

Trinidad and Tobago

10–25 February 2005

Participants:

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Violaceous Trogon

Leader: Martyn Kenefick

This tour was, from a personal point of view, one of the very best. Not only did everyone become instant friends, we were blessed with several extremely keen pairs of eyes – and the birds were pretty good too. We found 221 species, and heard seven more. Our finds included a first for T&T; a number of other extreme rarities, plus of course, the two specialities of each island – Pawi and Campy. As always, we missed a few common birds but this should not detract from what was undoubtedly an exceptionally successful and enjoyable two weeks.

Day 1: After the rigours of trans-Atlantic flying, the party arrived in Tobago late afternoon to be met by Peter from Hummingbird Inn, and within a few minutes, they were able to relax with a drink in hand beside the swimming pool enjoying the late afternoon sun.

Day 2: A welcome surprise to start the tour – the inter island flight across to Trinidad was early arriving! So, having met the party at Piarco International Airport, our driver for the week, Shannon, and I made the short transit to Pax Guest House well ahead of schedule. As always, the introductory briefing was interrupted by a constant stream of new birds appearing from the rear terrace. First an adult Gray Hawk perched in a conifer across the valley; next both Green and Purple Honeycreepers visited the fruit tray feeders; all the while the ‘blue-est’ Blue-gray Tanagers in the Americas together with both Copper-rumped Hummingbirds and Yellow Orioles flitted to and fro. The first morning is always about getting to grips with the common birds of a new country. We carefully studied the four common tanagers; Palm, those Blue-grays, White-lined and Silver-beaked; common large flycatchers such as Tropical Kingbird and Great Kiskadee together with those ‘everyday birds’ Orange-winged Parrot, Ruddy Ground-dove, Tropical Mockingbird, Bananaquit and Bare-eyed Thrush. Shortly before lunch, we moved into the front car park and immediately found a female Tufted Coquette feeding along a Vervain hedge proving just how small hummers can get. By contrast our first adult male Black-throated Mango seemed huge. In the shade of a Samaan tree, my imitation of a Ferruginous Pygmy-owl call brought in an inquisitive Yellow Warbler and a couple of Golden-fronted Greenlets, whilst overhead a dark-phase Short-tailed Hawk, a few Crested Oropendolas and a Southern Rough-winged Swallow soared past. Lunch was a leisurely affair of Tomali pie and salad but by 14.30 we were walking up the hill beyond Pax and onto the forested slopes of Mt St Benedict. The sun was hot and birdlife was obviously enjoying a siesta. The shade of the forested Old Donkey Trail came as a welcome relief. Birds were still scarce, but the message was quality at the expense of quantity. A nesting pair of olive-morph Bright-rumped Attilas were the star show (only the second time this species has been found on a Birdfinders tour), continuously calling to each other and attracting in a rufous morph third bird a little further on. Our first Golden-headed Manakin was an adult male at eye level and a Streaked Xenops flitted along the underside of several branches pretending to be a tree creeper. A Golden-crowned Warbler was seen repeatedly coming in to bathe in a small stream, with a couple of Green Hermits and a Cocoa Woodcreeper putting in brief appearances. Back at the entrance to the trail, the late afternoon had cooled down – we even had a brief rain shower to freshen the birds up – and immediately there was a considerable increase in bird activity. We quickly found a feeding party of Turquoise Tanagers

with an accompanying Bay-headed; a Yellow-breasted Flycatcher perched low above our heads; two Trinidad Euphonias sat calling in the tops of a Mistletoe tree and we found two Black-throated Mango nests both with attendant sitting females. Not to be outdone, raptors came into the show with single Zone-tailed, Broad-winged and Short-tailed Hawks together with a couple of Merlins. On the walk back down the hill, White-chested Emerald at zero feet became the fifth hummingbird species of the day and a Yellow-bellied Elaenia earned its varying nicknames of either 'punk rocker' or 'bad hair-do bird'. Last but by no means least, we had a real surprise: a party of four siskin-sized yellow, wing barred finches – without question new for Trinidad and Tobago. At the time of writing, they have been identified as immature Lesser Goldfinches, but that awaits verification from the national Rare Birds Committee. An excellent, easy-paced introduction to Trinidad birds – 53 species under the belt, including some real gems.

