



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO BIRDING ADVENTURE

6 - 16 DECEMBER 2019



Red-bellied Macaw should be seen on our tour of Trinidad and Tobago.

This tour serves as a wonderful introduction to the birds of South America, probably the most diverse and exciting birdlife on earth. Our relaxed and easy-paced Trinidad and Tobago birding tour stays at only two locations, the world-renowned Asa Wright Nature Centre on Trinidad, probably one of the finest wildlife lodges around, and our superb lodge on Tobago.

There are many amazing highlights on this tour: enjoying wave upon wave of **Scarlet Ibis** at twilight, visiting a colony of the bizarre **Oilbird**, motmots, hummingbirds, and honeycreepers right from our balcony, night-time excursions for nightjars and potoos, antbirds, jacamars, and woodcreepers along the ASA Wright nature trails, not to mention agoutis, tropical butterflies, and flowering plants, as well as a glass-bottom boat trip over a beautiful coral reef, a favorite with birders and naturalists everywhere!

Itinerary (11 days/10 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Trinidad

Our Trinidad and Tobago birding tour begins at Trinidad's Piarco Airport, where you will be met and transferred to the Asa Wright Nature Centre, where we will be based for the next week.

Days 2 - 7. Asa Wright Nature Centre and Lodge

During our time here we explore the grounds and nature trails that radiate from the lodge and also take day trips to the many excellent birding localities in Trinidad. The Asa Wright Nature Center is located in a valley of Trinidad's Northern Range. These impressive valleys host several plantations (cocoa, coffee, citrus), many active but several abandoned. The abandoned plantations have now been taken over by secondary growth, especially vines and epiphytes (air-plants) and are surrounded by impressive rain forest. It is in this setting that we begin our birding adventure.

We spend the first day familiarizing ourselves with the local birds - **Hummingbirds**, such as **White-necked Jacobin**, **Black-throated Mango**, and the superb **Tufted Coquette**, **Honeycreepers**, including **Purple** and **Green**, and **Tanagers**, including **Bay-headed**, **Silver-beaked**, **White-lined**, and **Turquoise**. Along the entrance road to the center there is a nesting colony of noisy **Crested Oropendolas**, their long, pendulous nests a conspicuous feature of the tall trees of the entrance road. From the large veranda we have a fine view over the Arima Valley, and this is often an excellent spot to see such fabulous birds as **Ornate Hawk-Eagle**, **White Hawk**, and the vividly-colored **Channel-billed Toucan**. Along the aptly-named Bellbird Trail we hope to track down **Bearded Bellbird**, whose loud ringing "bok" call is a characteristic sound of the center. We will ensure that we visit the lek sites of both **White-bearded** and **Golden-headed Manakins**, which are within easy reach of the center, while it is worth keeping an eye out overhead for **Blue-headed** and **Orange-winged Parrots**, which often fly over the center. The undergrowth will be investigated for calling **Great Antshrike** and **Squirrel Cuckoo** as well as for **Black-faced Antthrush** whistling from dense ground cover.

During our stay at the center we will visit a cave where a colony of the strange, almost bat-like **Oilbirds** reside. **Oilbirds** are close relatives of nighthawks and nightjars; however, unlike their relatives, their diet does not consist of flying insects but rather strictly of fruit, and they have adapted to nesting in caves. We will have a guide take us to the cave, who will ensure we minimize any disturbance to the birds.

On one of our days at the center we travel through some of the island's most scenic mountains and highest rainforest (not to mention numerous waterfalls!) when we take the road from Arima to Blanchisseuse on the Caribbean coast. Along this drive we have a chance to see many higher-elevation species. All three species of **Trogons** (**Collared**, **Green-backed**, and **Guianan**) occur in this area, as do **Speckled Tanager**, **Little Tinamou**, **Golden-crowned Warbler**, **Trinidad Motmot**, **Lilac-tailed Parrotlet**, and an array of raptors, including **Common Black Hawk**, **Grey Hawk**, **Grey-headed** and **Swallow-tailed Kites**, and **Bat Falcon**. At the highest point along the road, at 595 meters, we look for **Yellow-legged Thrush** and **Blue-capped Tanager**, and with a lot of luck we may see the elusive **Spectacled Owl**. Walks along the various rainforest trails could produce a flock of ant-associated birds such as antwrens, antvireos, and woodcreepers, and perhaps **Streaked Xenops**. We end a fantastic day having seen a wide diversity of birds as well as some spectacular scenery!

In contrast to the lush rainforests of the Northern Range we also visit the Aripo Savannas and the long-abandoned United States airfield at Wallerfield. These are two of the very few remaining natural savannas in Trinidad, and birding can be extremely productive. The Aripo Savannas are a seasonally wet grassland with a high diversity of open-country species. **Pearl** and **White-tailed Kites** frequent this area, as do **Yellow-headed Caracara** and **Savanna Hawk**. Fruiting trees in the area will be investigated for feeding **Red-bellied Macaws**, or perhaps we will see them flying overhead as they move between feeding areas. The stunning **Ruby-topaz Hummingbird** occurs here, and we have a good chance of finding it. **Yellow-rumped Caciques** occur here too as well as an array of **Flycatchers**, including **Sulphury** and **Bran-colored**. However, our biggest target here is the extremely rare **Moriche Oriole**; we will make a special effort for this species.

