

Trinidad & Tobago: Incredible Birds & Wildlife

With the Tucson Audubon Society



June 21-30, 2023

With TAS Host Jennie MacFarland

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Experience Trinidad and Tobago, the best introduction to tropical birding possible, with Jennie McFarland on a special departure for the Tucson Audubon Society. Trinidad, with its proximity to Venezuela, offers a number of South American species (Caroni Marsh, with its daily Scarlet Ibis Spectacular, is an iconic destination in itself), while Tobago feels entirely different—classic Caribbean. Combined, these islands provide a variety of habitats that yield dramatic diversity. In many ways it feels like two vacations in one!

Within our journey, we have three nights each at two nature lodges, offering a nice pace of travel. We start at the Hilton Hotel in Port of Spain, located close to the city's botanical gardens, Queen's Park Savannah, and a row of architectural heritage buildings known as the Magnificent Seven. We make an overnight trip to the island's northeastern corner, in search of endemics and specialties. We then travel up into the mountains to stay at the famed Asa Wright Nature Centre, immersed in nature. Enjoy the contrast of the mountains of the Northern Range and the best of tropical lowlands before taking the short flight over to Tobago where we end at the delightful Cuffie River Nature Retreat, where an endemic Trinidad Motmot may greet you at the swimming pool.

Spend time with toucans, trogons, manakins, colorful tanagers, elegant seabirds, and more. See over a dozen species of dazzling hummingbirds including the tiny Tufted Coquette and the brilliant Ruby Topaz. In Trinidad's northeastern corner at Grand Riviere, witness the spectacle of nesting Leatherback Turtles and a chance to see endemic Trinidad Piping Guan.

Please note we will do all activities outlined in this itinerary but may adjust day to day to be flexible to weather or birding opportunities.

Tour Highlights on Trinidad

- Bird in varied habitats from savanna to mangroves, lowland forest to mountain terrain
- Enjoy big vistas and the iconic Bearded Bellbird up in the mountains of Trinidad's Northern Range
- Dine in a local village known for making quality chocolates and great birding
- Discover intimate views and potential photos of birds at gardens in selected lunch stops, with brilliantly colored hummingbirds, honeycreepers, tanagers, toucans, and more
- Discover the enigmatic Oilbird roosting at Dunstan Cave in Trinidad's Northern Range
- See the amazing spectacle of nesting Leatherback Turtles
- Find the tiny Tufted Coquette and other species of hummingbirds

Tour Highlights on Tobago

- Arrive to a frenzy at Cuffie River Resort's feeders, perfect for observation and photography and a great place to see the beautiful Ruby Topaz
- Enjoy creative tropical architecture; let the breeze be your ventilation in this peaceful mountain retreat.
- Take a swim—from the pool watch Trinidad Motmot, Rufous-vented Chachalaca, and Orange-winged Parrot
- Marvel at dinner guests that may include (just outside) a White-tailed Nightjar or Common Potoo

- Visit Tobago's historic Main Ridge Forest Preserve and Little Tobago Island with experienced, local guides, followed by a boat ride to land and observe seabirds on Little Tobago Island

Tour Summary

10-Day / 9-Night Trinidad Birding Tour

\$4690, from Port of Spain

Arrival Airport is Piarco International (POS)

Departure Airport is Tobago-Crown Point Airport (TAB)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Wednesday, June 21 Welcome to Trinidad!

Welcome to Trinidad! Upon arrival at Piarco International Airport, you are met at the airport. Enjoy three nights at Port of Spain's Hilton Hotel with some excellent dining opportunities. Those arriving in time can enjoy a walk at the city's botanical gardens. Tropical air greets you as well, and the adventure begins. Meet your guides and travel companions at a welcome dinner.

Accommodations at Port of Spain's Hilton Hotel (D)

Thursday, June 22 Coastal Birding | Cultural Sites | Scarlet Ibis of Caroni National Park

Today we head over to the Gulf of Paria and bird the shorelines for this morning's outing. From February to November large numbers of both Yellow-billed and the striking Large-billed Terns are present while from mid-April to October breeding Collared Plover can be found. Many of the shorebirds found in Trinidad are passing migrants. During the appropriate seasons, resident birds are augmented in varying numbers by Wilson's Plover, Spotted, Solitary, Pectoral, White-rumped, and Stilt Sandpipers, American Golden Plover, and occasionally Hudsonian Godwit. The shallow waters of the Gulf of Paria provide a haven from inclement weather and the list of rarities in this area is substantial. It includes the only Maguari Stork, Terek Sandpiper, and both Kelp and Greater Black-backed Gulls. In some years near Carli Bay, we can find rare resident Rufous Crab-Hawk.