Day 3: Today involved the first of a series of 06.30 departures. Even at this hour the sun was out, and both Orange-winged Parrots and Black Vultures were leaving their respective roosts en-masse. Just as we boarded the bus, an early morning Merlin dashed past – a good omen. But first priority was second breakfast. Meriel, Mike and Jim joined me in doubles – a traditional, if rather sloppy Trini snack comprising a deep fried chickpea and flour sandwich filled with curried channa, cucumber, kutchela and, of course, hot pepper. Jim and Lynda relied on bananas for substance but still managed to glimpse our first Ringed Kingfisher beside the highway. First birding stop – the Aripo Agriculture Research Station – the birding was so good we spent the entire morning here. Upon arrival, new birds came through thick and fast. The first field held no less than 20 Grassland Yellow-finches, together with a fine adult male Ruddy-breasted Seedeater. Further along the track, we came across a singing male Masked Yellowthroat and two Solitary Sandpipers playing in a puddle. Mike drew our attention to a distant large heron perched in the top of a tree. That was probably the extent of the groups interest but it got me writing copious field notes – it was a first winter Grey Heron, only the fourth record for T&T. Understandably much keener interest was shown in several Savannah Hawks, all perched in the open; a group of very-confiding Green-rumped Parrotlets and a Striped Cuckoo on its song perch. Back on the main track, we came to grips with both Pied Water and White-headed Marsh Tyrants, Yellow-chinned Spinetails, dazzling Red-breasted and Yellow-hooded Blackbirds, Smooth-billed Anis and Wattled Jacanas by the score. Then came the identification stumbling block – two snipes appeared. Now South American Snipe is a resident of Trinidad and breeds in these fields, whilst Wilson's Snipe is a common winter visitor. The two species are inseparable in the field. They almost certainly were South Americans but Two more wader species were then quickly added to the list, Southern Lapwing and Least Sandpiper; several Striated Herons perched up in the early morning sunlight and our first Great Egret stalked the water meadows. Following a welcome cold-drink break, we moved on to explore the dry savannah scrub to the north, finding soaring Gray-headed Kite and Short-tailed Hawk en route. Once in the shade, we came across Boat-billed and Piratic Flycatchers, Rufous-browed Peppershrike and our first Violaceous Euphonias. After what seemed to be an age of tantalising glimpses, we finally saw (at a distance) all of a Squirrel Cuckoo – five minutes later a second bird appeared right out in the open and at close range! After four hours of extremely enjoyable birding, we headed off eastwards to the Atlantic coast. On the way Yellow-rumped Caciques flew across the road in front of us and our first Plumbeous Kite dashed past (sadly we were never to get a good look at one of these). Finally we arrived at Manzanilla, to have lunch on the beach. By now the sun was roasting hot, so we spent the next two hours in the shade of various Coconut palms. By mid afternoon, we headed south along Cocos Bay Road seeking out any raptors, which might still be relaxing in like manner. To be fair, the results were disappointing, but we did manage to accumulate an adult Gray Hawk, a sub-adult Common Black-hawk and, just as we pulled up beside a small patch of mangrove, an adult Yellow-headed Caracara. Birding mangrove in the afternoon heat is a thankless task. The two Jims managed to glimpse a Red-rumped Woodpecker but that was about it. Our final stop, at the south-eastern corner of Nariva Swamp, was the settlement of Kernaham and its surrounding water meadows. The heat was still pretty fierce and birds were loathed to give their location away. We finally found a flying party of 20 Red-bellied Macaws, and came across our first American Purple Gallinules. However, this failed to nullify the frustration of being less than 20ft away from a Gray-breasted Crake (a species I have still never seen), which called incessantly, but never showed its face. The long drive back was interrupted with fine views of a perched Ringed Kingfisher and silhouette views of a party of nine Plumbeous Kites hawking the evening insects. Finally, about half an hour after dark, we arrived back at Pax – 78 species seen for the day and the tour list standing at a respectable 100.

Day 4: This morning, the tour officially attained Honorary Trini Status – everyone had doubles for second breakfast. This preceded a drive up through the Arima valley along the Blanchisseuse Road, as high as the road would take us. Eventually we arrived at Morne Bleu, enjoying our first Channel-billed Toucan in the process. At the lookout, we briefly joined the members of the T&T Field Naturalist Club for what became a magical 90 minutes. The perimeter lights of the radar station attract numbers of large flying insects, and in turn the insects attract large numbers of birds. Star players this morning included pairs of Streaked Flycatchers and Hepatic Tanagers both feeding within a few feet of us. The other advantage of the site is to be able to look down (rather than up) at fruiting trees. Parties of exquisite Speckled and Bay-headed Tanagers put in several appearances, a couple of Scaled Pigeons perched up close but the rarest sight was a Black-whiskered Vireo (only the fourth I have seen in T&T). Eventually we managed to tear ourselves away to walk the forested road to Las Lapas corner. Here we found both Red-rumped and Golden-olive Woodpeckers, watched at close range both White-tailed and Collared Trogons, and added both Euler's and Dusky-capped Flycatchers to the checklist, before rejoining Shannon and the bus for the slow drive north to the Caribbean coast and the village of Blanchisseuse for

