

Trinidad and Tobago

4 - 19 March 2004

Participants:

Les Awford

Peter and Vivien Coleman

Paul and Anne Cutforth

Carol Hewitt

David and Maureen Paling

Tony Spraggins

Heather Wood



White-necked Jacobin

Leader: Martyn Kenefick

A mixture of excellent birding, good weather and great company – essential ingredients for a happy and successful holiday. During the course of two weeks, we found 211 species with almost all participants seeing almost all of the birds. In addition to the anticipated targets (trogons, toucans, jacamars, motmots and ibis), the “specialities of the islands” – Trinidad Piping-guan, White tailed Sabrewing and Bearded Bellbird all performed for us. There were some unexpected bonuses in the shape of a Black Hawk-eagle, and a trickle of Leach’s Petrels close into shore. A rescheduling of the itinerary produced the real surprise and, perhaps, the highlight of the tour – Giant Leatherback Turtles nesting on our hotel beach

Day 1: After an uneventful transatlantic flight followed by a friendly and relaxing night at the Hummingbird, the group met up with me at Piarco Airport, Trinidad shortly after 9.00am. The short drive up to Pax Guest House, our base for the next seven nights, was enlivened by a Savannah Hawk perched on roadside wires, and the first of many thousands of Black Vultures to be seen during our stay. The registration procedure and tour logistics briefing were well timed, coming as they did during a short sharp rain shower. March is the dry season, but as I said “it is a leap year”. Right on cue the rain stopped, the sun came out and we enjoyed a walk up the road beyond Pax to “Top of the Mount” as an introduction to the commoner birds of Trinidad. Colourful Great Kiskadees, Yellow Orioles and Tropical Kingbirds vied for our attention with some perched Southern Rough-winged Swallows. An adult male White-bearded Manakin was seen by a few, but we were all able to enjoy a wintering male Yellow Warbler and a pair of Black-throated Mangos. Aloft, at least one White Hawk effortlessly soared over the tree line and our first two Turkey Vultures glided past. Back at Pax, we had time to be introduced to the common four tanagers (Blue-grey, Palm, Silver-beaked and White-lined) together with the first of many Copper-rumped Hummingbirds, before being summoned to a lunch of Beef Pelau and fried Plantain. After lunch, whilst some “siesta’d”, a hardy few were rewarded with both White-chested Emerald and Purple Honeycreepers both coming into the balcony feeders. By mid-afternoon, we retraced our steps back up the hill before descending onto the Old Donkey trail – the former link trail to the old monastery set way back in the hills. Initially birds were slow to reveal themselves. Our specific target was to watch the lekking of adult male Golden-headed Manakins. We heard several, but they were always topside of the canopy. However, the afternoon became one of real quality, if at the expense of quantity. First to show was a Forest Elaenia right above our heads. Next came a Streaked Flycatcher perched right out in the open. As we started to climb the winding trail a party comprising at least three White-shouldered Tanagers and probably the same number of Streaked Xenops were frantically chasing each other round in the mid storey canopy whilst an female Tropical Parula called from an Immortelle tree. Soon we were in the frustrating position of having three Golden-headed Manakins invisibly calling above us but the movement that attracted our attention was much rarer – a rufous morph Bright-rumped Attila tearing away the skin from a dead lizard. Plain-brown Woodcreeper and Ochre-bellied Flycatcher were soon added to our list as we made our way back down the valley sides. We spent an enjoyable few minutes in the company of a very inquisitive adult male Violaceous Trogon, calling just above our heads before heading out of the valley with the last rays of sunshine. It was still quite bright out in the open ground and a Zone-tailed Hawk circled low over head. This last hour of daylight can be very “birdy” here and today was no exception. We soon found a pair of Boat-billed

Flycatchers, a Grayish Saltator, and another Yellow Warbler chipping away; all awhile pairs of Orange-winged Parrots continuously squawked overhead on their way to roost. A good introduction day with a total of 44 species, all seen extremely well.