Also of significant interest, is the beautiful Hindu Temple of the Sea, in view from our birding areas and well worth a visit. Additional cultural sites can be added to this day as time allows but we aim to be at the dock to catch our boat in Caroni no later than 4 PM, perfect timing for the spectacle of Scarlet Ibis coming to roost and more.

To see Caroni National Park in the most intimate way, we bird by boat (watch for Ruschenberger's Tree Boa and Silky Anteater, too), then moor up at a quiet spot in the mangroves to let the sunset show begin. Hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of Scarlet Ibis cloud the sky as they fly into an island to roost. Tonight's experience is one you won't soon forget, often rated among the world's top birding spectacles.

Accommodations at Port of Spain's Hilton Hotel (B,L,D)

Coastal Bird Highlights

Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Pelican, Neotropic Cormorant, Great and Snowy Egrets, Little Blue and Tricolored Herons, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Black-necked Stilt, Southern Lapwing, Willet, Hudsonian

Whimbrel, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Semi-palmated and Black-bellied Plovers, Short-billed Dowitcher, Laughing Gull, Royal Tern, and Black Skimmer

Bird Highlights on the Caroni Outing

Long-winged Harrier, Yellow-hooded Blackbird, Bicolored Conebill, Masked (Red-capped) Cardinal, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Green-throated Mango, Northern Waterthrush, Anhinga, Striated Heron, White-cheeked Pintail, Large-billed Tern, Pied Water-Tyrant, Black-crested Antshrike, Common Potoo, Scarlet Ibis

Friday, June 23 Aripo Agricultural Station | Nariva Swamp | Trinidad's Atlantic Coast | Leatherback Turtles at Grand Riviere

This morning, after breakfast, we head out for a full but rewarding day, first visiting the nearby Aripo Agricultural Station and then heading on to Nariva Swamp. The station has a series of ponds and water canals and open savannah that makes it fun to explore while providing some interesting new species.

As the day warms up, we leave here to drive east, then stop for seabird sightings on the beach at Manzanilla. Magnificent Frigatebird and Brown Pelican are the most likely species.

Driving down "Coconut Alley" leads us through beachside habitats before we enter Nariva Swamp. Raptors often perch up on long lines of palms. Here, the Nariva River reaches the sea; freshwater environments of herbaceous swamp and mangrove swamp forest make for spectacular birding. There are some fascinating mangrove habitats to scan from the road and we make several stops along the way. Pygmy Kingfisher and Silvered Antbird are secretive species we hope to find.

After a picnic lunch, we head up to Grand Riviere, to settle into our beachside accommodations. This beach has some of the highest nesting density of massive Leatherback Turtles known. In June there are still adults laying eggs, as well as juveniles hatching. We get settled and may even see the first few as we dine.

This evening we walk out onto the beach to witness with spectacle with guides from a local conservation group. *Accommodations at Grand Riviere (B,L,D)*

Bird Highlights at the Aripo Agricultural Station

Great Kiskadee, Tropical Kingbird, Carib Grackle, Short-tailed Swift, Cocoi Heron, Savannah Hawk, Gray-headed Kite, Yellow-headed Caracara, Wattled Jacana, Southern Lapwing, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Fork-tailed Palm-Swift, White-winged Swallow, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Pied Water-Tyrant, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Red-breasted Meadowlark, Grassland Yellow-Finch, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater

Gazing out to Sea

Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Pelican, Leach's Petrel (rare)

East Towards Nariva

Common Black-Hawk, Yellow-headed and Crested Caracaras, Savannah Hawk, Pearl Kite, Gray-lined Hawk, Plumbeous Kite, Green and American Pygmy Kingfishers, Black-crested Antshrike, Silvered Antbird, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Pinnated Bittern, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Purple Gallinule, Yellow-hooded Blackbird,

White-tailed Goldenthrout, Long-winged Harrier, Yellow-crowned Parrot, Red-bellied and Blue-and-yellow Macaws.