lunch beside the sea. It was Sunday, it was hot and we were at the beach – but there were fewer people around than I feared. A post-lunch walk to the Marianne River bridge produced both Red-legged Honeycreeper and Blue Dacnis feeding on a flowering Immortelle tree, but little else. We decided to use the hot, early afternoon to best advantage and retrace our steps back up into the hills, past the village of Morne La Croix before stopping at Paria junction for an excellent late afternoon birding session. Pride of place must go to three adult male Collared Trogons perched no more than 15 feet over our heads. Hot on their heels were our first Violaceous Trogons and stunning views of Slaty-capped Flycatchers. Further down the lane, we found a small party of Red-crowned Ant-tanagers, White-flanked Antwren, Plain Ant-vireo and Plain-brown Woodcreeper. By contrast, the drive back to Pax was quiet and uneventful. The day ended on the rear terrace with Rufous Nightjar calling from across the valley. Not only had we found almost all of our target species today, we had seen them all really well. Tour list now stands at 127.

Day 5: The day started overcast, with a slight drizzle. Our first stop, Sumaria trace, is normally THE place to see bitterns in the early morning. Today its mood reflected the weather. The only additions to our list were Peregrine and squadrons of Neotropic Cormorants flying over but we did hear more Gray-breasted Crakes but again they were ‘no show’ birds. And so onto Cacandee, an area of mangrove immediately south of the Caroni Swamp reserve. The walk in produced a fine Ringed Kingfisher perched up on a dead tree. At the entrance to the mangrove proper, we found both Barred and Black-crested Antshrikes, Bicolored Conebill and American Redstart together with the ever present Yellow Warblers and Northern Waterthrush. The absence of sun had a limiting effect on bird sightings, but with perseverance we found at least four Straight-billed Woodcreepers. Sadly I was the only person to catch onto the American Pygmy-kingfisher. By mid-morning, the sun came out, and we drove some distance south to check out three sites on the Gulf of Paria. The first, Carli Bay produced Scarlet Ibis, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Willet and Hudsonian Whimbrel. At the second, we hit gold. Amongst a roosting flock of several hundred Laughing Gulls, Jim W picked up something different. His questioning tone of ‘what’s this gull with the bright red bill?’ got me rushing to look through his telescope – the reward a fine (almost) summer-plumaged adult Franklin’s Gull – only the fourth or fifth for T&T. Sadly it flew off north literally seconds before my friend Graham arrived, in work attire and binoculars in hand. Also present were good numbers of Royal Terns, Black Skimmers ‘skimming’ and both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. A short drive north brought us to Waterloo where we set up our tripods to scan the mudflats, and Shannon set off to collect our lunch. Today we enjoyed roti – a tortilla-like package filled with curried shrimp/goat/chicken or beef. First bird seen – the Franklin’s Gull. A further quick telephone call to Graham resulted in his appearance five minutes later, this time able to smile. Whilst scanning through the rafts of Laughing Gulls, we found both adult Lesser Black-backed and second-winter Ring-billed. To have four species of gull in a day in Trinidad is some achievement – the record is five, and its only been done once! A lazy lunch in the shade allowed us to find Yellow-crowned Night-heron, Grey Plover and Ruddy Turnstone but the hoped for Large-billed Terns were obviously still in Venezuela. By now the sun was fierce and it was evident that birds were keeping low. A final walk along the south bank of the Blue River at Caroni gave us excellent perched views of a male Green-throated Mango, but it was then back to Pax for a welcomed rest before dinner. Not only had we increased our tour list to 153, but in Franklin’s Gull we had found a bird really pushing for ‘bird of the trip’.

