

Trinidad & Tobago

3-18 March 2001

Participants:

Connell & Anona Walford

Jane Farr

Leader:

Martyn Kenefick



Picture: Magnificent Frigatebird

Day 1: After a delayed flight, Connell, Anona and Jane arrived at Piarco Airport, Trinidad at 20.45. They were met by MK and transported to Pax Guest House, Mount St. Benedict. The other two anticipated members of the party were unable to make the flight. All there was time for was a late meal, a brief outline of tomorrow's activities and a well-earned sleep.

Day 2: Today was designed as a gentle introduction to Trinidad birding however, the adrenaline of the first day in a new country prevents a lie in! Martyn met the group at 06.15 for a pre-breakfast walk "up the hill from Pax". So good was the birding, we only reached 300 metres up the road before it was time to turn back. In the Vervain bordering the car park we had 5 species of hummingbird within the first fifteen minutes. Up to 8 Copper-rumped Hummingbirds were soon joined by females of both Ruby-topaz Hummingbird and Tufted Coquette, a further 2 female Black-throated Mangos and a pair of Blue-chinned Sapphires. Our first tanagers, Palm and Blue-grey, chattered noisily in overhead trees whilst Yellow Oriole and wintering Yellow Warbler from the US added a splash of colour and the cackle of low flying Orange-winged Parrots was almost continuous. As we reached the road, Greyish Saltators and Tropical Kingbirds vied for our attention whilst Great Kiskadees were calling their name from all sides. A dead tree set back from the road not only held 2 juvenile Yellow-headed Caracaras perched atop, but a male Lineated Woodpecker was working its way up the main trunk. A matching tree on the other side held two more tanager species, White-lined and the exquisite Turquoise whilst a male Barred Antshrike (Zebra in pyjamas) churred above our heads. 29 species in the notebook before the toast was ready. Once breakfast was finished, we spent just a short while looking out over the balcony at Pax, long enough to see a number of White-chested Emeralds diligently guarding their own "favourite" feeders from all potential visitors. We decided to walk the Parula trail on Mount St. Benedict before the sun got too hot and the forest took a siesta. Birding under the canopy was slow going but by late morning we had managed to find our 7th species of Hummingbird, a magnificent male Long-billed Starthroat. The flycatcher family was well represented with Tropical Pewee, Yellow-bellied Elaenia and Streaked Flycatcher showing themselves eventually whilst Rufous-browed Peppershrike and Tropical Parula added a touch of glamour. As always in the tropics, birding activity during the middle part of the day is at low ebb. We therefore relaxed on the balcony at Pax with American Black and Turkey Vultures constantly in the air. We enjoyed a rather tatty immature female Peregrine Falcon swooping along the tree line whilst closer to us a male Purple Honeycreeper (with bright yellow wellies) joined the resident Bananaquits at the feeders. A second forest trail walk during the late afternoon was rather quiet with just White-bearded and Golden-headed Manakins for our trouble. By 17.00 however, the sun was hitting just trees at "Top of the Mount" and there followed a vocal feeding frenzy. This involved both male and female Green Honeycreeper and Blue Dacnis, a family party of 4 Boat-billed Flycatchers and an extremely tame and approachable Brown-crested Flycatcher in a nearby Cercropia tree. As the day drew to an end, a Magnificent Frigatebird circled lazily around with the vultures and our first parties of Crested Oropendolas flew up the valley, presumably to roost. We did the same, heading for a well-earned rum punch and buffet dinner.