Saturday, June 24 Trinidad Piping Guans at Grand Riviere | El Suzanne Rainforest Lunch | Asa Wright Nature Center

At dawn, if you are up early you can see the last of the Leatherbacks turning back to the sea, a beautiful time to photograph them. We are up early anyway to make an effort to see the endemic Trinidad Piping -Guan. Trinidad's northeast corner at Grand Riviere is a stronghold for this endangered species. We have an excellent chance to find them there at a local estate where their favorite food plants, including Wild Nutmeg trees regularly attract them. While endemic Trinidad Piping Guan, known locally as Pawi, lure us to this side of the island there are some other excellent forest birds to see here as well. If making this effort is not your thing, no worries, enjoy a lovely relaxing morning at the Hilton.

We pack up our gear late morning, and for lunch stop in at the hospitable El Suzanne Rainforest Lodge. Enjoy a locally sourced lunch and search out more key birds. Nestled in the Tamana Rainforest and bounded by the Cumuto River (a tributary of the Caroni), this hidden gem features forest birding alongside a large, comfortable terrace and dining area. The photographers among our group love this stop!

From here we head up into the mountains above Arima to step out onto the famed verandah of the Asa Wright Nature Centre to see a grand view and great cast of avian wonders. Many flowering and fruiting trees planted around the Centre grounds help bring species in. Settle into your accommodations, then enjoy tea and rum punch served with the birds as you watch the sunset.

Accommodations at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, Arima (B,L,D)

Bird Highlights at Grand Riviere

Trinidad Piping Guan, Southern Lapwing, Lilac-tailed Parakeet, Gray-headed and Plumbeous Kites (in season), White Hawk, Bat Falcon, Lineated and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, Grayish Saltator, Silvered and White-bellied Antbirds, Black-tailed Tityra, Trinidad Euphonia, mixed flocks of colorful tanagers

Sunday, June 25 Trails at the Asa Wright Nature Centre | Oilbirds of Dunstan Cave

Today we have the full day to enjoy the wonderful ambiance of the Asa Wright Nature Centre. The grounds and trails have a host of excellent food plants for birds, and our guides know where to find the best activity. We plan to bird the trails and the quiet winding driveway leading into the property as well as to spend some time with guides on the verandah.

With a three-night stay at the Centre, we hope to be able to visit Dunstan Cave, one of Trinidad's major colony sites for Oilbirds, a unique species in that it is a nocturnal, fruit eating bird. This colony has been monitored for many years. Enjoy a chance to learn about their ecology and conservation. The trail to the cave is steep in some locations, so wear secure footwear especially in wet conditions. We take it at a birder's pace and if you are not up to it, feel free to enjoy free time on the verandah or grounds at your leisure. There is also a nice freshwater pool for those that want to take a cooling swim!

Accommodations at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, Arima (B,L,D)

Monday, June 26 Birding Trinidad's Northern Range | Blanchisseuse Road from the Asa Wright Nature Centre | Brasso Seco Village

Today we pack up and head into the mountains. Our scenic, day-long excursion takes us high into the Northern Range on the Blanchisseuse Road. Stately trees arch over the shaded road and views from overlook points are grand. We make frequent birding stops and enjoy a local lunch in the picturesque village of Brasso Seco (with four or fewer participants a picnic lunch is provided). We continue through the mountains to the village of Morne la Croix to enjoy watching parrots fly in to roost.

Today also offers the opportunity to examine other species, perhaps the strange world of leafcutter and army ants or bright colored land crabs catch your eye. The abundance of tropical life surrounds you—observe or photograph butterflies, orchids, and other tropical flora.

In the afternoon we arrive at Trinidad's famed Asa Wright Nature Centre and settle into our cottages. Enjoy a fine view off of the Verandah with possible sightings of the Bearded Bellbird, a signature species of the property. Rum punch is served at sunset and dinner is served in their spacious dining room. After dinner, enjoy an evening presentation or possibly a night walk to see nocturnal species

Accommodations at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, Arima (B,L,D)

Bird Highlights of the Northern Range

Swallow-tailed Kite, Common Black Hawk, Bat Falcon, Collared Trogon, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Bearded Bellbird, Channel-billed Toucan, Trinidad Piping Guan, Short-tailed Hawk, Streaked and Euler's Flycatchers, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Blue-headed Parrot, Lilac-tailed Parrotlet, Orange-winged Parrot, Collared Trogon, Golden-olive, Red-rumped, and Chestnut Woodpeckers, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Stripe-breasted Spinetail, Cocoa and Plain-Brown Woodcreepers, Dusky-capped and Slaty-capped Flycatchers, Rufous-breasted Wren, Long-billed Gnatwren, Golden-fronted Greenlet, Speckled and Hepatic Tanagers, Yellow-rumped Cacique

Tuesday, June 27 Yerettê Hummingbirds | Flight to Tobago | Cuffie River Nature Retreat

Enjoy some optional early morning birding on our lodge grounds. After breakfast, start the day with a special treat—visit the hummingbird retreat called Yerettê, "Home of the Hummingbird." Located in the Maracas Valley, this private home and lush garden attracts up to 14 of the 18 species of hummingbirds found in Trinidad and Tobago. A photographer's delight, hummingbirds gather at the feeders and native vegetation by the tens to hundreds depending on the time of year.