Day 2: Breakfast trays and a 6.15am departure enabled us to arrive at Sumaria Trace freshwater marsh just as the sun was warming the reed-beds. Both Pied Water-tyrant and White-headed Marsh-tyrant were quickly picked out, and the first of two Strip-backed Bitterns, totally oblivious to our presence, sunned itself from the top of the reeds. A juvenile Striped Cuckoo was obviously anticipating a parental feed, anxiously turning its head from side to side and raising its crest. Parties of Yellow-hooded Blackbirds provided a constant background chatter and cigar shaped Yellow-chinned Spinetails zapped too and fro. In the wetter areas, both Snowy Egrets and Little Blue Herons fed alongside parties of Wattled Jacanas, and a number of American Purple Gallinules clambered about the sedges. Aloft, Ospreys seemed to be ever present whilst an early Large-billed Tern was an unexpected bonus quartering the open water, and numerous parties of Scarlet Ibis drifted over the mangrove. My "crake/rail bash", replete with thigh waders, failed to produce the hoped for Sora Rail. However, as we neared Eric's bus, two Yellow-bellied Elaenias obligingly perched atop the bushes and a Grayish Saltator sunbathed atop a pylon. After a short drive south-west to Cacandee, we slowly walked the tracks down to the mangrove. An extremely low tide produced a party of five Black-necked Stilts amongst several Lesser Yellowlegs, and the first of many Tricolored Herons fed nearby. Much closer, several adult male Red-breasted Blackbirds performed their parachute glide display flights and both immature Merlin and adult Yellow-headed Caracara perched in nearby dead trees. On reaching the mangrove proper, a Rufous-browed Peppershrike (normally a shy and retiring species) showed itself off for everyone and a pair of Black-crested Ant-shrikes fed on the ground mere feet away from us. By now it was getting pretty hot and birds were seeking dense cover. No amount of coaxing could entice a Northern Waterthrush to perform for everyone, but on the walk back to the bus, we managed to see an adult Common Black-hawk soaring over the lake together with a group of five Neotropic Cormorants. There followed an hour-long drive to Carli Bay. The muddy creek was alive with Snowy Egrets and Scarlet Ibis together with more familiar faire in the shape of several Hudsonian Whimbrels. New birds then came thick and fast: Willet and Least Sandpipers, Southern Lapwings and Yellow-crowned Night-herons all fed out in the mud avoiding "waving" fiddler crabs. A few miles north at Orange Valley, the tide was slowly rising. The first parties of Brown Pelican and Laughing Gull sat on the roofs of moored boats and on one exposed sandbar, we found a group of 48 Royal Terns. Then on to Waterloo, and the bay beside the floating temple. By now, Laughing Gull numbers were approaching 3000 birds. Black Skimmers "skimmed" and parties of waders included our first Greater Yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitchers, Semipalmated Plovers and Western Sandpipers. Almost as soon as we had got back on the bus, we had to disembark in somewhat of a panic, as a low-flying white-morph Long winged Harrier decided to soar around the car park. As lunchtime approached, we made our way back to Pax and were greeted with the news that the "water problems" had been solved and celebrated with a very tasty Tuna Pasta Bake and salad. Those relaxing on the lower balcony after lunch were rewarded with views of Turquoise Tanagers and a very confiding Purple Honeycreeper. In the afternoon we walked up the mount again and after a patient scrutiny of the trees on the ridge, we came across a mixed feeding flock comprising three Blue Dacnis, five Turquoise Tanagers and an adult male White-shouldered Tanager. Further up the slope, most of us saw a Yellow-breasted Flycatcher and we all found a further three Tropical Parulas. Meanwhile, back at Pax a recharged Tony found the groups first Scaled Pigeons. A good day had by all – 80 species had been seen by the group bringing the tour running total to 96.