Since its abandonment the Wallerfield airbase has become somewhat overgrown, which means that it now plays host to an impressive array of bird species. **Southern Lapwing** and **Wattled Jacana** occur in pastures, while all three species of locally-occurring hermit hummingbirds can be found here too. The shrubby vegetation holds **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**, **Barred** and **Black-crested Antshrikes**, and **Blue Dacnis**. In the taller vegetation **Black-tailed Tityra** and **Yellow-breasted Flycatcher** occur, and if there is standing water nearby then **White-headed Marsh Tyrant**, **Pied Water Tyrant**, and **Yellow-chinned Spinetail** may also be present. We will hopefully encounter some night birds during our walks, including **Pauraque**, **White-tailed Nightjar**, and perhaps **Common Potoo**.

An evening excursion to the Caroni Swamp is high on the agenda of most naturalists visiting Trinidad. The event is truly spectacular! Every evening around 5 p.m. large flocks of wading birds fly in to join the impressive roost, and the activity continues until after sunset. Egrets, herons, and especially **Scarlet Ibis** congregate in their hundreds in the mangroves, presenting a fine show of reds and whites against the dark-green background of the mangroves – a truly unforgettable spectacle! The boat trip into the Caroni Swamp passes through prime mangrove habitat, where **Boat-billed Heron** and **Common Potoo** occur and where we have a chance of seeing **Dark-billed** and **Mangrove Cuckoos**, **Straight-billed Woodcreeper**, **Greater Ani**, **Bicolored Conebill**, and **Masked Cardinal**. The channel borders will be scanned for several species of herons and bitterns, including **Rufescent Tiger Heron** and **Pinnated Bittern**, rails and crakes, and whistling-ducks. We will also be on the lookout for a number of raptor species which hunt in the area, including **Long-winged Harrier** and **Aplomado Falcon**. We should hopefully encounter a school of four-eyed fish during the boat trip; these well-adapted fish have their eyes divided into upper and lower halves; the upper half protrudes above the surface of the water looking for predators with the lower half underwater looking for food.

The Nariva Swamp is a large triangular-shaped area along the east coast of Trinidad, which provides ideal habitat for wading birds, rails, raptors, and **Manatees!** **Yellow-hooded Blackbird** breeds here, and two striking black-and-white flycatchers can easily be found, **Pied Water Tyrant** and **White-headed Marsh Tyrant**. The swamp is also the best place on the island to find **Silvered Antbird**, **Red-bellied Macaw** and **Orange-winged Parrot** fly overhead between the larger stands of vegetation, and there may be **Guianan Red Howler Monkey** and **Humboldt's White-fronted Capuchin** in the large trees. During our time around Nariva Swamp we should also encounter **Red-breasted Meadowlark** and **White-tailed Kite**.

Days 8 - 10. Tobago

Birding on Tobago is very different to birding on Trinidad; the island is small enough that a short visit is sufficient to visit the important birding areas, much of the agricultural land is reverting back to secondary-growth habitat, and there are no biting mites (chiggers), which means walking in tall grass is not discouraged. We will visit the central highlands and mangrove swamps and will also take a boat ride to Little Tobago Island. Here on Tobago we will be targeting those species not found on Trinidad, which include **Rufous-vented Chachalaca**, **Striped Owl**, **White-fringed Antwren**, **White-tailed Sabrewing**, **Blue-backed Manakin**, **Scrub Greenlet**, and **Black-faced Grassquit**. Some species are more abundant on Tobago than on Trinidad, and we have a good chance of locating **Yellow-legged Thrush**, **Venezuelan Flycatcher**, **Stripe-breasted Spinetail**, **Great Black Hawk**, and, most importantly, **Trinidad Motmot**. Seabirds are the main attraction on Little Tobago Island, with the highlights including **Brown** and **Red-footed Boobies**, **Magnificent Frigatebird**, and the elegant **Red-billed Tropicbird**.

Day 11. Departure

Today our Trinidad and Tobago birding tour comes to an end when we leave Tobago in the morning for our flight back to Trinidad. From here we catch our flights back home in the afternoon.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Duration:	11 days
Group Size:	2 – 12 (We have a higher limit for this than for most tours.)
Date:	6 - 16 December 2019
Start:	Piarco Airport, Trinidad
End:	Piarco Airport, Trinidad
Price:	US\$4975 per person

Single Supplement: US\$490

Price includes:

Return flight between Trinidad and Tobago

Meals

Accommodation

Guiding fees

Entrance fees

All transport while on tour

Tolls

Price excludes:

All international flights

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts

Alcoholic drinks

Personal insurance

Gratuities

Medical attention