

Trinidad and Tobago

24 January–8 February 2002

Participants:

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Picture: White-chested Emerald

Leader: Martyn Kenefick

Day 1: The flight to Tobago was delayed due to a medical emergency on the in-bound flight and the group eventually arrived in Tobago at 22.00. Instead of travelling on to Trinidad, arrangements were made for us to stay at Hummingbirds Guesthouse close to the airport, overnight.

Day 2: After breakfast, the group flew on to Trinidad. Martyn Kenefick (MK) met us at Piarco airport at 09.00 for the brief transit to Pax Guest House, our base for the next seven nights. No sooner had we reached the main highway than two Large-billed Terns were seen quartering Trincity ponds, an unexpected bonus as these birds are rarely present before March (we were to see many more later in an unprecedented early arrival). The roadside Savannah Hawk seen by MK however eluded the others. Having checked into our rooms, we attempted an introductory discussion on the rear terrace. Despite our best endeavours there were frequent interruptions to view Black-throated Mango, White-chested Emerald and Copper-rumped Hummingbird vying for attention amongst the Yellow Orioles and Bananaquits. We only had to set foot outside the front door at Pax to add a fourth hummingbird, a delightful female Tufted Coquette feeding on the vervain hedge. Despite the late morning sun, we quickly found a Zone-tailed Hawk soaring low over the hillside, sorted out how to differentiate Boat-billed Flycatcher from Great Kiskadee and became familiar with the “common four tanagers”, Palm, Blue-grey, White-lined and Silver-beaked. Back on the terrace at Pax during lunchtime, a male Long-billed Starthroat became hummingbird number five. Green-rumped Parrotlets perched in the Bois Canoe trees; a stunning male Purple Honeycreeper came into the feeders and a diminutive Southern Beardless Tyrannulet foraged amongst the bushes. By mid afternoon, it was time to get into the forest proper on Mt St Benedict. Walking Parula trail not only produced close views of a pair of Tropical Parulas but other highlights included a majestic White Hawk perched right out in the open, Green Hermit (hummingbird number six) and an adult male Golden-headed Manakin which sat motionless at eye level. As the evening drew in, an immature female Peregrine gliding past was a familiar sight. Not so, however, were the Lilac-tailed Parrotlets perched right beside the road. 52 species were seen by the group today (including a few in Tobago over breakfast) – most of them new for everyone. A worthy total bearing in mind that the peak early morning hours were spent travelling.

Day 3: Dawn was heralded with grey skies and, persistent heavy drizzle over Mt St Benedict. However, by the time we made a planned “very brief stop” overlooking Caroni ricefields the skies had cleared. The stop was not so brief. First a Pinnated Bittern,

