

Trinidad & Tobago: Land of the Hummingbird

January 11-21, 2018

Detailed Itinerary

Thursday 11 January—Arrival in Trinidad

Today you arrive in the lovely tropical island of Trinidad. A driver will meet you at the airport and drive you to the world-famous Asa Wright Nature Centre (AWNC). If you arrive during daylight, you'll have an opportunity to start adding new birds to your list immediately.

Friday 12 January—Asa Wright Nature Centre

This morning you'll awaken to the clattering courtship ritual of the Crested Oropendola and a host of other exotic sounds. Before the sky begins to brighten, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls will be chanting, hopefully right outside your window. Soon you'll be greeted by the raucous calls of Great Kiskadee and a host of other exotic sounds. You never know what life birds you might pick up on the short walk from your bungalow to the Main House for breakfast. The Asa Wright Nature Centre is renowned for the ease with which birds can be observed. You could easily see 20 or more life birds from the veranda, including Guianan Trogon, Channel-billed Toucan, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, Purple and Green Honeycreepers, and four kinds of tanagers, including the plush Silver-beaked Tanager. As you explore the sinuous entrance drive, you'll see plenty of new species, examine the fascinating world of leaf-cutter and army ants, and photograph orchids and other tropical flora. After enjoying a plentiful lunch buffet, you'll continue to explore the AWNC grounds and take a hike through the spectacular rainforest that covers much of this rich and diverse wildlife sanctuary. You'll search for the highly ventriloquial Bearded Bellbird and watch White-bearded and Golden-headed Manakins on their leks. After dinner, those who are so inclined may participate in a night foray along the entrance drive.

Saturday 13 January— Eastern Trinidad

On this day you'll travel to Trinidad's east coast and the Nariva Swamp, the largest freshwater herbaceous swamp in Trinidad. Along its edges are found palm 'islands', where the tall *Moriche* palm is common. Here, too, you'll see a unique mangrove community composed primarily of stilt-rooted *Rhizophora* mangroves, which often reach heights of 80 feet. But first you'll visit the Aripo Livestock Station, where target species will include Savannah Hawk, Southern Lapwing, Wattled Jacana, Green-rumped Parrotlet, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, and Red-breasted Meadowlark.

Arriving at the Atlantic coastal plain, you'll have an opportunity to view Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans while you enjoy lunch on the beach. Beyond this point, Pinnated Bittern, Wattled Jacana, herons, and egrets populate the shallow marshes, with Limpkin seen from time to time. In the Nariva Swamp proper, you'll explore the tall wild rice, rushes, hyacinth, and other aquatic vegetation for a variety of species. Nariva is a particularly productive spot for raptors. In late afternoon you'll head back north to Waller Field, a former U.S. airbase, to observe Fork-tailed Palm-Swift, Sulphury Flycatcher, and Moriche Oriole in a stand of Moriche palms. If you are very fortunate, you might see Red-bellied Macaw here, and as darkness fall, you might hear or see Common Pauraque.

Sunday 14 January— Northern Range

Today sees you on an excursion across the Northern Range as far as the hamlet of Morne La Croix, where en route you'll explore the upper Arima Valley and Morne Bleu. In the heights you'll look for Speckled Tanager, Common Black Hawk, White Hawk, all three species of trogons, and Blue-headed Parrot, along with species missed on previous days. You'll be alert for foraging groups that usually include Golden-headed Manakin, Blue Dacnis, Yellow-breasted and Slaty-capped Flycatchers, Tropical Parula, and Long-billed Gnatwren and for fruiting fig trees that attract thrushes and other fruit-eating species. In late afternoon you'll head back to the Asa Wright Nature Centre, where you can continue to explore, relax in the cool freshwater pool, relax on the very birdy veranda, soak in the ambiance of this wonderful locale, or choose to join an optional night trip to see nocturnal species such as Tropical Screech-Owl and White-tailed Nightjar.

Monday 15 January—West Coast

This will be a day of contrasts as you examine many coastal habitats. Today's journey will take us to the Gulf of Paria, which comprises Trinidad's western boundary. Trinidad's West Coast contains the most productive mudflats on either island. The eastern Gulf of Paria is a magnet for rarities, having produced American Flamingo, Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Kelp Gull, Pomarine Jaeger, Rufous Crab-Hawk, and Trinidad's only Maguari Stork to date. Target species include Neotropic Cormorant, Yellow-headed Caracara, Pearl Kite, Long-winged Harrier, nine species of herons and egrets, Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns, migrant shorebirds, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Green Kingfisher, Masked Cardinal, Black-crested Antshrike, Bicolored Conebill, Yellow-hooded Blackbird, and Greater Ani.

Tuesday 16 January— Oilbirds and Ibis

After breakfast you'll walk about a half a mile through a beautiful montane rainforest on a quest for a single species of bird. In the beautiful riparian Guacharo Gorge, you'll stand beside a shallow stream to observe the world's most accessible colony of Oilbirds, which nest deep in the cave. This rare bird is the only nocturnal, fruit-eating species known to navigate by echolocation.