Day 3: Highlights of pre-breakfast birding this morning were a Tropical Parula found by Connell and Anona near Bennett Hall, and a most obliging Lineated Woodpecker drumming on a rotten branch beside the Pax car park. A 08.20 departure saw us heading towards the West Coast mangrove at Cacandee. Initially new birds came through quite quickly with Pied Water-tyrants, White-headed Marsh-tyrants, Carib Grackles and Bicoloured Conebills being particularly conspicuous. Walking the river path produced at least 3 different Common Black-hawks and an adult Yellow-headed Caracara, ever present Ospreys and our first Scarlet Ibis. However, for long periods the walk was very frustrating, as good birds were extremely shy and we had to slowly build the bird picture. A glimpse of an American Redstart here, always flitting out of view the Northern Waterthrushes

that were forever disappearing behind mangrove roots and Striated Herons, which called incessantly, but never, showed well. The three “star birds” were only seen by some of the party. A Green Kingfisher which flew low across the river and just kept on going into dense cover; the Trinidad Euphonias perching only momentarily in a dead tree by the sluice gates and, far rarer, a Rufous-necked Wood-rail which bustled across the floor of the mangrove, never to be seen again. Our next port of call, Caroni Ricefields, produced the target birds required; a light phased Long-winged Harrier quartering the fields and creating havoc amongst a party of Least Sandpipers, and a Limpkin flushed from a wet rice paddy. Amongst the parties of Snowy Egrets and Little Blue Herons were smaller numbers of Great White Egrets and Tricolored Heron and an adult Black-crowned Night-heron. We found small numbers of wintering waders with both “yellowlegs” and single Solitary Sandpiper and Common “Wilson’s” Snipe. Also present were resident Yellow-chinned Spinetails and both Red-breasted and Yellow-hooded Blackbirds. After lunch, Jane opted for a quiet afternoon birding around Pax and a cultural evening. The rest of us visited Aripo Agricultural Research Station. We quickly found our first Savannah Hawks perched atop dead trees; Wattled Jacanas feeding on lily pads and White-winged Swallows quartering the fields. We enjoyed excellent views of two local specialities, Cocoli Heron and Ruddy-breasted Seedeater along the main track and were able to get extremely close to feeding Least and Solitary Sandpipers. A family party of Yellow-chinned Spinetails perched up on barbed wire and proved that they do indeed have yellow chins! Moving back into the hills behind the livestock station, a male Barred Antshrike and a couple of Yellow-breasted Flycatchers were watched at very close range, as was a second Cocoli Heron flushed by our minibus from a roadside ditch. As dusk fell, we managed to find a Pinnated Bittern lurking furtively in the tall grass and an adult Peregrine Falcon roosting in a nearby tree. After dark, we spent a short while scouring the fields by torchlight. Several distant nightjars were almost certainly White-tailed, and we found our first Southern Lapwings frozen by our light beam. Whilst birding was definitely slow going at times, we added a further 46 species today bringing the cumulative total to 99 for the tour.

Day 4: A day of mixed fortunes; definitely quality as opposed to quantity. A very successful pre-breakfast walk “up the hill” to the beginning of the Alben Ride. This produced new flycatchers in the form of Forest Elaenia and Piratic Flycatcher, excellent views of Trinidad Euphonia perched atop mistletoe (thereby redressing the glimpse the previous day) and our now resident Lineated Woodpecker came even closer. The rest of the day was spent birding the Upper Arima Valley along the Blanchisseuse Road. A very hot day with a warm breeze, the tinderbox dry leaf litter being testament to the lack of rain. Beside the cryptophene fields we soon got to grips with differentiating Band-rumped from Grey-rumped Swifts and watched the tranquillity of nesting Crested Oropendolas being threatened by marauding Giant Cowbirds. Following a brief stop to view the Golden-headed Manakin lek where at least 4 males were calling, we birded the road from Morne Bleu to Las Lapas. It was mid morning and rather quiet. A White Hawk flew through the trees, Tropical Pewees sallied from low perches and Green Honeycreepers and Violaceous Euphonias augmented flocks of Bay-headed Tanagers. Star bird along this stretch was undoubtedly Speckled Tanager. Following several unsuccessful attempts to view distant calling Collared Trogons, we walked down into Las Lapas. An adult female Hepatic Tanager and a wintering Olive-sided Flycatcher made the walk worthwhile. After our picnic lunch, we slowly descended down to Brasso Seco junction. A perched juvenile Broad-winged Hawk was very obliging but it took a long while for all members of the group to get a good view of the Black-faced Antthrush calling from beside a fallen log deep in the undergrowth. The back end of the afternoon was spent overlooking the forest beside the Morne Bleu Tracking Station. New birds were very difficult to come by, but we did manage to find low flying light phased Short-tailed Hawks, more Speckled Tanagers and a second Olive-sided Flycatcher (these are very uncommon winter visitors to Trinidad). The tour list has now increased to 112