Day 3: Early starts have become the norm. We boarded Eric's bus at 6.30am and headed for Caroni ricefields. This former magnificent birding site is now, sadly, just a shadow of its past as currently no rice being grown. Our target bird, Pinnated Bittern, was to prove rather elusive. Some saw a bill; some managed bill and head; but only a few members of the party saw much of the birds body as it hid in the reeds. All was not lost, as we managed to find several Solitary Sandpipers, a couple of stalking Striated Herons, a number of adult American Purple Gallinules perched right out in the open taking in the morning sun – we even managed a Common Moorhen! There followed a drive of some 45 minutes east to the Aripo savannah at Cumuto. Here we walked a track that once was the eastern railway line in Trinidad for a couple of kilometers. Perched beside some Moriche palm fruit, Tony found three Red-bellied Macaws, and we were soon to find another speciality of the area, Sulphury Flycatcher, with at least six birds on show. At the far end of the track, two Southern Beardless-tyrannulets flitted from tree to tree and a sub-adult male Ruby-topaz Hummingbird gleamed in the sunlight. Over our heads, single White and Savannah Hawks soared over but the usually plentiful Fork-tailed Palm-swifts were few, and distant. As we returned to the main road, a pair of Green-rumped Parrotlets perched up on overhead wires. Next stop a Yellow-rumped Cacique colony in the grounds adjacent to Cumuto Police Station. Despite their beauty and melodic calls, it has to go on record that greater interest was taken in the ice cream freezer stock of a nearby store! Then onto Arena forest where we were expecting the forest to be quiet, given the late morning heat. We soon found however, a party of four White-tailed Trogons and with regular stops along the forest road, added Squirrel Cuckoo, Golden-olive and Lineated Woodpeckers, Golden-fronted Greenlet and a pair of Golden-crowned Warblers to our tally. The journey back to Pax was quiet, save for a Zone-tailed Hawk having the endure the unwanted attention of a scolding Tropical Kingbird. Lunch today was spicy chicken with dhalpuri roti and rice. Peaceful dining was interrupted when a male White-necked Jacobin appeared beside one of the balcony feeders. Soon it was time to board our bus once more and head down to Caroni swamp and our evening boat ride into the mangrove. A high gliding Peregrine Falcon was new for the tour but unfortunately the views of both Green and American Pygmy Kingfishers were brief indeed. Nevertheless, the boat was an unqualified success. We enjoyed excellent views of Red-rumped Woodpecker, Bicoloured Conebill and Yellow-crowned Night-heron – and one of the closest Common Potoos I have seen here – if only it would have turned its head round! A cuddly brown ball of fluff sitting (we were soon to realise, sleeping) 15ft up a red mangrove tree turned out to be a roosting Silky Anteater. By 5.30pm we were in position against the "wall" of the lagoon awaiting the roost to commence. Almost immediately a light phase Short-tailed Hawk glided over our heads. The first parties of Snowy Egrets, Little Blue and Tricolored Herons flew in selected their perches and (probably) went straight to sleep. The ibises initially came in "one's and two's" but before long, parties of 30–40 birds were homing in on their chosen island. At one point, a female Anhinga flew in front of the roost, but kept on going. All too soon it was time to turn our boat around for the return journey, with the helm shared

by Charlie and his 11-year-old son Darren! A day of mixed fortunes but overall successful and enjoyable with a total of 75 species seen by almost everyone

Day 4: Our drive this morning would take us up through the upper Arima valley, across the northern range and onto the Caribbean north coast. But, first things first, a cultural introduction this morning to the concept of 2nd breakfast – doubles, a true Trini snack – fast food at its best. A deep-fried split peas and flour sandwich filled with curried channa, kutchela and (for those brave enough) hot pepper. Our first birding stop, beside a crystophene plantation was designed to watch a nesting colony of Crested Oropendolas together with their attendant, if unwelcome Piratic Flycatcher. However, a Channel-billed Toucan, perched right out in the open sunning itself, stole the show. We climbed up to the end of the road at Morne Bleu – one of the few areas in the northern range where we can look down at the trees. Here, in bright sunshine, we had fantastic views of Speckled and Bay-headed Tanagers, Scaled Pigeon, Green Honeycreeper and Tropical Pewee whilst several Blue-headed Parrots repeatedly flew over our heads. We next walked sections of the Blanchisseuse Road before descending along the track at Las Lapas. Despite the occasional vehicle hooting its horn to acknowledge our presence, we still managed to find Collared Trogon, White-necked Thrush and what surprisingly turned out to be our only Green Hermit of the tour. Las Lapas was a hive of activity. First to show were more Bay-headed and Speckled Tanagers twittering in fruiting trees over our heads. We next watched a Slaty-capped Flycatcher repeatedly enter its nest hole – whether feeding young or nest construction fine tuning, we couldn't be sure. Both American Redstart and Dusky-capped Flycatcher were added to the list before we started to climb back up the slope. Some birds are particularly responsive to tape rendering of their calls: antbirds fall definitely into this category. A splendid White-bellied Antbird stalked to and fro, no more than 30ft from us indignantly trying to locate the origin of our mimicry. Soon it was time to drive through the forested northern slopes towards the sea stopping en route at the Mid Way Bar in Morne La Croix village. Lunch was to be taken on the beach. Despite quite rough water, Vivien braved the elements suitably attired in bathing suit, whilst several others at least got their feet wet. Lunch finished, we walked along the side of the Marianne River estuary, finding a male Lineated Woodpecker and another Piratic Flycatcher on the way. Now time for our second antbird. An immature Silvered Antbird literally flew right at us in response to the tape, landing on some fallen bamboo shoots, about 20ft away. Here endeth the birding, well almost. A drive west along the coast road to Maracas beach was rudely interrupted by a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars perched beside the road. Most of the party tempted their tastebuds with the now traditional Birdfinders mid-afternoon tea of “Bake ‘n Shark”. Heather, on the pretext of putting the wrong sauce on the first one, ate two! A typically tropical day with bright sunshine but not too hot or humid. Most of the target birds seen well by all. Running total of species for the tour stands at 142.