Day 6: A tried and tested pattern again this morning: early start; drive east; eat doubles! Our first birding stop was Waller Field disused airfield, once the longest runway in the Americas (and vital to allied shipping during World War 2). More recently an area to be visited with care. However it is now well-managed with effective perimeter security, and provides good birding. Fork tailed Palm-swifts were continually hawking overhead as we drove into an area full of Moriche Palms. On alighting from the bus, a pair of Gray necked Wood-rails were heard, but were too distant to entice in. Moriche Palms attract speciality birds, and before long we were watching at least four Sulphury Flycatchers – a bird unlikely to be found elsewhere on the island. A little further down the track we came across three Bran-coloured Flycatchers, again a species that can be tricky elsewhere. Ruby-topaz Hummingbirds were zipping about everywhere and a couple of Striped Cuckoos sang from exposed perches. Sadly, despite diligent searching we couldn’t locate the speciality hummer of the area – White tailed Goldenthrout. Back on the bus, we took the short journey to Cumuto, slightly further south in the savannah. By now the sun was extremely hot and my umbrella was put to good alternative use! Along the entrance track, we found a fourth Bran-coloured Flycatcher, and then heard macaws feeding in some distant palms. A short, rather muddy diversion ensued, and we were soon looking at several groups totaling at least 40 Red-bellied Macaws, swirling about just over the tree-line. With the sun behind us, this made for far better viewing than we would have had at the Nariva roost. No sooner had the macaws disappeared, when an adult male Crimson-crested Woodpecker flew into a track-side palm, allowing extended telescope views. Our next stop was in Cumuto village itself. There were two reasons; a Yellow-rumped Cacique colony in the grounds of the Police Station, and a shop with an enticing stock of ice creams. Our last stop of the morning was to explore one track within the extensive lowland Arena Forest. Late morning is never busy in the forest, and today was no exception. However, we did manage to find yet another Bright-rumped Attila, male Plain Ant-vireo and Dusky-capped Flycatcher. Lunch today was back at Pax but we still had time for a male White-necked Jacobin perched just off of the balcony. Several bowls of San Coche really living up to the Trini name of ‘belly filler soup’ were taken at our leisure, allowing for an hour or so’s relaxation before boarding Shannon’s bus once more for the trip to Caroni swamp. At 4.00pm, we met Sean our boatman, boarded and set off west down the Blue River (which has the alternate less salubrious name of No 9 Drain), along the border of the 40 square miles of protected mangrove swamp. Within just a few minutes, we had found our first snake, Cook’s Tree Boa

(or Cascabel in Trini) coiled up in a tree – we were lucky enough to find another two later on – and our first mammal, a Silky Anteater (or Two-toed Sloth). As for birds, a male Green-throated Mango was seen perched in the open and a Straight-billed Woodcreeper flitted from trunk to trunk. Once into the protected area proper, we found two roosting Common Potoos whilst out on the exposed mudflats were Scarlet Ibis, Yellow-crowned Night-herons, Blue-winged Teal, Semipalmated Plover and Lesser Yellowlegs. By 17.30 we were tied to our stake awaiting the roost to begin. The sunlight was excellent, and to our delight wave after wave of Scarlet Ibis, Little Blue and Tricolored Herons and Snowy Egrets came in early, allowing the cameras to click to their hearts content. A light-phase Short-tailed Hawk soared over before plummeting into the mangrove (presumably after a snake) and we found our first Aningas of the tour. The return journey was enlivened by close views of a Spectacled Cayman hugging the mangrove roots. By 19.00, we had returned to Pax with a further eight species under belt for the day bringing the running total for the tour to 161.

Day 7: The day dawned bright, and already hot. This is the one day of the tour totally different from all others. Our destination, Chacachacare, the westernmost of the Bocas Is and the nearest point of Trinidad to Venezuela. By 06.00, we were heading towards Port of Spain, and then onto the jetty at Chaguaramas. Unfortunately vandalism is present in Trinidad, as well as the rest of the world and so our departure was delayed by a further 30 minutes whilst Elton, our skipper for the morning, made running repairs to the steering cable which had been sabotaged during the night. Even before we had left, 'Mulls' had found a female Blue-tailed Emerald, a species almost always restricted to the north westernmost part of Trinidad. From Chaguaramas, we passed the coasts of Monos and Huevos islands on a nearly flat calm sea, before turning into Chacachacare Bay and docking at the isthmus. Birding Chac never produces quantity, but it gives us the opportunity to seek out species either absent or exceedingly difficult to find on Trinidad. Our route was to walk the paved road up from the jetty to the lighthouse, through dense, dry scrub-forest. As a road goes, it is exceeding quiet – there is only one vehicle on the island. The downside is that the driver believes he is always the only person on the road and takes blind bends accordingly! Immediately behind the jetty, we found our first Brown-crested Flycatchers, together with a tiny-billed Northern Scrub-flycatcher. Shortly after the road began to climb, we could hear White-fringed Ant-wrens plaintive short trills thereafter seeing them every few minutes or so during the ascent. No sooner had I mentioned to the group that the middle part of the climb was traditionally the quietest, when the star bird of the morning appeared. A Mangrove Cuckoo called briefly from one side of the forest before flying across the road twice. Total viewing time 5 seconds! and unsurprisingly no amount of Mike's bizarre interpretation of its call could entice it into the open. The trees close to the summit held several Brown-crested Flycatchers together with Boat-billed Flycatcher and Tropical Parula. We ate our lunch in the shade, looking out over the Paria peninsula of Venezuela only seven kilometres distant, and the tiny uninhabited island of Patos. In the midday heat, we were indeed grateful that the return hike was all downhill. Close to the summit we found Mouse-coloured Tyrannulet and several more Tropical Parulas; the remaining walk only enlivened by regular sightings of Brown-crested Flycatcher, White-tipped Dove and plenty of White-fringed Ant-wrens – that is until we flushed a White Hawk from a roadside tree no more than 10 metres away from us. A cooler full of juice and water was a welcome sight as we boarded our boat once more – the return journey adding soaring Gray, Zone-tailed and Common Black-hawks. The group relaxed at Pax during the heat of the afternoon but by 17.00, some had ventured back up to 'Top of the Mount' finding Blue Dacnis and, incredibly, a new total of eight juvenile Lesser Goldfinches. Whilst only 45 species were found during the morning, the day is a complete contrast to the remainder of the tour, visiting totally different habitat.