Day 5: Another hot, dry and rather humid day. The early morning walk above Pax produced many of yesterday's birds; female Ruby-topaz Hummingbird and Tufted Coquette, Forest Elaenias, Yellow-breasted Flycatchers and a light phase Short-tailed Hawk. Our primary destination for the morning was the lowland Arena Forest in central Trinidad. The small lake near St Raphael held yet another Cocoli Heron, American Purple Gallinule and Anhinga alongside the shoreline while Yellow-rumped Caciques fed noisily in overhead trees. We had to work hard to prize good birds out of the forest, but eventually we all managed excellent views of Zone-tailed Hawk and Plumbeous Kites soaring low overhead; Rufous-breasted Hermits that chased each other from one side of the path to the other and a female Red-crowned Ant-tanager. Other new birds for the trip were only seen by some included Rufous-breasted and Long-billed Gnat Wrens. Unfortunately Martyn was the only one to catch the male White-tailed Trogon and pair of Black-crested Antshrikes. Star bird however was a female Rufous-tailed Jacamar flitting from perch to perch quite close to the trail. Having left the forest by late morning, we attempted a “long shot” Bat Falcon in Cumuto Aripo Savannah (MK had seen it recently), sadly without success. After a relaxing lunch at Pax, we returned to the central lowlands. A brief “look in” at Trincity Ponds produced 7 Least Grebes, 4 Little Egrets (including two with full breeding plumes) and a couple of Black-necked Stilts. Moving further east, fields immediately before Wallerfield were busy with Yellow Warblers and we telescoped both adult Grey Hawk and Striped Cuckoo at our leisure. The Moriche Palms inside the disused airfield held at least 3 Sulphury Flycatchers and a magnificent flock of 45 Red-bellied Macaws. Whilst we were unable to find one of the Wallerfield specialities, Moriche Oriole, we enjoyed excellent views of another, White-tailed Goldthroats hovering in the long grass. Soon after nightfall. We were able to watch several White-tailed Nightjars flying along the edges of the runway, but pride of place must go to the Grey Potoo watched for nearly ten minutes flycatching and always returning to its favourite perch. What could better this? Well, how about the Tropical Screech-owl, found by Gerard, on an exposed branch in the mango tree outside the kitchen at Pax that made our dinner get cold!