then a Ringed Kingfisher perched right out in the open. Both Red-breasted and Yellow-hooded Blackbirds appeared close to the road. Family parties of Purple Gallinules climbed up reed stems giving tantalising brief views, but unfortunately the calling Striped Cuckoo was only seen by MK. An hour late, but with excellent species under the belt, we arrived at the Cacandee section of Trinidad's west coast mangrove. While we slowly walked a wide but rather muddy track, new birds came through thick and fast. Firstly a couple of male Ruby Topaz (hummingbird number seven) hovered in front of us, quickly followed by two "mangrove specialities" - Black-crested Antshrike and Bicolored Conebill. All the while American Redstarts, Northern Waterthrush and Yellow Warbler "tacked" away close by. Flycatchers were well represented with Pied Water-tyrant, White-headed Marsh-tyrant and Brown-crested Flycatcher added to our tally. A splash of colour in the mangrove was provided by a pair of Rufous-browed Peppershrikes hanging upside down from branches like titmice and small parties of dazzling Scarlet Ibis effortlessly glided low overhead. A couple of Common Black-hawks soared over, alongside both Osprey and Anhinga, but the Mangrove Cuckoo that decided to fly quickly across the lagoon, never to be seen again, was missed by everyone, save MK. Back on the minibus, and 40-minutes drive later, one or two brave souls joined Ivan and MK in "doubles", a local spicy snack. Then, onto the tidal mudflats. At our first stop, Carli Bay, the shore held groups of Brown Pelicans and Snowy Egrets. Greater Yellowlegs, Willets and Spotted Sandpipers probed the mud, and a couple of Yellow-crowned Night-herons sat up high in the mangrove. A few miles north, at Orange Valley, an unusually early Yellow-billed Tern was perched on a pole sticking out of the water; groups of Laughing Gulls lazily loafed around moored fishing boats and a few Magnificent Frigatebirds effortlessly soared offshore. By the time we reached Waterloo, the rising tide had covered almost all of the mud leaving a party of 34 Large-billed and five Royal Terns to roost upon a series of wooden staves. Little did we know that a Sabine's Gull, only the second record for Trinidad, was to fly in several hours later. Back to Pax for lunch with both Short-tailed Hawk and Grey-headed Kite showing from the terrace. Whilst birds themselves were few and far between during our late afternoon hike along Old Donkey trail, what we found was definitely worth the effort. Everyone enjoyed unusually prolonged views of a Grey-throated Leaf-tosser, tossing leaves, while at least 3 White-flanked Antwrens flicked through the undergrowth. The day was brought to a close with the sight of both Peregrine and Merlin chasing small bats in front of the Guesthouse. A total of 87 species had been seen during the day (plus a further two seen by MK) bringing the running total for the tour to 106.

Day 4: Breakfast was enlivened by Brians' Cheshire cat grin having found an adult male Tufted Coquette just outside the front door, first thing. Our destination today, the Asa Wright Nature Centre, high up in the Arima valley. Having detected no upset stomachs from yesterday's 'doubles', MK upgraded today's portions from "slight" to "regular" pepper. Our first birding stop gave us the opportunity to sort out Grey-rumped, Short-tailed and Chestnut-collared Swifts while an immature Broad-winged Hawk circled low overhead. On arriving at the Nature Centre, the balcony was already a hive of activity. Black-throated Mango, White-necked Jacobin (hummingbird number eight), and White-chested Emerald jostled for access at the sugar water feeders, both Purple and Green Honeycreepers joined the throng of Bananaquits at the tray feeders and Cocoa Thrushes tried to pick up the food that fell on the floor before being pushed aside by either Agouti or Golden Tegu Lizard. We had been seated for less than 15 minutes when an adult Ornate Hawk Eagle slowly drifted past us before diving into cover. A guided walk along the Discovery trail added Little Hermit (hummingbird number nine) and a superb Bearded Bellbird which 'clonked' directly overhead, to our tally. Makesh, our local guide, gave a well informed talk not only about the local flora and fauna, but also on the history of the estate and the birth of the Nature Centre. After our picnic lunch, an early afternoon stroll along the wooded entrance road produced Grey Hawk, Blue-chinned Sapphire (hummingbird number 10), Great Antshrike, Tropical Pewee and White-necked Thrush. Our final visit to the balcony added Grey-fronted Dove foraging in the dark cover just behind the feeders. These really are remarkably similar to White-tipped Dove, just a shade paler blue grey forehead and the thin red orbital ring being the separating features. A leisurely drive back down the valley saw us return to Pax in time for a sunset beer on the balcony. The day had yielded 58 species, and our trip list had increased to 123.

