

Trinidad & Tobago: Incredible Birds & Wildlife

A Custom Journey with Delaware Nature Society



November 8-17, 2023

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Experience Trinidad and Tobago, the best introduction to tropical nature and birding on the planet, with a special 10-Day/9-night Trinidad and Tobago 2-Island journey organized and led by Jim White with local island experts for a memorable Delaware Nature Society tour.

Trinidad, with its proximity to Venezuela, offers a variety of birds not usually seen on an island (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.

As a bonus, in time for this custom tour for Jim White and Delaware Nature Society we are pleased to announce the reopening of the Asa Wright Nature Centre Lodge which has been closed over the pandemic. Our tour will feature three lodges, for three nights each, keeping logistics simple so you can be immersed in tropical nature.

Spend time with toucans, trogons, manakins, colorful tanagers, tegu lizards, agoutis, elegant seabirds, and more, based out of three locations: the Hacienda Jacana and the Asa Wright Nature Centre on Trinidad, and the delightful Cuffie River Nature Retreat on Tobago.

Please note we will do all activities outlined on this itinerary but may adjust day to day to be flexible to weather or birding opportunities. *Our group will be 10-12 persons, please note that single accommodations are possible but limited.*

Tour Highlights on Trinidad

- Experience outstanding birding from cozy cottages at Hacienda Jacana and the Asa Wright Nature Centre as our base for exploring the mountains, savanna, and mangroves of Central Trinidad
- Enjoy big vistas up in the mountains of Trinidad's Northern Range
- Explore habitats from savanna to mangroves, lowland forest to mountain terrain
- 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
- Witness skies turned crimson with thousands of Scarlet Ibis coming in to roost in Caroni National Park as you glide through mangroves on a quiet boat ride
- Find the tiny Tufted Coquette and up to 14 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
- Watch migration in action, we look for the first returning Ruby Topaz, a stunning hummingbird
- 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

\$4990 DBL / \$5785 SGL, from Port of Spain

Arrival Airport is Piarco International (POS)

Departure Airport is Tobago-Crown Point Airport (TAB)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Wednesday, November 8: Welcome to Trinidad!

Welcome to Trinidad! Upon arrival at Piarco International Airport, you are met at the airport. Drive to your lodgings for the next six days at the delightful Hacienda Jacana. Tropical air greets you as well, and the adventure begins.

Nestled into nature, Hacienda Jacana's two-room casitas with kitchen and living room surround a small pond. Even from your porch the birding is terrific! This nature oasis has just four casitas and a few rooms in the main estate house, so our groups stay small (7 – 10). Meals are catered and feature local, delicious Caribbean and "Trini" cuisine. The Hacienda is in an ideal location to start our adventures and field trips and away from the bustle of Port of Spain.

Note: If your flight arrives late, consider arriving a day early (additional cost), and enjoy an unscheduled morning. We recommend a local Guest House with a view of the city for added time. Our guides meet all flights the tour start date, and pick up at the Pax Guest House.

Accommodations at Hacienda Jacana (D)

Birds at Hacienda Jacana

Copper-rumped Hummingbird, Gray-cowled Wood-rail, White Hawk, Green-backed Trogon, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Streaked Flycatcher, Violaceous Euphonia, Crested Oropendola, Yellow Oriole

Thursday, November 9: Aripo Agricultural Station | Nariva Swamp | Trinidad's Atlantic Coast

After an early breakfast, we depart for a full day of birding, first at the Aripo Agricultural Station and then 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 a picnic lunch and seabird sightings on the beach at Manzanilla. Magnificent Frigatebird and Brown Pelican are the most likely species.

Close to Nariva 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. 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. A highlight is a visit the Bush Bush area to look for Trinidad's Red Howler Monkeys.

Accommodations at Hacienda Jacana (B,L,D)

Bird Highlights at the Aripo Ag Station

Great Kiskadee, Tropical Kingbird, Carib Grackle, Short-tailed Swift, Cocoli 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

Friday, November 10: Coastal Birding | Cultural Sites | Night Birding

Today we head over to the Gulf of Paria and explore 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. Learn more about this fascinating ecology as the system is heavily influenced by outflow from the great Orinoco River in Venezuela.