Day 6: An excellent pre-breakfast birdwatch from the rear terrace at Pax where Grey-headed Kite, White Hawk and Giant Cowbird were all seen against a forested backdrop. We drove via Valencia onto the unpaved Cumaca Road and were rewarded with prolonged perched views through a telescope of a fine male Bearded Bellbird replete with extensive black wattles. There our good fortune ran out, a fuel starvation problem with the vehicle (caused by water in the gas tank when filling up) meant the excursion was abandoned, and we limped back to Pax. With alternative transport arrangements made, we drove west to the Waterloo tidal mudflats at lunchtime. Whilst there was an extremely high tide, we managed to add a number of sea and shore birds to the trip list including Willet and Hudsonian Whimbrel, Royal and Least Terns and a party of 40 graceful Black Skimmers. The walk along the coastal path to Brickhill was rewarded with an adult male Fork-tailed Flycatcher complete with “full tail”. The white on the real collar suggests this could be the race “monachus”, unusual in Trinidad (where Fork-taileds are summer visitors), but a scarce resident in Tobago. Our final destination was to witness the Scarlet Ibis roost in Caroni swamp. The late afternoon boat weaved through various narrow mangrove passages and we enjoyed our first Yellow-crowned Night-heron together with yet another Cocoli Heron, 2 Anhinga and a party of Willet and Short-billed Dowitchers. With luck, many but not all boat trips manage to find a Grey Potoo at its daytime roost - we found two, one of which was perched right out in the open. A nocturnal Silky Anteater all bundled up with its paws covering its eyes was a welcome find, not quite how Anona described the 2 Cook's Tree Boas high up in the trees! Our reptile list increased with an Iguana trying to hide under a fallen log. The roost itself contained approximately 200 each of Neotropic Cormorant and Snowy Egret, about 100 Tricolored Herons and perhaps 50 Little Blue Herons. The ibis were still flying in as dusk settled in, we certainly saw well over 500 but sadly Martyn was the only person to see the female Blue-winged Teal that flew across the back of the lagoon. After five days birding in temperatures well into the 90's F we have amassed a bird total of 150 species.

Day 7: Today was to be a “full moon day”, extreme tides. We therefore set off at dawn back down to Caroni swamp. As we arrived a male Peregrine Falcon shot across the road. Our pre breakfast walk was on the northern side of the Blue River. After about a mile we found a lagoon with exposed mud which, held a wealth of wading birds. Amongst the now familiar Snowy Egrets, Little Blue and Tricolour Herons and Scarlet Ibis was a pair of breeding plumaged Blue-winged Teals. Amongst a flock of about 25 Lesser Yellowlegs were at least 4 wintering Stilt Sandpipers. With Northern Waterthrush in the bushes along with a male Green Kingfisher. With both juvenile Common Black-hawk and Yellow-headed Caracara flying over, it was a very successful start to the day. We were to spend the rest of the day at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, via a brief stop overlooking the cryptophene fields once more to check out the swifts. The tone of the day was set when 2 magnificent Channel-billed Toucans flew low right over our heads, and perched briefly on an exposed tree in the valley. On arrival at Asa Wright, we found the balcony to be a hive of activity. Purple and Green Honeycreepers fought for their places with Cocoa and Bare-eyed Thrushes at the table feeders. The prevalent hummingbird was the immaculate White-necked Jacobin (with smaller numbers of Copper-rumped and White-chested Emeralds going almost unnoticed). Below the feeders, the rather tame Agouti and Golden Tegu Lizards mopped up the spilt offerings. A resident tour guide led the walk down the main kilometre long Discovery Trail. More “target birds” fell with excellent views of adult male Collared and White-tailed Trogons, another two male Bearded Bellbirds and a brief appearance of a female White-bearded Manakin. Whilst the group were down the trail, Martyn remained on the balcony where both Ruddy Quail-dove and Grey-fronted Dove put in an appearance. After a snack lunch, Anona and Connell joined Martyn in a walk back along the entrance road whilst Jane remained to enjoy the activity on the balcony. Being the hottest part of the day, the walk was a little quiet but we still managed to pull out an adult male Violaceous Trogon, Golden-olive Woodpecker, American Redstart and several Violaceous Euphonias. Whilst we were away a female Great Antshrike had been a visitor to the table feeder. No sooner had we returned to our seats than good birds started to appear. Firstly a pair of Grey-headed Kites were displaying (albeit distantly) further down the valley. A Little Hermit came into the flowering hedge beside the steps. An adult male Great Antshrike hopped from one table to the other (much to our relief) and a real star appearance, Chestnut Woodpecker partial to banana performing for the video. An excellent day, not only have we added considerably to the tour list (now standing at 162), more importantly we have enjoyed excellent views of target bird species.