Day 5: A 06.30 start saw us heading once more for the Arima valley, via an alternative doubles vendor. We climbed to Morne Bleu at 2000ft and were rewarded with a close perched Channel-billed Toucan within five minutes of arrival. A careful watch from the top of the road during the next 90 minutes produced seven Blue-headed Parrots, adult male Collared Trogon, Streaked Flycatcher, four Blue Dacnis, two Red-legged Honeycreepers and an exquisite pair of Speckled Tanagers. We then slowly walked down the Morne Bleu track and along the Blanchisseuse Road ridge to Las Lapas finding another Collared Trogon, a couple more Channel-billed Toucans and managed to entice an obliging Black-faced Ant-thrush into view. The remainder of the morning was spent birding Las Lapas trace. The journey down gave us Grey-throated Leaf-tosser, Slaty-capped Flycatcher and a very approachable adult male American Redstart. Highlights of the hike back up the slope included female White-bellied Antbird, another leaf-tosser and a magnificent adult male Summer Tanager – the latter a new bird in T&T for MK (in recent years, the only previous records were in May '94 and Jan '99). We then descended to the village of Morne la Croix and ate our packed lunches before finding a pair of stunning Rufous-tailed Jacamars and a male Tufted Coquette close by. Our early afternoon drive down to the north coast was interrupted by a juvenile Broad-winged Hawk perched right over the road. From there, it was to Maracas beach and a date with "Richards Bake'n Shark" – the finest \$10 spend on the island – before the scenic but long drive back to Pax. After four days, our trip list had increased to 139 species.

Day 6: We left Pax at dawn – an immature Merlin perched right by the car park – and drove into the central lowlands to the Aripo savannah at Cumuto. En-route, a Striped Cuckoo sat up obligingly for all to enjoy and a flock of Green-rumped Parrotlets

“twittered” nearby. Many of the birds here we had seen previously but it was nice to enjoy sometimes closer views. Blue-headed Parrots flew low over our heads and both Red-legged Honeycreeper and Rufous-tailed Jacamars were found right out in the open. Slowly, but surely, we picked off the “savannah specialities” with Red-bellied Macaw, Black-tailed Tityra and Sulphury Flycatcher all showing fairly well. After much searching first one, then two Bat Falcons were found perching in the pine trees, staying on show long enough for everyone to enjoy. Hopefully the video footage will be a success. Just as we were leaving the track, Ivan picked out a fine male Crimson-crested Woodpecker which flew over the minibus and perched in trees close by. As we had all seen a male Lineated Woodpecker earlier in the day, the separating features were fresh in our minds. No sooner had we left the savannah, and entered Cumuto village than we stopped again, outside the Post Office – or more correctly beside a Yellow-rumped Cacique nesting colony that just happened to be in a tree found in the grounds. Late morning was spent driving slowly through the wooded tracks of Arena forest. The “midday lull” had set in, although we did manage to find Cocoa Woodcreeper, White-bellied Antbird, Forest Elaenia, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher and Red-crowned Ant-tanager. Having been fed and watered at lunchtime back at Pax, it was time to drive down to Caroni swamp and board our boat heading for the Scarlet Ibis roost. En-route, we had excellent views of Grey Potoo and a tiny rufous ball of fluff that was to be Silky Anteater – what Brian identified it as will remain a secret among ourselves. The spectacle of literally thousands of Ibises, Tricoloured and Little Blue Herons, Snowy Egrets and Neotropic Cormorants all landing on one small island of mangrove trees has to be seen to be believed. There is order in the chaos, each species understands its place in the pecking order for roosting perches. With the setting sun making the scarlet appear even redder, the photographers amongst the group were hard at work. The return journey encountered a Cooks Tree Boa roosting on an overhanging branch, several Yellow-crowned Night-herons and an unseasonal Lesser Nighthawk. Unfortunately, the rare and much sought after Boat-billed Herons did not appear. Another excellent day in widely differing habitat. We found almost all of our target species and brought the trip list up to 155.