In the afternoon we head for the idyllic (scenic!) island of Tobago. It's a short 25 minute flight from the Port of Spain airport's domestic terminal, and Jason Radix, our excellent naturalist for this part of the journey is there to greet us. Settle into your spacious rooms at the Cuffie River Nature Retreat and catch the daily fly-in of Orange-winged Parrots and more as the sun goes down.

Local food is just delicious here and evening meals are a treat. If we are lucky night birds such as Common Potoo may appear in the lights of the lodge as we dine!

Accommodations at the Cuffie River Nature Retreat (B,L,D)

Birds of Yerettê

Copper-rumped, White-chested Emerald, Blue-chinned Sapphire, White-necked Jacobin, Black-throated Mango, Long-billed Starthroat, Ruby Topaz, Tufted Coquette, Green Hermit, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Little Hermit, Brown Violetear, Rufous-shafted Woodstar, White-tailed Sabrewing hummingbirds

Common at Cuffie's Feeders

White-tailed Saberwing, Ruby Topaz Hummingbird, White-necked Jacobin, Bananaquit, Spectacled Thrush, Barred Antshrike, Common Potoo

Wednesday, June 28 Cuffie River Trails & Adventure Farm | Wetland Birding

In keeping with Tobago's laid-back vibe, today is easy-going. In the morning we explore a nature trail close to the lodge, walking from the entry with the lodge's expert guide, Desmond Wright. While we never move faster than a birder's pace, the trail is up and down small hills, so a walking stick may be handy.

Return to the lodge for a delicious lunch and brief rest before traveling off site to Adventure Farm, a delight for birders and the culinary-inclined. The farm is a mix of varietal fruit trees rimmed by natural forest. Enjoy a winding trail through the property spending time at fruit and hummingbird feeders. Tropical Mockingbird provide a serenade. This location is a favorite for photographers.

Keep your binoculars handy as we may have time for some wetland birding stops. Walk around well-placed ponds that attract ducks, wading birds, and possible Spectacled Caiman. We always add several species as we explore.

Be sure to be at a good viewpoint for sunset, as hordes of parrots, parrotlets, and noisy chachalacas fly here to roost—quite a spectacle! After dark, check the driveway's streetlight for night birds.

Accommodations at Cuffie River Nature Retreat (B,L,D)

Cuffie River Bird Highlights

Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White-tailed Sabrewing, Blue-backed Manakin, Yellow-legged Thrush, Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Ruby Topaz Hummingbird, Collared Trogon, Red-crowned Woodpecker, White-fringed Antwren, Orange-winged Parrot, Fuscous, Yellow-breasted, and Venezuelan Flycatchers, Caribbean Martin, Scrub Greenlet, Common Potoo, White-tailed Nightjar

Wetland Bird Highlights

Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Green and Tricolored Herons, White-cheeked Pintail, Least Grebe, Southern Lapwing, Eared Dove

Thursday, June 29 Gilpin Trace on Tobago's Main Ridge Preserve | Little Tobago Island from Blue Waters Inn

We have an early breakfast and head out for our drive high into the mountains in the historic Tobago Main Ridge Forest Reserve, the world's oldest legally protected forest. Scientific American once said that "the protection of Tobago's Forest was the first act in the modern environmental movement." In 2022, UNESCO

named much of Northeast Tobago part of a new [Man and the Biosphere Reserve](#).

Tobago's montane forests are home to 210 species of birds. On a trail into the forested interior, we look for several elusive species, including White-tailed Sabrewing, a large hummingbird once thought to be extinct. Sabrewings were rediscovered after hurricanes caused extensive forest damage in the 1960s.

We also seek out Blue-backed Manakin, Yellow-legged Thrush, and other Tobago specialties, including Red-crowned Woodpecker and White-fringed Antwren. After a satisfying walk, we then travel through vibrantly colored hillside villages to the dock at Blue Waters Inn, where we board a glass-bottom boat for a pleasant cruise to Little Tobago Island. The island, one of the country's most significant wildlife sanctuaries, offers incredible views of plentiful and rare seabirds, both from the boat and by walking a trail up to a lookout point on the island, where Tropical Dry Forest occurs.