Day 8: Following a farewell to Pax, we drove back down to the head of the Blue River at Caroni swamp and walked along the south bank. Birds were much more responsive than on previous days and we soon found two targets; Black-crested Antshrike and Straight-billed Woodcreeper as well as the more regular Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Yellow Warbler, Northern Waterthrush and Bicoloured Conebill. We then drove back down the Solomon Hochoy highway to Waterloo mudflats knowing that we would be hitting a low tide. From the shaded trees close to the Floating Temple an active calidris wader flock were largely made up of Western Sandpipers, but there were a good few Semi-palmateds amongst them to challenge our separation skills. We were able to make direct comparison between Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and have our first extensive look at the dumpy Short-billed Dowitchers. The two Least Terns from Thursday had gone, but a full adult summer plumaged Yellow-billed Tern was perched up on the roosting stakes in their place. We drove on further south to the Orange Valley along Bay Street where the main gull concentration appeared to be. Upwards of 1000 Laughing Gulls were resting on the mud. Amongst them were a scattering of Black Skimmers, a few Royal Terns, and an adult Lesser Black backed Gull of the race “graellsii” which is the race normally found in a UK summer and a single winter plumaged Gull-billed Tern. During the hottest part of the day (and today was the hottest of the tour to date) we made the long drive to the north east coast of Trinidad, and our base for the next three nights, to Jasmine's Ocean Resort just beyond the village of Rampanalgas. It was time to “chill on the veranda” and enjoy Magnificent Frigatebirds and Short-tailed Swifts - with a few Caribs of course- and freshen up with a well-earned swim in the pool.

Day 9: The day could not have started better. Whilst still standing in the hotel grounds looking out over the forest on one side and with the Atlantic shoreline on the other, 4 American Swallow-tailed Kites appeared and spent the next twenty minutes swooping low over and between the trees, no more than 100 metres from us. Adult Yellow-headed Caracara and Grey Hawk added further variety to our raptor list, and Magnificent Frigatebirds soared over the shoreline. Over breakfast, a fruiting tree beside the swimming pool attracted numbers of Yellow-rumped Caciques and the 4 common tanagers. Our first birding destination was back down the east coast road beyond Balandra. A single dead tree in a clearing beside the road and a series of large holes in the trunk heralded the territory (and nesting tree) of a pair of Crimson-crested Woodpeckers. We eventually saw both male and female at the nest hole, and the noise emanating from within indicated breeding success. Retracing our steps, we made another stop beside the road to watch two flowering Immortelle trees which, were alive with both Red-legged Honeycreepers and White-necked Jacobins amongst their rich orange blossom. Two parrots that flew between the trees were undoubtedly “Blue-headed”, but unfortunately only seen by Martyn. We headed north once more, passing Toco at the northeast tip of Trinidad and then further on in a now westerly direction along the north Caribbean coastline. At San Souci we stopped briefly to watch another colony of American Swallow-tailed Kites beside a busy “cacique tree”. Eventually we arrived at Grande Riviere, and we walked south along Montevideo Trace up to the Pawi viewing area. Whilst lunchtime will always be quiet in the forest, we managed to find Rufous-breasted Hermit, Blue Dacnis and a number of Red-legged Honeycreepers. At the summit, the mixed swifts flock included both Chestnut-collared and Lesser Swallow-tailed. Back in the minibus, we headed east to find a beach for lunch. En-route, we saw more American Swallow-tailed Kites and a superb Plumbeous Kite soaring low over the road. Having lunched close to San Souci we headed out to Galera Point (the most northerly point of Trinidad) and encountered our first rain of the trip. The rain worked, right at the tip we had a party of 7 White-collared Swifts swirling low over the lighthouse bushes! The rain stopped and within a minute, the swifts disappeared. Birds were then relatively thin on the ground, being now a hot sunny Sunday afternoon but, we still managed to find several Ruby-topaz Hummingbirds and numerous Yellow-bellied Elaenias. It was then a late afternoon drive back to Jasmines and time for a beer once the sun had sunk below the yardarm.