Day 5: Despite a prompt 6.15am departure, and the freedom of the Priority Bus Route, we still had to endure commuter traffic along Port of Spain seafront. Nevertheless, we arrived on site at the base of Morne Catherine in good time. Our first new bird appeared before we had a chance to get off the bus: a party of 10-12 Saffron Finches including several adult males. From here, we were to walk the winding road up through the forest. As always, the lower flat part of the road was particularly busy with birds. We found several Forest Elaenias, a foraging, very inquisitive male Barred Antshrike, a couple of Southern Beardless-tyrannulets and a Streaked Flycatcher all perching out in the open. Here we found two new hummingbirds for the tour: the common and widespread Blue-chinned Sapphire and the much rarer and decidedly local Blue-tailed Emerald (normally only found on off shore islands). Among the early morning flight of Black Vultures we picked out single adult Broad-winged Hawk, a winter visitor to Trinidad, and a light morph Short-tailed Hawk. As we began to climb the hill, we encountered several Tropical Parulas and had very close views of a party of White-flanked Antwrens. Golden-fronted Greenlets were both showy and scolding all the way up and Long-billed Gnatwrens and Rufous-breasted Wrens joined in the scolding, unfortunately they remained hidden from view. We never did make the top of the hill – a low wall about 3/4 of the way up proved too good to avoid, and so a welcome ten minutes rest preceded the walk back down. By now it was getting pretty warm, and the forest had gone quiet. One shady area hosted a mixed flock of White-shouldered Tanagers and Golden-crowned Warblers but we saw little else, save for numerous Bananaquits and female Golden-headed Manakins. As we reached the entrance an adult Yellow-headed Caracara flew over, but the cold water in the cooler on the bus took priority. The lunchtime journey to Pax was devoid of birds, save for yet another Zone-tailed Hawk gliding by. A stop at the Lady Young lookout provided an aerial view of Port of Spain, then it was the serious business of lunch, a “real belly filler” as our waitress Niah pointed out: a bowl of San Coche soup brimming full with various “ground provisions”. Those that watched from the lower balcony at Pax during the afternoon were rewarded by an extremely obliging Rufous-browed Peppershrike. At 5.00pm, we were off once more driving to Waller Field disused aerodrome. Once the longest runway in the Americas, now a venue for drag car racing... and night birding. We arrived with 30 minutes of daylight left; time for perched Merlin and Gray Hawk. As the darkness drew in, we started to hear White-tailed Nightjars calling all around us. During the course of the next hour, we spotlighted at least six, plus two Common Pauragues, and were able to walk within 30 ft of several. Running total of species for the tour, a healthy 153.

Day 6: The day commenced with a display of contrasting birding styles between the British and American contingencies gathered at the Pax breakfast table. A White Hawk glided over – chairs were pushed back, tables jarred, crockery clattered – all American of course, in the dash for the balcony. Meanwhile the Brits sat calm and dignified – save one of course! – and buttered their toast. During the drive up the Arima valley, we found our own White Hawk soaring over the road, again watched with decorum. By the crystophene plantation, numerous Band-rumped Swifts sallied to and fro across the road. And then on to Asa Wright Nature Centre, renowned for good views of good birds, and today was to be no exception. As anticipated, the sugar water feeders and fruit and bread tray feeders in front of the balcony were heaving with birds. At one point adult male Purple, Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers sipped from the same saucer feeder. On the surrounding floor and walls, new birds kept appearing: Blue-crowned Motmot, Gray-fronted Dove, Red-crowned Ant-tanager; and the crowd of “the common four” tanagers and Bananaquits never dwindled. Hummingbirds were very active. Good numbers of male White-necked Jacobins darted hither and thither, a pair of