Day 8 The pace of the tour dropped dramatically as planned today with a leisurely Pax hot breakfast (even if it did involve eggs!) and an 08.30 departure. All of the birding today was to be at the Asa Wright Nature Centre. situated at about 1200ft elevation in the upper Arima valley. Upon arrival, the verandah was literally heaving with birds, the bulk being made up of the common four tanagers, Purple and Green Honeycreepers, Bananaquits, Crested Oropendolas and Cocoa Thrushes at the tray feeders, whilst White-necked Jacobins and White-chested Emeralds guarded their own particular saucer feeders of sugar water. Quality birds just kept popping in; a Black-whiskered Vireo in the shimmer tree; a male Red-legged Honeycreeper on a tray feeder; a female Tufted Coquette foraging the array of orange blooms in front of us and, best of all, a male Chestnut Woodpecker attacking the bananas with gusto. Beneath the feeders, mopping up all of the bits of bread and fruit that had been displaced, were a number of Red-backed Agoutis and Golden Tegu Lizards. Our mid-morning walk along the Discovery Trail was led by Mukesh who provided a brief potted history of the estate, pointing out and naming (to my shame) a number of flowers and trees. At this point we were joined by a number of other visitors from a cruise ship tour. During the descent, we had excellent views of Violaceous Trogons, numerous White-bearded Manakins at their lek, a couple of White-flanked Ant-wrens and a roosting Common Potoo. However birds weren't the only thing on the agenda – we had pointed out to us a magnificent Tree Porcupine wrapped around a monkey ladder vine (only the third one I've ever seen). We then quietly evaded what was becoming a rather noisy gathering and made our own way down the trail guided by the ever-closing anvil-clanging call of a male Bearded Bellbird on territory. Sure enough it was easily spotted close to the trail, no more than 25ft up and gave an excellent performance for about fifteen minutes, by this time to a large and appreciative audience. For the return hike, we held back letting the hordes advance well to the front. This paid dividends with the only Long-billed Starthroat of the tour and our first decent view of Long-billed Gnat-wren. Back on the verandah, it was approaching lunchtime. Our appetites were further enhanced with a magic five minutes where Forest Elaenia, and Ochre-bellied Flycatcher appeared in the Shimmer tree and a Channel-billed Toucan perched up not much further away. Shortly after lunch, the decision was made to leave

the verandah and walk the entrance track. Jim C and I quickly diverted to the bus to offload some gear, a good move as we saw a magnificent adult male Tufted Coquette feeding on the car park Vervain hedge. Along the track, we all enjoyed extended perched views of both Little and Rufous-breasted Hermits and managed to call in a splendid male Great Antshrike. By 15.00 we were back on the verandah enjoying the usual menu of tanagers, honeycreepers and hummingbirds. Our last few minutes were livened briefly by a male Golden-headed Manakin and more leisurely by a Blue-crowned Motmot perched on a tray feeder. Sadly, whilst loading up the bus, the male Tufted Coquette vigil went unrewarded and there followed an uneventful journey back to Pax. With about an hour of daylight left, most of the party assembled on the road close to Top of the Mount, our eyes focused on two rather scrubby trees. Sure enough two Lesser Goldfinches appeared at about 17.40, but one of them, a really tatty individual, was moulting into adult male plumage. So there are at least nine birds in the area! These later joined another two juveniles in what we presume to be their roosting tree. Our time based at Pax had come to an end – with 180 species under the belt.