Day 10: Six species of raptor before breakfast this morning. American Swallow-tailed Kites had increased to 7 and they were swooping even lower, almost over our heads. A couple of Ospreys were fishing the shoreline first thing, and single Yellow-headed Caracara and Zone-tailed Hawk flew past. Of smaller fare, highlights were male Barred Antshrike and Ruby-topaz Hummingbird. Today’s journey took us down the east Atlantic coastline. At Balandra we came across a close perched Plumbeous Kite and near Matura, a Lineated Woodpecker flew across the road. Our first main stop was on Brigand Hill, the easternmost peak of the Central Range. We managed to drive the steep 1km track to the summit and then climb on foot up to the light station which afforded a spectacular view over the Nariva swamp and Cocos Bay encompassing over one million coconut palm trees. Looking back over the forest, the only perched bird visible was another Plumbeous Kite and we had a number of Southern Rough-winged Swallows circling below us. The walk back down was slow birding, but we did attract a mixed feeding flock by “Pygmy Owling” which included Tropical Parula, American Redstart, Purple Honeycreeper, White-bearded Manakin and Long-billed Gnatwren. Slightly lower down we managed to glimpse a male Red Howler Monkey before it disappeared back into the canopy. We retraced our steps back to the Eastern Main Road and continued on to Manzanilla beach, for lunch and a swim. The early afternoon was spent slowly driving along Cocos Bay Road seeking out perched raptors whilst they shaded themselves from the fierce sun. We found several Yellow-headed Caracaras, a couple of Common Black-hawks, single Osprey and Savannah Hawk but pride of place went to the Pearl Kite perched on overhead wires right beside the road. Shortly before the Nariva river estuary, we stopped and spent the rest of the afternoon in the adjoining mangrove. Quality birds here included a flock of Green-rumped Parrotlets, single wintering Prothonotary Warbler, American Redstart and Northern Waterthrush and resident Red-rumped Woodpecker and Silvered Antbird. The long drive back up the east coast to Jasmines produced several more perched raptors, but only species seen earlier in the day.

Day 11: A 05.30 start today, driving back along the north coast road to Grande Riviere arriving at the Pawi viewing area on Montevideo Trace shortly after dawn. Thanks to the keen eyesight of the local resident warden, a Trinidad Piping-guan was found quite quickly, feeding in a dense nutmeg tree. As if on cue, it flew up right into the open and performed at length for all. Almost at the same time, two more new species for the trip were on view; a pair of Black-tailed Tityras and a couple of Scaled Pigeons. An excellent start to our last day in Trinidad. At the edge of the clearing, a flowering Immortelle held about a dozen Red-legged Honeycreepers, several White-necked Jacobins and a fine male Blue Dacnis put in a brief appearance. After a “packed breakfast” we walked over the ridge and down a partly forested track to the river “Grande Riviere”. We were able to “call in” a fourth new species; White-flanked Antwren and both Little Hermit and male Barred Antshrike were seen by the path. Further down the trail, more “Pygmy Owling” produced Forest Elaenia, Tropical Pewee, Rufous-breasted Wren, Golden-headed Manakin and Tropical Parula. The slow and rather tiring walk back up to the ridge was helped by a good display of soaring raptors. A White Hawk was accompanied by 2 Common Black-hawks whilst 2 American Swallow-tailed Kites were seen, some way off. Much closer to us, Jane found a perched adult female Merlin which posed through the telescope right out in the open. Back at the top, we were just about to board Ivan’s bus when an adult Grey-headed Kite hopped up onto an exposed branch, posed for a few minutes and then flew right at us. We decided to spend our last hour of birding on Galera Point. On the way we finally found one of our “common misses” a Grey Kingbird on wires beside the road, and the regular American Swallow-tailed Kites at Sans Souci were soaring well. Out on the Point, it was dry and very hot with birds thin on the ground. We found a Pale-