exquisite Tufted Coquettes fed on the powder puff and Vervain hedges, and both White-chested Emeralds and Black-throated Mangos defended their own particular saucers with vigour. James escorted us down the main discovery trail mid morning. This used to be the main road down to Arima in the days of the horse and cart. The busiest traffic now are the millions of leafcutter (bachac) ants. Two special birds were seen closer and better than I can ever remember for a large group before. A Common Potoo feigned sleep attached to the end of a grapefruit tree branch 15ft off of the ground, looking at us out of the corner of its eye. Further down the trail, a full adult male Bearded Bellbird performed loudly right out in the open. We enjoyed excellent views of both male Golden-headed and White-bearded Manakins, the latter wing snapping at their traditional lekking ground – remember fidelity amongst male “White-bearded” is a 10 minute thing! We appreciated the subtle plumage features of a very confiding Euler’s Flycatcher, which had taken up temporary residence behind the bachac nest, and watched a pair of Stripe-breasted Spinetails put final touches to the lining of their nest. After lunch, a walk along the entrance track in the mid-afternoon sun was understandably quiet, but we did manage good views of Turquoise Tanager and Violaceous Euphonia. As we neared the Centre building complex, adult male Great and Barred Antshrikes crept through the bush tangle to check us out. All too soon it was time to leave, and head back down the valley for one final stop. Close to Piarco airport, there are a series of lakes with reedy fringes. Two juvenile Pied-billed Grebes swam out in the middle of the water, and a third bird, hiding at the far end, may well have been an adult. An excellent day. We added a further 10 species to our tour tally bringing the running total up to 163. More importantly, we had superb views of excellent birds.

Day 7: Soon after 6.00am, Eric was speedily negotiating commuter traffic to get us to Chaguaramas boat docks in time for our scheduled departure to Chacachacare, the largest of the Bocas Islands and the closest to mainland Venezuela. Elton, our boatman, awaited our arrival and we were soon gliding across a completely calm Gulf of Paria, passing the islands of Casper Grande, Monos and Huevos en route. Once ashore, our journey was to follow the road up to the (normally) manned lighthouse, switching back and forth through dry scrub forest. It was a hot and humid climb despite the early start. As expected, birds were plentiful at the bottom of the hill and also at the top 200 metres, but we really struggled to find stuff in between. No sooner had we walked off of the jetty, than a pair of Tropical Parula flitted around the very first bush we came to. A little further on, we came across our first Northern Scrub-flycatcher and then almost immediately the two island specialities: extremely good if brief views of both Streaked Saltator and a female Blue-tailed Emerald. Nearing the top we picked up several Brown-crested Flycatchers and White-fringed Antwrens, but small flycatchers were noticeable by their absence. An early lunch was taken in the shade beside the lighthouse garden. Sadly, the rather hazy conditions meant that views of both Patos Is and the Venezuelan Paria peninsula were not as dramatic as we would have hoped. The highlight of an extremely hot walk down the slope fell to Heather who found a Mouse-coloured Tyrannulet but, sadly, few others managed to reach the spot in time. Other noteworthy birds found included two more Blue-tailed Emeralds, several Tropical Parula and many more White-fringed Antwrens and Brown-crested Flycatchers. The boat ride back was only slightly bumpier, as Elton twisted and turned to give us the smoothest run. An early-afternoon return to Pax enabled the group to sample tea at Pax, unwind from an early start and prepare for tomorrow's departure.

Day 8: After a frenetic start to the day handling revised accommodation logistics, we bade farewell to Pax and journeyed to the Aripo Agricultural Research Station. This venue has only just re-opened its gates to birders, having been closed for more than two years in response to the Foot and Mouth outbreak in the UK. We quickly found some of a party of Grassland Yellow-finches discovered there at the end of February. A new species for Trinidad & Tobago, and it begs the question “how long have they been there?” Other birds on view included Green-rumped Parrotlet, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, White-winged Swallow and Red-breasted Blackbird. The few remaining patches of muddy water held several Solitary and Least Sandpipers, plus a lone Semipalmated Sandpiper, new for the trip. Our journey to the east coast was subject to two stops – one planned, the other damn lucky. A comfort break was taken at an air-conditioned Chinese restaurant in Sangre Grande to the relief of the ladies. About five miles further east, the bus came to an abrupt and sudden halt as a Black Hawk-eagle (the first seen on a Birdfinders tour) glided over the road and was seen soaring over nearby trees for a few minutes. Eventually we reached the beach at Manzanilla for lunch, this time beside the Atlantic ocean. After a short while, the first of at least five Leach’s Petrels glided over the breaking waves – it's hard to imagine that their next landfall is likely to be the outer Scottish islands. By 2.00pm, we were back on the bus, slowly driving south along Cocos Bay, seeking out raptors sheltering from the hot sun. It is said that over one million palm trees line this road, and few of us would disagree. We managed four Gray Hawks, two Savannah Hawks and up to 10 Yellow-headed Caracaras. A brief stop beside a mangrove-fringed stream yielded an adult female Green Kingfisher perched low over the water. It was then on to Kernaham village, a settlement of squatting subsistence farmers and a slow drive along the raised bund tracks. It was extremely hot, and birds were scarce. We saw several Solitary Sandpipers together with common marshland birds, but little else. The remainder of the day was taken up with the long drive round the north-east corner of Trinidad to Grande Riviere, and our base for the next two nights at Le Grand Almondier Beach Resort. (Shame on the un-named member of the party who suggested a comfort break be taken on the lawns at Jasmines as we passed!) After a welcome shower, a couple of beers and a wonderful Kingfish dinner, an early night beckoned after a long and hot day.