Day 7: Just six of us today as Agnes opted for a day of R&R. A dawn departure from Pax with the immature Merlin on sentry duty once more, and back to the Northern Range. Our first stop was Morne Bleu and we were greeted with bright sunshine but a fierce wind, which ensured many birds kept their heads down. A couple of Channel-billed Toucans sat atop open branches; Speckled Tanagers fed at eye level; but the only new bird for the tour was a migrant Olive-sided Flycatcher from North America. We reckoned on less wind at lower altitude and decided to try our luck back on Las Lapas trace. A few bird flocks responded to MK whistling, they comprised mainly Bay-headed Tanagers and Green Honeycreepers. New for the tour were single Rufous-breasted Hermit (hummingbird number 11), Red-rumped Woodpecker and Euler’s Flycatcher. Yet again, we successfully “called in” a Black-faced Ant-thrush which entertained us with its rail-like gait and inquisitive nature, and we were so close to that Little Tinamou calling right by the path... but just not close enough. By midday we descended down the Arima valley with one brief stop to watch a mixed flock of Band-rumped and Grey-rumped Swifts. Was there a Chapman’s amongst them ? How do you tell ? After an initiation into eating Roti with one’s fingers, early afternoon birding centred upon the north sector of Arena forest. Here we found our second Euler’s Flycatcher for the day, a couple of rather flighty White-tailed Trogons and several “lekking” Green Hermits on their favourite perches, only inches off the ground. By 16.00, we had reached Wallerfield, a disused airfield in the heart of the savannah, and immediately had excellent views of Sulphury Flycatcher and Black-tailed Tityra. Our target bird, Moriche Oriole, appeared on cue and a majestic Grey-headed Kite flew low overhead as we waited for darkness to fall. White-tailed Nightjars began calling at 18.20 and we soon found several in our spotlight. Common Pauragues called from afar but the highlight of the evening was the prolonged view of a Grey Potoo making numerous forays after insects, but always returning to its preferred branch. Finding new species was getting harder, but we still increased our trip total to 162.

Day 8: Even before our a 06.00 departure, Brian managed to have in his notebook three Tufted Coquettes including two adult males in front of Pax. Our first stop was a boatyard in the far north west of the island where we boarded a vessel and headed for Chacachacare, the outermost of the Bocas Is. We had planned a driving time of about one hour; unfortunately almost every vehicle in Trinidad appeared to be on the same road. Over 30 minutes late, we were greeted with the news that our scheduled boat had met with an accident the evening before and was in dry dock being repaired. Nevertheless, within 45 minutes we were underway aboard a different (and more substantial vessel), and watching a delightful party of Bottle-nosed Dolphins briefly at very close quarters. Once ashore, we set off up the tarmac road (there’s only one vehicle on the island, and it still wouldn’t give us a lift!) up to the lighthouse. On the way, both Broad-winged and Zone-tailed Hawks soared overhead and Tropical Parulas appeared at regular intervals. Before we reached the summit we had found Northern Scrub, Bran-coloured, Boat-billed and Brown-crested Flycatchers. Lunch was taken looking out at the Paria peninsula in Venezuela, clearly visible and only a few miles away, wondering how long it will be before some of the common residents on the peninsula make that very short jump across the water and get added to the T&T list! The return hike was rewarded with stunning views of a male Blue-tailed Emerald (hummingbird number twelve) and an admittedly rather boring-looking Streaked Saltator, a species restricted in range to the Bocas Is and the extreme north western tip of Trinidad. Back at the jetty, a Belted Kingfisher perched up across the bay and an Osprey drifted past with lunch in its talons. The return boat trip was a bit of a battle against wind, wave and resultant spray but not as tedious as our battle against the commuter traffic of Port of Spain. There was still time to sample yet another of Trinidad’s local cuisine establishments – Kentucky Fried Chicken for a bag of chips ! Having completed our first week of the tour, the species list had increased to 168.