vented Pigeon and a couple of Boat-billed Flycatchers in the lighthouse bushes, but the only other notebook entry was a flyover Giant Cowbird. Back at Jasmynes there was time for a final swim, a beer, lunch and then the speedy drive to Piarco airport to catch our inter-island turbo prop Dash 8 flight to Tobago. Cynthia, the manageress of Speyside Inn, was at Crown Point airport to meet us, for the ninety minute drive across Tobago. Having settled into our rooms, and whilst everyone else was either unpacking or showering, Connell found 4 Rufous-vented Chachalacas in the garden beside his balcony. We had spent ten days birding Trinidad and managed to find 187 species - a successful tally bearing in mind the hot and more importantly exceeding dry conditions prevailing which made finding birds much more difficult.

Day 12: Before breakfast some of us walked along the coast road in Speyside and onto the access road to Blue Waters. Anona managed to catch up with the chachalacas before we even set off! We quickly found a few of the commoner Tobago specialities: Scrub Greenlet, Black-faced Grassquit and Caribbean Martin. However much more glamorous was the White-fringed Antwren which, flicked across the track. We also enjoyed excellent views of a couple of species we had seen only briefly on the larger sister isle; Brown-crested Flycatcher and Pale-vented Pigeon. A Broad-winged Hawk caused quite a flutter as it soared over the treetops, and male Ruby-topaz Hummingbird and Green Kingfisher put in brief appearances. As we walked back to the hotel, an adult Yellow-crowned Night-heron stared at us but refused to budge from its patch of grass beside the stream. After breakfast, we took a taxi to the top of Flagstaff Hill and walked back down to Speyside. Whilst Blue-crowned Motmots frustrated us by calling from inside deep cover, we managed to add Red-crowned Woodpecker, Buff-throated (Cocoa) Woodcreeper, Chivi (Red-eyed) Vireo and Fuscous Flycatcher to our tour list. Raptors are generally scarce in Tobago, but we did have a brief of a Great Black-hawk gliding low over the treeline, Broad-winged Hawk and Osprey. Around the creek beside the Blue Waters bridge, both Green Heron and (the same) Yellow-crowned Night-heron were perched in full view. After lunch, we boarded our glass bottomed boat for the twenty five minute crossing to Little Tobago. As we passed Goat Island, our first close Red-billed Tropicbirds screamed overhead. Having disembarked, the winding forest trail up to the seabird viewing platforms produced excellent views of one of our main target birds; Blue-crowned Motmot. Together with several Brown-crested Flycatchers and a Northern Waterthrush. Most of the time on the island was spent looking out from the two viewpoints. Red-billed Tropicbirds were ever present in the air, some passing within feet of us but, despite a concerted effort, we were unable to find the White-tailed Tropicbird that had been putting in occasional appearances. Amongst the large numbers of Brown Boobies, we found two pairs of dark morph Red-footed Boobies in close proximity to nests with fluffy white chicks. There was a single white morph bird which, flew passed us on several occasions, but was never in view for long. The return boat journey concentrated on the coral reef fishes and some of the passengers managed to glimpse a Small Hawks-bill Turtle (sitting starboard was OK - sitting port, meant you dipped!). Back on land, Connell watched a Great Blue Heron fly across the bay