Day 9: Much of today was taken up by traveling. Whilst the island only measures 55 miles by 30 miles, journeying to the more remote areas can take considerable time. We left Pax shortly after 09.00, drove east to our doubles vendor (shame on Jim W, lowering his pepper intake to slight) and then branched north east to hit the Atlantic coastline at Matura. We followed the coast road north to Toco, and then east onto Galera Pt. Beside the rocks at the end of the road we witness the convergence of the Atlantic Ocean with the Caribbean Sea, scenically wonderful, but not a bird in sight! A short and exceedingly-hot walk through the scrub produced a fly past of Lilac-tailed Parrotlets, some wonderful butterflies including Flambeau, King Page and Postman but little else. Lunch was taken at Salybia Bay – on the beach but in the shade of Coconut palms before the 45-minute drive west along the north coast road to Grande Riviere, and Le Grande Almandier Hotel, our base for the next two nights. A late-afternoon hike up Montevideo trace was more to stretch the legs than in any real expectation of seeing good birds – how wrong could we be? Firstly three Violaceous Trogons played around the lower branches of a Mango tree, then a pair of Lineated Woodpeckers flitted from tree to tree. A little later a male Black-tailed Tityra perched in open view. All of a sudden, Jim C exclaims ‘I’ve got an oriole – it’s different – it’s orange’ The exclamation I muttered on looking through my binoculars cannot be repeated – but there perched no more than 10ft from the Tityra was an adult male Baltimore Oriole, a new species here for me and the first seen in Trinidad for 25 years. The walk back down the trace produced a further two tityras, croaking as we passed (their Trini name is Frogbird for obvious reasons).

Day 10: It was still dark when we walked out of the hotel at 05.30 with the sky absolutely full of stars. The first rays of dawn filtered through the trees as we walked up Montevideo trace once more, with the constant calling of a close by Ferruginous Pygmy-owl frustrating us – was that shape that flew across the track the owl – probably so but it will be up to individual consciences (if there are any) as to whether it gets onto personal checklists. Once at the viewing area, we waited as the light gathered. The first Trinidad Piping-guan (Pawi) was found around 06.40 perched right out in the open, but rather distant – the relief was obvious and after looking through his telescope, Jim C actually did a little dance! It’s mate soon flew up into the same tree and then both scrambled over to a heavily-laden Nutmeg tree, eating oblivious of their admiring audience for some while. After about ten minutes, they both flew into the regular feeding tree, right in front of us. Also on view at this time were a pair of Violaceous Trogons, two of yesterdays Black-tailed Tityras and a diminutive Southern Beardless-tyrannulet. As we slowly descended the forest track down towards the river, another Pawi came out into the open right above us. Upon arrival at a known territory for White-bellied Antbird, an inquisitive pair performed for us no more than 20ft away before slinking back into the undergrowth. Beyond the forested slope, the track ran beside some citrus and banana gardens where at least two Lesser Swallow-tailed Swifts zapped over, accompanied by the usual posse of Short-tailed Swifts. Shortly after, we were able to entice a pair of Silvered Antbirds to come and check us out. Always more wary than their White-bellied cousins, we had to settle for a number of brief tantalising views as they constantly hopped through the ground foliage. Before reaching the river, a male Great Antshrike was much more sociable standing right out in the open, and our first Giant Cowbirds flew over. The return walk up the hill was quieter – and much hotter. Along a side track, we managed to find our first Rufous-tailed Jacamar plus both Forest Elaenia and Yellow-breasted Flycatcher together with occasional glimpses of both Golden-headed Manakin and White-flanked Ant-wren. Just before our descent back down into the village, a juvenile Broad-winged Hawk joined a soaring kettle of Black Vultures, but by now breakfast called – the walking pace picked up and we returned to Le Grande Almandier with just a Rufous-breasted Hermit along the way. Breakfast was a long drawn out affair – the sun was high in the sky, it was hot, we were beside the beach and there we stayed until well into the afternoon. Well, all of us except Mike (what is it they say about mad dogs and Englishmen), who went for a lunchtime walk, finding a pair of Lineated Woodpeckers at a suitable nesting hole. By 16.15, the sun was waning slightly, and we walked the road to the main river bridge and then up into the coastal forest. Birds were few and far between save for a perched Common Black-hawk, a few hummingbirds and our first White-shouldered Tanager. Nevertheless, it had been an exceptional day with as good a view of Pawi as anyone could hope for – and plenty more besides. Tour trip list now stands at 192.

Day 11: A dawn ‘all male’ birding walk this morning – the ladies opting for a lie in. We decided to walk straight to the river over Montevideo trace, and then slowly retrace our steps with the sun at our backs. So we marched past the viewing