Day 9: No Eric today, everything on foot. Soon after 6.00am, we were walking up Monte Video Trace for what was to be an extremely successful morning. As we reached the traditional Pawi viewing area, I pointed out a new squatters house with adjacent garden. Whilst the family were quite nonchalant of what we were doing, their encroachment into the area of nutmeg trees favoured by the Trinidad Piping-guans has to create a question mark over the future of this site. Upon our arrival, three Plumbeous Kites were perched out in the open, one later seen carrying nesting material. We soon heard the thin reedy whistles signifying the presence of Pawi, and caught the occasional movement of leaves as “something big” was obviously clambering through. All of a sudden one flew out of the back of the tree, showed very briefly to one or two of us before disappearing from sight. Fortunately, there was another bird still in the main tree and slowly but surely it climbed up into full view allowing everyone to enjoy telescope views of

this endangered species. This open area always holds good birds, and today was no exception. A Squirrel Cuckoo flew into an open branched tree and sat their sunning itself, whilst a Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift drifted over. Soon, the youthful exuberance of a football game between two squatter children and their puppy dogs became too much for the Pawi and it flew back into dense cover – a fitting moment for our own departure. The steep walk down to the river produced several good birds. A Gray-headed Kite soared over; a couple of Channel-billed Toucans “dueted” each other and probably three different Lineated Woodpeckers foraged in the trees around us. At the river itself, a Green Kingfisher perched up briefly but the imminent onset of a rain shower sent us scattering for the nearest tree cover. The rain became rather persistent, but not heavy, during our walk back but this did not deter good birding. First to show was an adult male Crimson-crested Woodpecker out in the open on a bare branch. Next a pair of Silvered Antbirds were lured in by the tape machine and finally a Piratic Flycatcher was found at the trail entrance. A hearty late breakfast followed with the middle of the day spent either swimming, sunbathing or just relaxing after a hectic few days. But you can’t please everyone all of the time, Tony had to point out that the beach was too sandy and that he preferred Suffolk sand ! Middle of the day in Grande Riviere is normally exceptionally hot. Today however could be best described as “sunshine and showers”. A depleted party of five went back “up the hill” in the late afternoon. No sign of Pawi, nor for that matter any new species of raptor. We did have extremely close and prolonged views of two adult male Violaceous Trogons. “No new birds to grip the others off then” piped up Peter – however we still had the walk back down. Now reduced to a party of three (for Les, nature called), a frog-like noise from high in a tree drew out attention: adult male Black-tailed Tityra (and for good measure a toucan landed right beside it). At the bottom of the hill, we also found Gray Kingbird, but all were to see several later in Tobago. Dinner became a disjointed affair. Plates of half finished chocolate cake and coconut ice cream went flying when news came through that a Giant Leatherback Turtle was the beach, and commencing to lay her eggs. A fitting way to end a memorable day, and an enjoyable stay in Trinidad. So far we had found 183 species of birds, with Tobago still to come.