Day 13: A 07.00 departure this morning for the Central Range rainforest, and our primary stop, Gilpin Trace. A very successful slow walk down the main trail produced most of the area specialities. Yellow-legged Thrush (looking rather like a European Blackbird), Blue-backed Manakins and, rarest of all, 2 adult male White-tailed Sabrewings were seen well by all. This particular trail is good for birds that can be tricky in Trinidad (especially when it is dry). Sure enough, we added White-necked Thrush and Striped-breasted Spinetail to our tour list. A splash of colour was represented by good numbers of Blue-crowned Motmots, a pair of Collared Trogons, single Rufous-tailed Jacamar and a Golden-olive Woodpecker. We finally had excellent views of three really common birds which had been either elusive or entirely absent all tour; Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Buff-throated Woodcreeper and Rufous-breasted Hermit. Having taken a late breakfast on a hill top overlooking Bloody Bay, we returned briefly to the forest, along Nilpin trail on the other side of the road. Apart from close perched manakins and the ubiquitous Barred Antshrikes, a notable entry was originally unidentified. Anona and Martyn briefly saw a small passerine, acting rather like a spadebill, which was basically olive green but with a conspicuous orange/rufous (female Black-crested Antshrike colour) crown and a broad white eye ring. With puzzled expressions we made our way back to Guys maxi taxi. Just as we reached the road, our final new bird of the morning popped up into view; Venezuelan Flycatcher. Whilst very similar to the slightly larger Brown-crested Flycatcher, the rufous edges to the retrices are much more subdued, the bird is darker, greyer and duller with a less substantial bill. (Subsequent discussion in Trinidad concludes that our mystery bird was in fact a female Plain Antvireo with a brighter than normal crown area and much more conspicuous eye-ring). Jane chose not to join us this afternoon. Initially we walked along the coast road to Blue Waters bridge. A party of chachalacas fed noisily in the dry scrub, an immature male Barred Antshrike showed well with its copper edges to the tertials and on the green Yellow-crowned Night-herons were still present. We then drove back towards the Central Range. Along the valley towards Kings Bay, a party of 3 Broad-winged Hawks soared over, and yet another crossed the road further on. Back in the forest, we again enjoyed exceptionally close views of adult male manakins and Yellow-legged Thrushes. While the sun was still strong, we slowly drove the length of the central ridge in the hope of a late flying Great Black-hawk which, had eluded Anona but sadly, without success. However, on the return journey back down, we did obtain excellent views of adult male Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, Connell's first. An excellent and very successful day in Tobago rainforest. The only speciality we missed was Olivaceous Woodcreeper, we had to make do with one calling from way back in the forest, well off trail.

Day 14: A 07.30 departure this morning to drive the length of the island - taking breakfast en route. Our aim was to look at various fresh water areas in the south west. Our first (and most productive) stop was the private Lowlands sewage lagoons where special access permission had been obtained. Here we had flocks of 21 Blue-winged Teal and 18 White-cheeked Pintail

together with smaller numbers of Great Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper and Bonin Pinnacled Grebe. We then moved onto the marsh behind the beachfront at Buccoo which, was largely dry. Again both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, together with Hudsonian Whimbrel and Spotted Sandpiper, were seen at close range but the wintering Western Reef-heron had evidently gone. At sea, there were large numbers of Laughing Gulls and Brown Pelicans plus a few Royal Terns. On the "off chance" of an early Brown Noddy, we drove on to the headland at Plymouth overlooking Turtle Bay beach. Again, a few Royal Terns, but nothing new. A last port of call was made to Bon Accord sewage lagoons. Here there were 8 Least Grebes and over 20 Southern Lapwings but the anticipated Black-bellied Whistling-ducks failed to appear. The lunchtime drive back to Speyside produced 3 Rufous-tailed Jacamars on the wires, but little else. During the afternoon, we revisited Little Tobago aboard the "Fear Not" glass bottomed boat and again enjoyed the spectacle of literally hundreds of Red-billed Tropicbirds circling around in front of us. We found a parent bird obviously sitting on eggs right beside the path which, seemed totally oblivious of our presence and, a chick further down the slope anxiously awaiting both parent and dinner. Back out on the headland, both Brown and Red-footed Boobies were again seen on their respective nests; Browns on nest ledges like Guillemots and Red-footed in the tops of stunted trees. As the sun set, the bird tour was over, a total of 213 species had been found including 23 out of Connell's 27 target hit list.

Day 15: A relaxed morning for packing and relaxing followed by a the late morning drive back to Crown Point in time to check in for the JMC return flight to London

Day 16: Arrival back in the UK at the end of the tour.