Also of significant interest, is the beautiful Hindu Temple of the Sea, a spiritual and cultural site of great beauty. Additional cultural sites such as the Hanuman Statue are nearby where you can learn more about Trinidad's Hindu heritage and its national cultural diversity before we head back to the Hacienda for lunch and a break.

Then this evening, we depart about 4:00 PM for an exciting night bird excursion, complete with your rum punch and hot dinner in tow. An unused airfield is the first birding stop (pre-sunset), then to a grove of palms that attract Red-bellied Macaw and Moriche Oriole. Next, we set out on a slow drive with lights for spotting night birds.

Accommodations at Hacienda Jacana (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

Night Bird Outing Highlights

Fork-tailed Palm-Swift, Sulphury Flycatcher, Moriche Oriole (rare), White-tailed Nightjar, Common Pauraque, Common Potoo, Tropical Screech-Owl, Barn Owl, Spectacled Owl (if we're lucky!)

Saturday, November 11: The Nature of Trinidad's Northern Range | The Asa Wright Nature Centre

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. This mountain range is an extension of a range of mountains that runs across northern South American, most recently connected during the Pleistocene.

In the afternoon we arrive at Trinidad's famed Asa Wright Nature Centre and settle into our cottages. Enjoy a fine view off 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 (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

Sunday, November 12: 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 (B,L,D)

Monday, November 13: Yerettê Hummingbirds | Scarlet Ibis of Caroni National Park

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. Our visit includes a lunch featuring local foods—enjoyed with the birds!

From here, we depart for Caroni Swamp, birding along the way, training our scopes on some agricultural fields. To see Caroni National Park, 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.

We return to the Centre for a late-seating dinner and wonderful sounds of the tropical night.

Accommodations at the Asa Wright Nature Centre (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

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

Tuesday, November 14: Morning at Asa Wright Nature Centre | Flight to Tobago | Cuffie River Nature Retreat

Enjoy a morning to explore an additional trail at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, to learn more about tropical plants and their varied adaptations. Many fruiting and flowering trees are also around the cottages, and we appreciate the intricate relationships of their pollinators.

Late morning, we will collect luggage, have lunch and then depart for Piarco Airport and your flight to Tobago. Lunch is in route. Check in at the airport is quick, and so is the 25-minute afternoon flight!

Once you land in Tobago, local expert birding guide, Jason Radix, greets you in his air-conditioned bus. Welcome to the distinctly Caribbean and laid-back Tobago. You make a few stops for birding, so keep your sunscreen, hat, and binoculars at hand. We then travel through vibrantly colored hillside villages to the Cuffie River Nature Retreat. Once you arrive, enjoy the late afternoon to stroll the grounds, take a dip in the pool, or just relax.

Cuffie River Nature Retreat is a small inn; please ask the staff for any needs such as tea, beer, or wine, a pool towel, etc. Dinner is announced daily, usually at 7:30 PM. Food is local and specially prepared, so relax and enjoy this wonderful dining experience! Perhaps we see and hear a Common Potoo right outside the dining area as you linger over dessert.

Accommodations at Cuffie River Nature Retreat (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

Common at Cuffie's Feeders

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

Wednesday, November 15: 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, November 16: 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, November 17: 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 as soon as possible; the first flight out is typically 7:00 AM and they usually run about every hour. If you see an early morning international flight that you want, you can enjoy the day at our nature lodge, go back to an airport hotel (additional cost) in Port of Spain 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](#).

Cost of the Journey

The cost of this journey is \$4990 DBL / \$5785 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.

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 natural history and birding with some nice cultural elements added in. The pace is set to allow time for nature observation. 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.

A Note on Single Rooms

This tour has limited single availability. At Hacienda Jacana (three nights) singles have a private bedroom in a two bedroom casita, with a shared bath in the hallway between them.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive into Port of Spain's Piarco International Airport (POS) at your convenience on Nov. 8, 2023. Plan to depart from Tobago's Crown Point airport (TAB) **after 10:00 AM** on Nov. 17, 2023. 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.

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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