area, with a Pawi sat right on top of the usual feeding tree in full view, and clambered down the other side. At the river, a female Green Kingfisher briefly perched on some dead branches before flying downstream. The remainder of the walk was enjoyable but we found nothing new. We had excellent views of a Striped Cuckoo, a party of 10 Blue Dacnis, White-tailed Trogon, several White-necked Jacobins, a couple of Euler's Flycatchers and a Plain-brown Woodcreeper. On returning to the hotel, all that supposedly was left of the Trinidad section of this birding holiday was breakfast, check-out and a long drive to the airport. Fortunately there were one or two surprises left. Whilst sitting on the hotel balcony, surrounded by packed suitcases, two Chestnut-collared Swifts chose to accompany a swirling group of Short-taileds. Before we had even driven out of the village, we stopped the bus to enjoy a male Lineated Woodpecker (one of Mike's birds from yesterday) making the final touches to his nest hole in someone's front garden. Close to Balandra, a Pearl Kite sat on a roadside utility wire; a light-phase Short-tailed Hawk flew past us at Matura, and two Gray-headed Kites were in aerial display just outside Valencia. Eventually we reached Piarco airport, made our goodbye's to Shannon and proceeded through the tedious process of checking in and boarding our mid-afternoon flight to Tobago. We had left Trinidad having found 194 species; but more than that, almost everyone had seen almost everything really well – a mark of a successful trip. Following a rather bumpy 20 minute flight, we arrived in Tobago, albeit following a rather circuitous flight route and soon found ourselves beside the swimming pool at the Hummingbird – and that's where most of us stayed, relaxing in the late afternoon sunshine.

Day 12: No birding holiday would be complete without a visit to a sewage works; and for obvious reasons sewage works are best visited before the day gets too hot. So by 06.30, we were peering through the fence at Bon Accord sewage lagoons. Amongst the numbers of Great Egrets and Anhingas lined up on the banks were several Black-crowned Night-herons and Green Herons. We found singles of both Snowy and Little Egrets amongst the many Cattle Egrets whilst on the water swam a party of four Black-bellied Whistling-ducks, up to 15 White-cheeked Pintails, a single Least Grebe and rarest of all, an immature male American Wigeon. Our first Barn Swallows hawked over together with a much scarcer White-winged Swallow (there are probably only five birds in Tobago). A walk down beside the mangrove to Bon Accord Bay provided our first sightings of such common Tobago birds as Scrub Greenlet, Black-faced Grassquit and the noisy Red-crowned Woodpecker, whilst Caribbean Martins dashed to-and-fro over our heads. By now we knew it was going to be another really hot day, so we made our way westward to seek shade beside the feeders at the Adventure Farm. With glasses of home-made fruit juice in hand, we watched a dazzling array of Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, White-necked Jacobin, Black-throated Mango and Rufous-breasted Hermits feeding within feet of us. The trails through the forest and orchard were understandably quiet in the late-morning heat. Jim C managed to glimpse a Red-eyed Vireo that was calling incessantly, and we found quite good numbers of White-fringed Ant-wrens and Yellow-breasted Flycatchers, but little else. The drive back to Hummingbird was interrupted, firstly by a detour to see the Goat Racing Track at Buccoo and secondly to a local super-market. However, the end result of the latter was hardly tropical as bags of cheese crisps and McVities chocolate biscuits found their way onto the bus. Following a superb lunch of flying fish, the energy levels varied dramatically. Some slept, some gossiped but Mike and Jim W, the stalwarts of the group, braved the afternoon sun to walk around Kilgwyn swamp. Their rewards included a couple of Sanderling and a glimpse of what was probably a Mangrove Cuckoo. By 15.45, we were all headed off to Grafton Sanctuary, an area of lowland dry forest that is particularly birdy. At 16.00 daily the groundsman refills the various feeders. Within minutes a whole host of birds from Bananaquits to Rufous-vented Chachalacas (and all sizes in between) pounced on the fruit and sugar water. The lower trail produced a stunning adult male Blue-backed Manakin and yet another poor view of Stripe-breasted Spinetail. The ridge trail also caused frustration with two different Fuscous Flycatchers merely offering a brief glance. White-fringed ant-wrens and Yellow-breasted Flycatchers seemed to be everywhere, and at the other end of the size scale, both Blue-crowned Motmots and Rufous-tailed Jacamars posed for the cameras, another excellent day. We had already passed the 2004 trip total, with over two days birding left.