Day 9: Brian's pre-breakfast walk added two new birds for him (fortunately everyone else "pulled them back" within a couple of days); Scaled Pigeon and Giant Cowbird. Having checked out, and said our goodbyes to Pax, we travelled towards the east coast of Trinidad; en route enjoying excellent perched views of Savannah Hawks. Plum Mitan Road forms part of the western boundary of the extensive freshwater Nariva swamp. Here we found Pale-vented Pigeons and Giant Cowbirds before parking up alongside the ricefield project. No sooner had we got out of our minibus when two Great Black-hawks (a very rare raptor in Trinidad, more common in Tobago), an adult and a juvenile talon, grappled over our heads. We enjoyed a bird rich walk along the river bank with noisy Yellow-rumped Caciques patrolling up and down, always in view. Good numbers of hummingbirds fed on the fruit of Immortelle trees – they were mainly Black-throated Mango, Ruby Topaz and Blue-chinned Sapphires and included several stunning males. Most unexpectedly a female White-tailed Goldenthrout (hummingbird number thirteen) was seen alongside whilst on the riverbank, a shy Solitary Sandpiper stood motionless under the shade of some overhanging branches. Lunch was taken at Manzanilla beach, although the strong easterly wind and breaking surf prevented a midday swim. By mid-afternoon, we were slowly driving along Cocos Bay Road, passing over a million palm trees, looking for raptors perching in the shade. They duly obliged – we found several Savannah Hawks, Yellow-headed Caracaras and a lone Common Black-hawk allowing a comparison with its bigger cousin seen earlier. Eventually we reached a small accessible area of mangrove. First bird seen, Streaked Xenops – normally a species of deciduous forest. From the road bridge we flushed a female Green Kingfisher, then scrambled in across the mud to another part of the stream and found a foraging male American Pygmy Kingfisher. On retracing our steps, not only had the female Green returned to its perch, but it had brought its mate with her. We finally entered Nariva swamp proper via Kernaham trace and drove down raised bund roads overlooking wet pasture. Several Purple Gallinules sat high in the reeds, both Red-breasted and Yellow-hooded Blackbirds were gathering to roost and there was a constant rattle of Yellow-chinned Spinetails from the roadside vegetation. By 17.00 it was time for the long drive up the north eastern coastline to the village of Rampanalagas and Jasmynes Ocean Resort, our base for the next two nights. The journey was fairly uneventful, many in the bus were studying the inside of their eyelids and only MK saw the two Short-tailed Nighthawks, which flew across our path near Balandra. Our trip list had increased to 179.

Day 10: A day best dedicated to quality at the expense of quantity. A pre-dawn drive took us to Grande Riviere on the northern coast for a very singular and specific purpose: to find Pawi, or Trinidad Piping-guan. After a tantalising thirty minutes where we saw a wing here and a movement through the leaves there, we finally had prolonged views of not one but two Pawi right out in the open. With the pressure off, we could relax and enjoy two Black-tailed Tityras inspecting last years nest hole, Scaled Pigeons perching in a dead tree, a party of high-flying Lesser Swallow-tailed Swifts and a displaying group of five Violaceous Trogons chasing each other through the canopy. Then it rained, and, when it rains in Trinidad, it really comes down. We sheltered under an unoccupied house – not a good decision from MK's perspective as he was stung on the neck by a Jack Spaniard, the local wasp. With what looked like a very temporary break in the clouds, we decided to call it a day for Grande Riviere and return to the bus for breakfast. We parked up beside a tree close to Sans Soucci, which held a mixed oropendola and cacique breeding colony. Unfortunately the party of five Swallow-tailed Kites drifting just over the treeline eluded all eyes save for MK – due reward for the wasp sting! Back at Jasmine's for lunch, a free afternoon was interpreted differently – MK enjoyed siesta and the others walked the dry forest trails on the hill behind the hotel. Relief was had by all in finally finding an adult male White-bearded Manakin. This was one of the tour's mysterie. A common forest bird, we had seen many drab olive females, but black and white males had been conspicuous by their absence. Pride of place must go to Gill and Ian for finding a shy and elusive Little Cuckoo. The highlight for many occurred back at the evening meal table. In answer to the question "how would you like your fish?" Grace replied with a very straight face, "cooked". The answer was totally lost on the startled waitress who was expecting an answer of grilled, fried etc Whilst the species tally for the day was only 51, it was an unqualified success. Pawi are never reliable, indeed a couple we met had spent the three previous mornings there from dawn onwards and not had a sniff.

