes and took a leisurely drive back to Piarco Airport, accompanied by Petra providing a non-birding perspective of Trinidad. The drive was uneventful birdwise, no Plumbeous Kites were showing despite avid scrutiny of roadside trees by both Ivan and Martyn. We had left Trinidad birding behind with 189 species “under the belt”. Check in for the Tobago flight was straightforward, if a little irritating (no matter which queue we joined, it was the wrong one!) and we were soon aboard our Dash 8 plane together with the crew of Yangatang Comedy Troop. Who will ever forget the elderly lady of most substantial girth walking down the aisle to shouts of “give this lady two seats nah, and two seat belts!”. We were met at Crown Point airport by Cynthia and Pussycat (the beaming driver) and completed the 90 minute drive to Speyside Inn, our base for the final four nights of the tour. After a light lunch, a gentle stroll into the woodland behind Blue Waters gave us an excellent introduction to Tobago birds. Pale-vented Pigeons and White-tipped Doves blended into the background, whilst a delightful pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars hawked insects from dead branch perches. A Red-eyed Vireo worked its way through the

canopy while Scrub Greenlets and the local race of Barred Antshrikes performed well. Before long the arrival of mosquitoes heralded our departure to the roadside, but not before everyone had had close perched views of a Blue-crowned Motmot with beak full of nesting material. Back at the Inn, a watch out to sea, for the last half-hour of daylight, produced 135 Brown, and six Red footed Boobies. Tour list has crept up to 194.

Day 12: “Motmot in the garden” – an excellent way to start the day. Our early morning walk gave us a close encounter with a Rufous-breasted Hermit (how did we miss this one in Trinidad!) and amusement with a confused Red-crowned Woodpecker trying to work out how the holes got into the aluminium telegraph poles. Black-faced Grassquits, Barred Antshrikes, Scrub Greenlets played in the roadside scrub, and both Green and Yellow-crowned Night-herons fished the local stream, right out in the open. After a substantial breakfast, we boarded Guy’s (his real name is Dexter) maxitaxi and headed to Louis d’Or, a small area of freshwater marsh (a habitat much under threat in Tobago). This is the dry season, and much of the marsh was dry – all the better for concentrating birds into smaller areas. Our real prize was a Sora feeding right out in the open, apparently oblivious to our presence. We also found our first Wilson’s Snipe, three Greater Yellowlegs and a Solitary Sandpiper, Purple Gallinule, Tricoloured Heron and a number of Red-crowned Woodpeckers. A walk to Louis d’Or beach produced little in the way of birds save White-tipped Doves. Back at the main road, we stopped almost before we started our drive back to Speyside. A pair of Great Black-hawks put on a superb aerial display, often flying below the tree line, right in front of us, with a pair of Broad-winged Hawks higher up being, on this occasion, the supporting cast. Shortly before lunch, some of us drove to the top of Flagstaff Hill to look out over St Giles rocks – most of the seabirds were very distant. Red-billed Tropicbirds and Red-footed Boobies could just be made out through a telescope, but the scenic view was, nevertheless, breath taking. Meanwhile, Bill was lurking in the woods behind Speyside Inn and perfectly described a female White-winged Becard – a difficult bird to find in Tobago. After another filling lunch, (at Speyside, we have a menu!) we “wet boarded” *Fear Not* – a glass bottomed boat, for the trip over to Little Tobago. Once on land, we were greeted by the local population of Red Junglefowl – if ever there was a case for “official wild” (as opposed to domesticated) status for these birds in Trinidad and Tobago, it is here. Having endured a sweaty climb up the hill and through the saddle, we were greeted at the first lookout by, probably, over 50 Red-billed Tropicbirds – but best was yet to come. Having marvelled at their agility and graceful flights for about 20 minutes, we climbed further to the second lookout. Red-billed Tropicbirds increased to over 200, and in their midst, giving two close and prolonged “fly pasts” was an adult White-tailed Tropicbird (new bird for Martyn) replete with yellowish bill and different upperwing pattern. Brown Boobies were much in evidence as were Magnificent Frigatebirds, but despite a diligent search, Red-footed Booby could not be found. A couple of Blue-crowned Motmots entertained our descent to the jetty. The return boat journey stopped over two different areas of Brain Coral, and we saw perhaps 25 different species of fish – all shapes and sizes and a multitude of colour. On landing, the close and able assistance of a couple of young strapping lads certainly put a smile of Jen’s face, and a sparkle in her eye. Back at Speyside, a well-earned Carib awaited – the tour tally, 204.