After lunch you'll head to the lowlands, stopping at the Caroni rice fields and then at Caroni National Park. The Caroni Basin is a very specialized habitat that hosts three species of mangroves, which show classic examples of plant adaptations in this unique brackish community. You'll join experienced guide Darren Madoo in one of his very stable flat-bottomed boat for your exploration of this area. Target species include all regularly occurring herons and egrets, Scarlet Ibis, Limpkin, Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns, a wide variety of raptors and shorebirds, Mangrove and Little Cuckoos, Common Potoo, Green Kingfisher, Green-throated Mango, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Black-crested Antshrike, Masked Cardinal, and Bicolored Conebill. You'll also seek Amazon (Cook's) Tree Boa, Spectacled Caiman, Green Iguana, and Silky Anteater. In the channels you'll look for the curious Four-eyed Fish (*Anableps*).

The highlight of the day, if not the trip, will be the spectacular evening flight of Scarlet Ibis returning to their roosts in the mangroves. This is truly one of the world's most dramatic natural

moments, one you'll enjoy as you sip your rum punch or fruit juice and enjoy the confections sent along from Asa Wright.

Wednesday 17 January—Southern Tobago

Early this morning, you'll catch a 20-minute flight to Tobago's petite Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson International Airport. You'll spend the morning birding southern Tobago, the only flat part of the island, visiting all the hotspots. Target species include Least Grebe, White-cheeked Pintail, Anhinga, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Mangrove Cuckoo, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Tropical and Gray Kingbirds, White-fringed Antwren, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Caribbean Martin, Spectacled Thrush, and Black-faced Grassquit.

After enjoying lunch at the Grafton-Caledonia Bird Sanctuary, you'll explore the grounds, looking especially for species found on Tobago but not on Trinidad -- Rufous-vented Chachalaca, White-fringed Antwren, Blue-backed Manakin, and Scrub Greenlet. As evening approaches, you'll head north to the secluded Cuffie River Nature Retreat, your home for the next three nights. Many people who have stayed at Cuffie River rate it as their all-time favorite lodge. We hope you will, too!

Thursday 18 January—Tobago: Main Ridge Reserve and Little Tobago Island

Today's birding begins with a drive to at an elevation of almost 2,000 feet to explore one of the world's most beautiful rainforests. The Tobago Main Ridge Forest Reserve is the oldest wildlife sanctuary in the Western Hemisphere. You'll stop at promising locations in the cool mountain heights while scanning the area for target birds including Great Black Hawk, Orange-winged Parrot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Collared Trogon, Stripe-breasted Spinetail, Venezuelan Flycatcher, Yellow-legged Thrush, Blue-backed Manakin, Red-legged Honeycreeper, and Rufous-breasted Hermit hummingbird. You'll explore primeval Gilpin Trace, which rambles through a deep, narrow, pristine ravine. Gilpin Trace is home to the endangered White-tailed Sabrewing hummingbird.

After enjoying a packed lunch in the heights, you'll drop to sea level and catch a glass-bottomed boat in Speyside. You'll travel two miles across Batteaux Bay, observing along the way a magnificent coral reef that hosts the world's largest brain coral, locally called "Einstein." Passing cactus-festooned islets, you'll arrive at uninhabited, starfish-shaped Little Tobago Island. Also called Bird-of-Paradise or Ingram's Island, Little Tobago is a protected nature reserve. Because of the lack of fresh water, no permanent settlements have ever been established here. The climax semi-deciduous dry forest that you'll explore appears the same now as it did to the first human visitors millennia ago.

Your visit to Little Tobago Island is certain to be a highlight of your trip. Here you'll seek endemic Tobago races of Blue-gray Tanager and Bananaquit, larger and brighter than those found in Trinidad, and the recently colonized Scaly-naped Pigeon. You'll peer into tunnels under *Anthurium* root masses looking for nesting Audubon's Shearwaters and view Red-billed Tropicbird and Brown and Red-footed Boobies before returning to Cuffie River.

Friday 19 January—Cuffie River Nature Retreat

Everyone enjoys a free day on Tobago, so today you can relax, continue birding with your expert guide, or engage in optional snorkeling or sightseeing trips. Those who choose to stay at Cuffie River are invited to embark on a morning hike along the Cuffie River Trail, where the target birds include Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Blue-backed Manakin, and other Tobago specialties including Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, Collared Trogon, Red-crowned Woodpecker, and White-fringed Antwren. After enjoying a late lunch at Cuffie River, you'll have the afternoon free for more birding, splashing in the magnificent elevated swimming pool, hiking the trails, or relaxing on your veranda. The hummingbird feeders in front of the lodge often host the rare White-tailed Sabrewing hummingbird!

Saturday 20 January—Cuffie River Nature Centre, Adventure Farm, flight to Trinidad

On your last full day of the tour, you'll enjoy a relaxing morning and lunch at Cuffie River. Luggage packed and loaded, you'll travel to the unique Adventure Farm, where owner Ean Mackay has created a hummingbird haven. See rainforest birds appear out of nowhere at the sound of a gong! Late in the afternoon you'll bid farewell to Tobago and return via a 20-minute flight to Trinidad. Overnight at a hotel near the Trinidad airport.

Sunday 21 January— Departure

Your fabulous journey to the tropics concludes today as you board your homeward flight at Trinidad's Piarco International Airport.