Day 11: Our last morning in Trinidad, our last early morning walk and thankfully still time for one new bird – Long-billed Gnatwren seen well by Brian and MK, but sadly only glimpsed by the others. That apart, birding the hill was slow going; a couple of Common Black-hawks circling overhead, a single Rufous-browed Peppershrike and a fine male Barred Antshrike (a zebra in pyjamas) being the only other notable sightings. No sooner had we boarded the bus and started our drive to the airport, when Brian shouts "stop – owl!" It was a Ferruginous Pygmy-owl. Sadly the combined noise of squeaking brakes and six pairs of disembarking feet meant that this was to become a sighting for one only. The journey to Piarco was quite eventful; two adult Grey Hawks flew over and Ivan found a fine adult perched Plumbeous Kite which stayed long enough for all to enjoy through the telescope – our last new bird in Trinidad. MK claimed no credit whatsoever for the perfect landing at Crown Pt airport, Tobago despite being invited up to the cockpit for the 20 minute flight. Both Cynthia, the manager at Speyside Inn, and "Pussycat" our amiable coach driver were waiting to greet us, and we were soon on our way, for the ninety-minute drive across Tobago to our hotel and home for the remaining four nights of the tour. Following a hearty lunch, with a Rufous-breasted Hermit feeding in the garden, we strolled along the Speyside coastal road to Blue Waters, allowing us a gentle introduction to a new islands birds. Black-faced Grassquits were quite numerous, and we soon got to grips with both Scrub Greenlet and Rufous-vented Chachalaca. Over the forested hillside, two majestic Great Black-hawks soared across. Along the stream both Spotted Sandpiper and Northern Waterthrush fed right out in the open. As dusk drew in an immaculate Yellow-crowned Night-heron alighted its daytime roosting tree to hunt close to the road – we were to become close friends with this individual on the ensuing days. We had left Trinidad with 189 species under the belt and already 32 had been seen on the sister isle.

Day 12: A pre-breakfast walk along the Speyside coast road produced many of the species seen yesterday afternoon. However, Gill ensured that we still found a new bird for the trip by pointing out a fine Red-eyed Vireo. At 08.00, we boarded Guys maxi taxi and headed for Louis D'Or, an area of riverside vegetation and fresh water marsh. Here we quickly found Green Herons, looking decidedly different from the Striated Herons in Trinidad (despite MK's doubts that they are separate species), and two Greater Yellowlegs were beside the river. On the marsh proper, a lone Solitary Sandpiper lived up to its name. MK flushed a Wilson's Snipe (likely to be a separate species before the year is out) and Red-crowned Woodpeckers were much in evidence, far and away the most conspicuous and vocal of T&T's woodpeckers. Our next stop, Flagstaff Hill overlooks Speyside on the windward, and Charlotteville on the leeward side of the island. With telescopes set up looking out towards St Giles rocks, we concentrated on the seabird flocks. Slowly but surely we separated Brown Booby from brown-morph Red-footed Booby and confirmed that the white morph boobies also present were indeed "Red-foots" and not Masked. By early afternoon, we were boarding the glass bottomed "Fear Not" boat for the 30 minute crossing to Little Tobago. The steep and sweaty hike up through the forest was well and truly forgotten once we reached the first lookout point, and were greeted by the sight of well over a hundred Red-billed Tropicbirds swirling round. A while later, we climbed further up to a second lookout, having "grilled" our first Blue-crowned Motmot on the way. Even more tropicbirds had come in (but sadly not the sole White-tailed Tropicbird, which has intermittently visited the area for the last three years,) and we were able to scope both species of boobies on the nest. Our early evening boat ride back diverted to briefly watch over one of the world's largest examples of Brain Coral and most of us glimpsed a Green-backed Turtle idly swim by – a fitting end to a wonderful day. The trip list had increased to 197.