Day 13: Our last venture into rainforest. After the usual sumptuous feast that is breakfast at Speyside, it was off to the Central Range (one of the oldest protected forests in the world), and onto Gilpin Trace. Things started well, with Red-rumped Woodpecker completing the set of six woodpeckers in T&T together with good views of two species we really should have seen in Trinidad earlier in the tour, Plain-brown Woodcreeper and Stripe-breasted Spinetail. For a while thereafter getting good views of target birds became a tricky business. Some had distant perched views of a White-tailed Sabrewing, others saw part of a Blue-backed Manakin – both scenarios totally unsatisfactory – whilst a close Fuscous Flycatcher was only seen by Helena and Martyn. We were still able to enjoy Rufous-breasted Hermits, Golden-olive Woodpeckers and Cocoa Woodcreepers and a few more motmots. Then the tide turned – several male White-tailed Sabrewings (Gilpin Trace is the most accessible site in the world to find this species) were seen, one on a display perch continually fanning its tail. But a good look at a manakin continued to elude us. So, over to Niplig (Gilpin spelt backwards as its on the other side of the road!) Trace taking time out to watch a pair of Great Black-hawks glide by. Not five minutes into the trail and several adult male Blue-backed Manakins were found in all their glory. We retraced our steps back towards Roxborough stopping en route half way down the hill – just in time to add two more flycatchers to our tally (Streaked and Venezuelan), both found by Newton, a friend of Martyn’s and the leading bird guide in Tobago. The stop also allowed Bill to catch up with male White-necked Jacobin, a bird he had missed at Asa Wright. After lunch, the group split in two: Bill took the opportunity to join Newton and a couple of visiting birders in a boat trip over to St Giles rocks, whilst the remainder decided to explore Merchiston Road, opposite the Speyside lookout. Bill’s foray produced literally thousands of Magnificent Frigatebirds, hundreds of both Red footed and Brown Boobies and 37 Masked Boobies hunched together on Marble Rock. Back at Blue Waters, there was a sub-adult Great Black-hawk flying around. Merchiston Road was alive with birds, both in the large fruiting trees, and in the smaller flowering Immortelles. We saw “numbers” of Rufous-tailed Jacamars, Rufous-vented Chachalacas and Blue-backed Manakins; Streaked, Yellow-breasted, Ochre-bellied and Fuscous Flycatchers; Blue-crowned Motmots and Yellow-bellied Elaenias, Red-legged Honeycreepers and whole flock of Orange-winged Parrots feeding right by the entrance – a fitting end to an excellent day with now 213 species seen by the party.

Day 14: Just time for an early morning cup of tea/coffee before our drive down to the south western end of the island, stopping briefly en route to watch 12 Royal Terns sat on the groyne at Studley Park. After an hour or so we arrived at Bon Accord sewage lagoons. In all honesty, we arrived too late – the sun was already very strong and most of the waterbirds had flown off to seek shelter in the adjacent mangrove. However, we still managed to add a few Black-crowned Night-herons, five White-cheeked Pintails and a gathering of Anhingas to our tally. Walking down to the coast, we found both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and some of us

managed to glimpse a Belted Kingfisher, which flew across our path, and away, hidden from further view. Next stop, Grafton estate and breakfast. The birds had already been fed (feeding times 8.00am/4.00pm) but there was still a host of Red-crowned Woodpeckers, Rufous-vented Chachalacas, Barred Antshrikes and the common tanagers as we tucked into our sandwiches and cake. A walk up the slope into the dry scrub forest produced several more Blue-crowned Motmots and Rufous-tailed Jacamars, at least four Fuscous Flycatchers and a couple of Ruby-topaz Hummingbirds. Our last port of call for the morning really held the surprise of the tour. Special access had been arranged to Lowlands to view the sewage ponds and surrounding lakes. The first five ponds were rather a disappointment. There were plenty of Black-bellied Whistling-ducks and a few Blue-winged teals but little else. And then we came to the sixth lake, which has reedy sheltering margins. After a few moments, a party of ducks emerged which included two male Northern Shovelers in non-breeding dress (the first record for at least eight years); an adult male breeding plumage Ring-necked Duck (certainly less than annual in T&T) and an immature male American Wigeon (just about annual) – not to mention a further 17 Blue-winged Teals, mostly males in full breeding dress. Lunch was a re-acquaintance with old friends at “The Hummingbird”, with bar snacks and a few beers beside the swimming pool. But it was not over yet – one more birding stop at Buccoo marsh. On the track down to the marsh, we found at least four Brown-crested Flycatchers, and a Yellow Warbler whilst the marsh itself yielded yet more Blue-winged Teals and Black-bellied Whistling-ducks, a couple of Solitary Sandpipers – and a Coot hiding in the mangrove. Was it Caribbean or American? Martyn was uncertain. The white frontal shield extended above eye level but did not seem to reach the top of the forehead; no red bare facial skin could be detected at that range; the two species are known to hybridise on Antillian islands further north. Photographs would be consulted back home (later identified as American Coot). Several pairs of eyes were drooping to say the least, on the drive back to Speyside – it had been a very successful, but very, very hot day – we had increased our tally to a record 223 with a couple of species best described as “most unlikely”.

Day 15: Just time for one last early morning bird walk, before the rigours of packing, checkout and travel. We took the steep hill that overlooks Blue Waters Inn and had a final look at most of the commoner Tobago specialities. A juvenile Merlin flew over but despite a careful search, no Collared Trogon (There has to be a reason to come back).