Day 13: Just the five of us this morning, Meriel opting for a day of R&R. Straight after breakfast, we quickly checked out Bon Accord sewage lagoons. Pretty much the same as yesterday: there were a few more White-cheeked Pintail, three Blue-winged Teal had popped in and just as we were leaving, a Belted Kingfisher flew over. We decided to make a brief stop to check out the large lake at the highway entrance to the Hilton grounds. Another Belted Kingfisher was perched up, making occasional forays into the lake, and a couple of Least Grebes were down the far end. The next hour or so was spent driving the winding Windward Road to Roxborough, before turning west and climbing up into the Central Ridge rainforest. We parked up under a very overcast sky, and slowly made our way along Gilpin Trace – our target being the globally threatened hummingbird, White tailed Sabrewing (or Campy in Tobagonian). Within a few minutes we had found a pair of Yellow-legged Thrushes and shortly thereafter two different sabrewings, the latter admittedly rather distant. Further down the trail we had excellent views of two Stripe-breasted Spinetails (a common bird that was strangely difficult to find in Trinidad) and a couple of Blue-backed Manakins. Some way further on, an adult male sabrewing performed from its song perch at very close range for over fifteen minutes, often raising its wings and fanning its tail. The return walk was quieter, save for one more sabrewing and a pair of Golden-olive Woodpeckers. Once back on the road, we drove up to the Bloody Bay lookout to enjoy our picnic lunch. Gluttony became the order of the day, with certain members of the party eyeing up a lady selling huge portions of lemon/banana/chocolate cake – did Jim just have one slice? After lunch we slowly retraced our steps back down the south-eastern slope, stopping at the boundary of the forest reserve. This turned out to be an extremely-productive ad hoc stop, not only did we find Venezuela Flycatcher,

but also three Red-eyed Vireos (another normally easy species that had played hard to get), a few male Red-legged Honeycreepers, another male Yellow-legged Thrush and a pair of Streaked Flycatchers. We spent the next hour driving back south-west to Grafton. This time we had the trails to ourselves and our walk produced two Fuscous Flycatchers, a photogenic Rufous-tailed Jacamar which came almost close enough to peck at Jim's lens, more Blue-backed Manakins and a Cocoa Woodcreeper. Still time for some final birding for some – at Kilgwyn swamp – pleasant but unexceptional birding with three Peregrines being the highlight. The tour list had crept up to 216.

Day 14: Same start, same time, same species at Bon Accord this morning, although numbers slightly changed with a maximum of 32 White-cheeked Pintails. The next 90 minutes were spent driving the entire length of the Windward Rd, parking up at Speyside lookout for panoramic views of both Goat Island and Little Tobago. Directly opposite, we slowly walked Merchison Road. First to show, Fuscous Flycatcher followed fairly quickly by a pair of nest building White-winged Becards. Life then became confusing because shortly past the next bend, there was a pair of becards nest building. Surely there couldn't be two pairs of this uncommon flycatcher so close together. It's more likely that one structure was just for practice. Rufous-tailed Jacamars and Red-eyed Vireos appeared on every corner, as camera tolerant as ever; Ruby-topaz Hummingbirds flitted too and fro and 'Jolls' called out the only Great Black-hawk of the trip. On the walk back down, we found an adult male Blue-backed Manakin feeding in a fruiting tree stretched right over the path, and a Broad-winged Hawk soared over. With time to spare, we drove up Flagstaff Hill and onto the lookout, sadly in the middle of reconstruction. With telescopes set up (and more than a bit of imagination) we could just about identify the dots circling St Giles rocks as Red billed Tropicbirds and Red-footed Boobies – but let's be honest, they were dots. Following a picnic lunch shared with the local dogs at Speyside Beach facility, we drove round to Blue Waters Inn to board our boat for the lunchtime crossing to Little Tobago. Unfortunately, lunchtime became early-afternoon before we set sail – but it didn't really matter. On the island, the walk up to the seabird viewing area was as humid as ever. But once there the breeze blew, over 300 Red-billed Tropicbirds were in the air, some engaged in courtship flight displays, others trying to avoid the marauding Magnificent Frigatebirds and the rest simply swirling round in the sunshine. There were about 15 brown-morph Red footed Boobies on one small island, together with a lone white-morph bird whilst up to 25 Brown Boobies sheltered on the rocks. Sadly on the way down, we couldn't locate the recently-found Scaly-naped Pigeon on the hillside, but we had increased our tour total to 221 species. The evening drive back to Hummingbird went un-noticed by most of the group: almost everyone was fast asleep

Day 15: On our final morning at Bon Accord, the American Wigeon was still present otherwise just slightly lower numbers of the same stuff. There followed a short drive to Lowlands. On the main lagoon the sight of five small grebes with one a bit bigger got the pulses racing, but it was just mummy Least Grebe shepherding her young. The Belted Kingfisher looked on with total indifference. Once through the security checks, we wandered around a series of grass-fringed sewage lagoons. Here there were plenty of Least Grebes, a few Blue-winged Teals and White-cheeked Pintails. There is a line of tall dense trees at the back of the ponds and Lynda's eagle eyes picked out a preening Mangrove Cuckoo which remained in view for a full five minutes. That apart, the highlight was a nest with two very scrawny baby Green Herons sat therein, bills pointed upward.

So the birding on this tour ended with 221 species – just 2 short of the record set in 2002 – but hopefully great fun had by all.

Martyn Kenefick
Birdfinders