Day 10: To all intents and purposes, today was taken up by travel. However a small group led by Paul and Anne were on Grande Riviere beach by 6.00am to watch two more turtles finish their egg laying and lumber back to the sea. Soon after 9.00am, we boarded Eric’s bus for the long drive to Piarco airport. A brief stop on Monte Video hill failed to produce the Swallow-tailed Kites that often float over the treetops. We did see single Common Black-hawk and Gray Hawk but little else save the continual comings and goings of both Crested Oropendolas and Yellow-rumped Caciques at their communal nesting tree. By 11.30am we were checking our bags at the Tobago Express desk, our flight miraculously left on time and by 2.00pm we were boarding Sinclair’s bus for a speedy run along the windward coast of the island to Speyside Inn, our base for the next three nights. Few birds were seen en route – a Peregrine Falcon soared by, a number of Caribbean Martins hawked insects overhead and a Green-rumped Parrotlet flew right in front of us. Lunch seemed to be a “french fries convention” accompanied by a variety of cheeseburgers, chicken or fish (very tropical!). A brief late-afternoon walk up to the Blue Waters lookout was more an effort to walk off a heavy lunch than anything else, but we still managed to see Green Heron, Pale-vented Pigeon, Barred Antshrike and White-fringed Antwren before reaching back to the hotel. It is fair to say that dinner became a long drawn out affair – the food was excellent and the beer flowed, with talk of a new island, and a new islands birds.

Day 11: A relaxing start to the day with a 7.30am substantial breakfast. Our plan was to spend just a short while at the first stop, Merchison Rd, on the outskirts of Speyside. However, the birding was so good, we spent most of the morning there. For rarity status, star prizes went to at least two, possibly three White-winged Becards (calling like Greenshanks). For aesthetics, the almost constant presence of Rufous-tailed Jacamars were hard to beat. As a supporting cast, Broad-winged Hawks and Giant Cowbirds perched out in the open, the local race of Red-eyed Vireo fed noisily high up in the Immortelles, Black-faced Grassquits buzzed like serins either side of the track and both White-necked Jacobins and Black-throated Mangos all perched long enough to be ‘scoped by all. Sadly, however, only Tony and I managed to see a skulking Olivaceous Woodcreeper. We then drove back through the village and out onto Flagstaff Hill, the most north-easterly point of mainland Tobago. Here, we looked out over St Giles Rocks. Magnificent Frigatebirds were present in number, just hanging on the wind. More distant, brown and white shapes were obviously both Brown and Red-footed Boobies but at that range any plumage detail was out of the question. The white dot in my telescope, sat alone on the farthest outcrop was, I maintain, a Masked Booby perched on Marble Is – that is if it was a bird at all! An early lunch was followed by a brisk walk up over Blue Waters hill to catch our boat for Little Tobago. In the gardens of the hotel, several Rufous-vented Chachalacas prowled accompanied by a couple of White-tipped Doves. The journey across was uneventful and we were soon slowly walking up the steep forested slope towards the seabird lookout areas, with a couple of Blue-crowned Motmots for company. This is not a long walk, but the unbroken canopy and the incline makes it incredibly hot and humid. However, all thoughts of discomfort were immediately dispelled with our first views of Red-billed Tropicbird wheeling right in front of us. During the course of the next hour or so, we were to see probably about 100, some gliding past no more than a few feet away. Both Brown, and “brown morph” Red-footed Boobies were present, Browns in some number whilst frigatebirds put on several displays of piracy on unsuspecting tropicbirds causing them to disgorge their hard-earned meals. Back at the beach, Vivien (who had opted for an afternoon swim instead of a sweaty slog) pointed out a hole under some tree roots. Through our binoculars, at a safe distance, we peered in to meet the beady eye of a parent Audubon’s Shearwater sat on her nest. The return journey stopped over two prime areas for tropical sea-life. The first is home to one of the largest Brain Corals in the world, and the other is aptly named “Japanese Garden” for its variety of aquatic flora. Parrotfish, Damselfish, Trumpetfish and Groupers were much in evidence. Pride of place for beauty must go to a number of Queen Angel fish. For luck, the prize goes to Heather who, from her position looking through the glass, managed to glimpse a Hawksbill Turtle swimming past. Tour total bird list to date, 196 species.