Day 13: By 07.30, we were driving up to the rainforest at Gilpin trace in the Central range. Having spent the last few days in rather open terrain, some of us had forgotten just how frustrating forest birding could be. However, before long we had all enjoyed Golden-olive Woodpecker, Plain Ant-vireo, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher and Stripe-breasted Spinetail, species which had eluded most if not all of us in Trinidad. Regular splashes of colour – Blue-crowned Motmot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Collared Trogon – were much in evidence. However, it was the Tobago rainforest specialities that we had come to see. Eventually we all had excellent views of male Blue-backed Manakin; even closer views of the rare and local White-tailed Sabrewing (our fourteenth and final hummingbird) and Brian glimpsed a male Yellow-legged Thrush. The fourth and by far most difficult of our targets, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, called a couple of times, but was never close. Back across the road and onto Niplig trail (Gilpin spelt backwards) and the amazing sight of three male Blue-backed Manakins trying to "out yoyo" each other, all vying for the attention of a drab olive green female. We drove on to the lookout over Bloody Bay. A fine adult Great Black-hawk lazily soared back and forth, but the Yellow-legged Thrushes seen earlier by others, had gone. After yet another sumptuous lunch at Speyside Inn, a quiet walk around the lower slopes of Flagstaff Hill produced most of the now expected species including Ruby Topaz, Red-eyed Vireo, Green Kingfisher and White-fringed Antwren. As dusk settled, boobies were flying north across the bay. Amongst 50 or so passing, at least five were Red-foots, two of them white morph. Dinner was taken, the log agreed upon and we all felt the day had gone well. Little did we know that the most unexpected species of the day was not to be seen until 22.15 – a Leach's Petrel fluttered around on the balcony outside Brian and Chris' chalet, obviously dazzled by the lights.

Day 14: Our last full day and quite an early start for the drive down to the other end of the island. First port of call, Bon Accord sewage ponds. A padlocked gate and barbed wire topped fence impeded our progress at first, although we were still able to find Great Blue Heron and Anhinga amongst the more common herons, small flocks of Black-bellied Whistling-ducks and a few Least Grebes. Brian then gave a practical demonstration of how he finances his annual birding holidays by "circumventing" the padlock. Once inside, we found five Black-crowned Night-herons; studied a Little Egret with its pale blue-grey loral skin and more sloping forehead, and counted a total of 106 Black-bellied Whistling-ducks. Sadly, however, the long staying Western Reef-heron did not put in an appearance. A short walk further on down to the lagoon was reward for a few with a flying Belted Kingfisher. Next stop Grafton Estate and breakfast. Whilst we arrived long after the scheduled topping up of the bird feeders, there was still plenty present to attract Red-crowned Woodpecker and Barred Antshrike amongst more common fayre. A walk along one of the wide tracks enabled the photographers to get extremely close to confiding motmots and jacamars whilst Ochre-bellied and Brown-crested Flycatchers showed well, but not quite close enough. By late morning, it was time to visit our second set of sewage ponds for the day, this time inside the Tobago Hilton grounds where special access had been obtained. The duck flock comprised both White-cheeked Pintail and Blue-winged Teal and a scattering of waders included (unbelievably) our first Lesser Yellowlegs of the tour, and a chance for everyone to catch up with Wilson's Snipe. Having slaked our thirst at a beachside bar, it was time to negotiate Buccoo Marsh and its cows. The way in was uneventful; the birds excellent with two very uncommon birds being added to our list: American Coot (fourth record for T&T) and American Wigeon. Everyone had the opportunity to compare the relative size and structure of Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs whilst they stood side by side, and there were plenty of Black-bellied Whistling-ducks and Solitary Sandpipers to hold one's attention. The journey out was livened by a young bullock's (well it certainly had long horns) identification of Christine as the human who didn't like animals! We drove back along the much quieter leeward side of the island and across the central range and rainforest. There was still time to study the activity in one fruiting tree: plenty of Crested Oropendolas and a solitary motmot, not 10ft away, looking on at us in total indifference. Our final day drew to a close with our last sampling of the Speyside Inn chef's specialities and a couple of welcome Rum punches.

Day 15: Our last opportunity to enjoy the local Tobago birdlife before leaving at midday for the airport. Our walk to Blue Waters and the hill behind enabled the photographers to get extremely close to our resident Yellow-crowned Night-heron, all of us to enjoy the pair of Green Kingfishers from the bridge and have prolonged close views of at least two Fuscous Flycatchers. All too soon, it was time to bid farewell to Cynthia and Speyside and be driven once more by Pussycat back to Crown Point knowing a long journey home lay ahead. From my perspective the trip held the two ingredients necessary for a thoroughly enjoyable tour, most amiable company and excellent birds.

Martyn Kenefick