Leaving the island (if sea conditions are right), the captain takes time to look for colorful fish and possible Hawksbill Sea Turtle as we pass a former coral garden off Goat Island. The Atlantic side of the island has experienced extensive coral bleaching and while it's still excellent for divers, snorkeling is not what it once was.

After a long but fulfilling day, we head back to our delightful digs and another delicious meal at Cuffie River Nature Retreat. Tonight is our farewell dinner and we share highlights, favorite birds, and favorite moments of the journey.

Accommodations at Cuffie River Nature Retreat (B,L,D)

Main Ridge Forest Reserve Bird Highlights

Trinidad Motmot, Collared Trogon, White-tailed Sabrewing, Blue-backed Manakin, Yellow-legged Thrush, Red-crowned Woodpecker, White-fringed Antwren, Plain Antvireo, White-throated Spadebill, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Stripe-breasted Spinetail, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Rufous-breasted Wren

Around Little Tobago Island

Brown Noddy, Red-billed Tropicbird, Red-footed and Brown Boobies, Sooty Tern, Chivi Vireo, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Pale-vented Pigeon, Roseate and Bridled Terns, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Audubon's Shearwater sitting in its burrow (if we're lucky).

Friday, June 30 Departures

After a filling breakfast, bid farewell to Tobago. We arrange drivers for you to connect to the flight you schedule. **International flights MUST be booked out today AFTER 10:00 AM.** You need to leave time for the inter-island flight back to Port of Spain. Book the flight from Tobago to coordinate with your outbound International; the first flight out is typically 7:00 AM and they usually run about every hour. If your flight is later in the day – great! You can enjoy a relaxing morning at the lodge. If you see an early morning international flight that you want, you can enjoy the day at Cuffie River Nature Retreat, go back to an airport hotel (additional cost) in Port of Spain late in the day, and fly out the next day. Regardless of when you go, you need time in Port of Spain to collect luggage and check in with your international carrier. **The 10:00 AM rule is firm.**

Your departure time is confirmed the night before with the front Desk to arrange your return transfer. Late check-out may be available for you for an additional fee, to be arranged with the front desk at the time of your visit. Luggage can be stored if you plan activities ahead of later flights. (B)

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with [Allianz Travel Insurance](#). As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

The cost of this journey is \$4690 DBL / \$5390 SGL per person, from Port of Spain, departing Tobago Crown Point. Tour cost is based on double occupancy and includes all accommodations; meals as specified in the itinerary, group airport transfers, professional guide services, local park and other area entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. The deposit for this tour, made payable to Naturalist Journeys, is \$750 per person; please contact their office for registration.

Cost does not include transportation to Trinidad or from Tobago, or items of a personal nature like laundry, telephone charges, portage, maid gratuities, or beverages from the bar.

Pace of the Journey & Guides

This is an itinerary focused on birding with some nice cultural elements added in. At all locations, the lodges are pleasant places to bird and explore at leisure if you do not want to participate in the trips away. To fully participate you should be able to get in and out of vehicles multiple times a day with ease, walk 1-2 miles over uneven terrain, and have a flexible attitude towards the weather – this is a tropical rainforest so there will be a need to adjust birding at a time to let rains pass by. We support local guides and conservation with our visit.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive into Port of Spain's Piarco International Airport (POS) at your convenience on June 21. Plan to depart from Tobago's Crown Point airport (TAB) **after 10:00 AM** on June 30. Most likely you will book a round trip ticket to POS, and then add a Caribbean Airlines segment from TAB to POS to meet up with it. The short Caribbean Air segment is easy to book on their website. Make sure to leave time to pick up your luggage from Tobago, then recheck it with your international carrier – best if you have two hours minimum for this as the only airline Caribbean Airlines will transfer luggage to is Caribbean Airlines. As the first flight leaves Tobago around 7AM, we have the 10:00 AM rule in place for that reason. If you are on the late flights out, you can enjoy additional time to relax or bird on Tobago – our hotel can store luggage and provide meals for that time (additional cost for meals). Please check with us that the tour is confirmed before confirming flights.

Photo Credits

Channel-billed Toucan, Steve Wolfe; Ruby Topaz Hummingbird, Doug Greenberg; Purple Honeycreeper, Peg Abbott; Trinidad Motmot, Doug Greenberg.

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