Day 12: It had rained heavily during the night, and the morning dawned grey, overcast and windy so we were in no rush to get into the rainforest. Having breakfasted at our leisure, we made our way onto the Bloody Bay Rd and spent the first hours watching from the roadside. The Immortelle trees were alive with birds – mainly the common tanagers and Orange-winged Parrots, but amongst them we found a Golden-olive Woodpecker, several Giant Cowbirds and a couple of Rufous-tailed Jacamars. A little higher,

squadrons of Gray-rumped Swifts hawked over the road and we managed our first really good view of a Rufous-breasted Hermit. Just before the rainforest entrance, the “wellie man” did a roaring trade. At TT\$20 a time, it was to be money well spent. All kitted-up, we entered Gilpin Trace single file. Almost immediately a few managed to glimpse a couple of male Blue-backed Manakins, bouncing up and down like yo-yos way back in the cover. The rest need not have worried, we were to have superb views of both male and female slightly further on. Our first White-tailed Sabrewing was a juvenile without a tail, fortunately, dad was nearby flitting around in all his splendour. We were to find at least four more, including one male on a song perch no more than 20ft away from us. This is a truly rare bird and these are the most accessible sabrewings in the world. The only other populations are found in north-eastern Venezuela. Yellow-legged Thrushes were very vocal the whole length of the trail. We got good looks at one male, and fleeting glimpses of a couple more. Other than those three main target birds, a Stripe-breasted Spinetail crept “mouse-like” through the leaf litter, a male Plain Antvireo showed intermittently beside the path, and there were a few motmots and jacamars around for good measure. Back on the main road, a brief stop at the Bloody Bay look out did nothing for the bird list, but the lady selling cake and juice enjoyed our patronage. By 12.15pm, it was clearly time to return to Speyside for lunch. Birding finished for the morning – but not quite. Halfway down the hill, a Venezuelan Flycatcher flew across the road, perching briefly in a roadside shrub. Another shuddering screech of brakes announced the presence of a Great Black-hawk effortlessly soaring over at Louis d’Or, and finally three immature Broad-winged Hawks seen distantly over Kings Bay Hill “had us going” for a while. During the afternoon we decided upon a recce of the track leading to and beyond Kings Bay water treatment plant. It was still overcast, and our expectations were not high. However, the walk was surprisingly “birdy”. Pride of place goes to two Fuscous Flycatchers. A competent supporting cast included a pair of Red-legged Honeycreepers, an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher and jacamars on almost every bend.

Day 13: Early morning was taken up with packing, paying room bills and enjoying breakfast before saying good-bye to Speyside Inn and boarding Sinclair’s bus once more for the 90 minute journey back down to south-west Tobago. Our first stop, Bon Accord sewage lagoons were still busy with birds despite the mid-morning sun. Upon the causeways, there were Anhinga and Great White Egret. We were also able to go through the subtle ID characteristics which separate the many “Snowies” from the two Little Egrets also present. A lingering Great Blue Heron was new for the tour, as were a smattering of Least Grebes, a Black-bellied Whistling-duck and a pair of White-cheeked Pintails, with chicks in tow. Of slightly more familiar fare, Greater Yellowlegs and Spotted Sandpipers represented the waders on view. A hot walk along to Bon Accord lagoon produced adult Yellow-crowned Night-heron, more “yellowlegs”, Hudsonian Whimbrel and a couple of Wilson’s Snipe in the flooded fields together with a chiding Scrub Greenlet at the mangrove edge. Next stop, the dry forest at Grafton. Chachalacas seemed to home in on our arrival keeping Vivien company and awaiting our return for lunch. The walk up the hill enabled Tony and Les to catch up with Fuscous Flycatcher. Several rather plain-chocolate-brown-looking male Ruby-topaz Hummingbirds perched in the shade completely concealing their dazzling colours from the sunlight. And there was still time for our final look at Yellow-breasted Flycatchers, jacamars and motmots. Lunch was taken in the company of an ever-growing horde of chachalacas (one still managing to survive with two heavily clubbed feet) and several Red-crowned Woodpeckers. A minor revolt then took place, the suggestion of a final forest walk was unanimously rejected in favour of the sun-beds, swimming pool and the bar at The Hummingbird! A right and proper way to end a hot and very sunny afternoon. We had taken the tour species list to 210.

Day 14: Just a final morning's birding to go and one last destination, Lowlands sewage ponds. On the way, we paid a brief visit to the Bon Accord ponds, but there was nothing to add to yesterday's menu. At Lowlands, small parties of Black-bellied Whistling-ducks flew across the reedy ponds, adult Least Grebes chaperoned stripey young and four pairs of Blue-winged Teal, the males in full breeding dress, allowed a close approach. We had our final encounter with familiar waders and herons – Greater Yellowlegs and Solitary Sandpipers, Green and Little Blue Herons. By 10.00am, the sun was hot and strong.. The return journey to The Hummingbird via a duty free shopping stop at Penny Savers effectively ended the holiday. Just time for a final swim, a flying fish lunch and the tedious routine of packing and transferring to the airport for the journey back to the UK.