This past June 14-24, a group of nine birders and photographers (TAS President Joe Barros, along with Kathy Burkhart, Ann Wiley, Barbara and Ted Center, Nancy and Bruce Moreland and Lori and Tony Pasko) joined me for Tropical Audubon’s birding tour to Trinidad and Tobago. We were also joined by Mark Lopez, a turtle-monitoring colleague of Ann’s, for the first four days of the tour. The islands, which I first visited in 2008, are located between Venezuela and Grenada, at the southern end of the Lesser Antilles, and are home to a distinctly South American avifauna, with over 470 species recorded. The avifauna is sometimes referred to as a Whitman’s sampler of tropical birding, in that most neotropical bird families are represented on the islands by at least one species, but never by an overwhelming number, making for an ideal introduction for birders with limited experience in the tropics. The bird list includes two endemics, the critically endangered Trinidad Piping Guan and the beautiful yet considerably more common Trinidad Motmot; we would see both during our tour.

Upon our arrival in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago’s capital, we were met by the father and son team of Roodal and Dave Ramlal, our drivers and bird guides during our stay in Trinidad. Ruddy Ground-Dove, Gray-breasted Martin, White-winged Swallow and Carib Grackle were among the first birds encountered around the airport. We were immediately driven to Asa Wright Nature Centre, in the Arima Valley of Trinidad’s Northern Range, our base of operations for the first seven nights of our tour. After settling into our rooms, we gathered on the nature center’s veranda, which not only provided spectacular views of the surrounding valley, but was also buzzing with activity at the many hummingbird and fruit feeders. Common visitors to the hummingbird feeders included White-necked Jacobin, Black-throated Mango, White-chested Emerald and Copper-rumped Hummingbird. Hummers seen feeding in the surrounding gardens would eventually include Rufous-breasted, Little and Green Hermits, Blue-chinned Sapphire and the diminutive and adorable Tufted Coquette.

Other birds commonly seen or heard from the veranda during our stay included Orange-winged Parrot, Barred Antshrike, Forest Elaenia, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Tropical Kingbird, Tropical Mockingbird, Spectacled Thrush, White-lined, Blue-gray, Palm and Silver-beaked Tanagers, Bananquit, Blue Dacnis, Green Honeycreeper, Crested Oropendola, Yellow Oriole and Violaceous Euphonia. Less frequently seen were Scaled and Pale-vented Pigeons, Gray-fronted Dove, Channel-billed Toucan, Lineated Woodpecker, Piratic Flycatcher, Black-tailed Tityra, Turquoise and Bay-headed Tanagers and Purple Honeycreeper. Sightings were not limited to birds: Red-rumped Agoutis and Tegu lizards were also frequently seen around the nature center. On our last full day at Asa Wright, an immature Fork-tailed Flycatcher was photographed from the veranda, a possible first sighting for the nature center!

Asa Wright has an extensive trail system, which we explored on several occasions, either with guides or on our own. During our first foray down the popular Discovery Trail, we found all three of Trinidad’s trogons: Green-backed, Guianan and Collared. Other birds found along the trail include Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Giant Antshrike, Streaked Flycatcher, Cocoa and White-necked Thrushes and Red-crowned Ant-Tanager. A Common Potoo was discovered at its day roost in a bamboo stand along the trail; this bird was found at the exact same spot on all subsequent visits. Both Golden-headed and Bearded Manakins were easily seen at their trailside leks; these birds became popular photographic subjects for our group. The ventriloquial calls of Bearded Bellbirds,
said to resemble the sound of a hammer striking an anvil, rang throughout the forest, but these birds proved to be more of a challenge to actually see. Eventually, we spotted one, and then another, high in the forest canopy. Later in the week, we hiked the trail to Dunston Cave, the most well known Oilbird roosting location on the island. Listening to the otherworldly calls of these strange nocturnal birds as we entered the cave was an unforgettable experience. In addition to the Oilbirds, we also found a Chestnut-collared Swift on a nest at the cave entrance.

Asa Wright’s half-mile paved driveway, covered either while driving to or from the nature center or while on foot, added several species to our trip list, including Common Black-Hawk, Trinidad Motmot, Gray-throated Leafloesser, Streaked Xenops, White-flanked Antwren, Golden-fronted Greenlet and Long-billed Antwren. Many more were added along Blanchisseuse Road, which bisects the Northern Range and leads to higher elevations north of Asa Wright. Species tallied during roadside stops included Little Tinamou (heard only), Swallow-tailed Kite, Short-tailed, Zone-tailed and Gray-lined Hawk (the latter a recent AOU split from Gray Hawk), Squirrel Cuckoo, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Short-tailed Swift, **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**, Golden-Olive Woodpecker, Stripe-breasted Spinetail, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Silvered (heard only) and White-bellied Antbird, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Euler’s Flycatcher, Tropical Pewee, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Southern Rough-winged Swallow, Rufous-breasted Wren, Speckled and Swallow Tanagers, Red-legged Honeygriever, Sooty and Blue-black Grassquits, Tropical Parula, Golden-crowned Warbler, Grayish Saltator, Yellow-rumped Cacique and Trinidad Euphonia.

The tour included several day trips with Roodal and Dave to other parts of Trinidad. One evening, we drove to Matura Beach, on the island’s east coast and one of the world’s largest leatherback turtle nesting sites. It was an unforgettable experience: not only did we witness nesting by several leatherbacks, but we also had the good fortune to find a nest where tiny hatchlings were just emerging from the sand! Another day, we left Asa Wright pre-dawn and headed to Grand Riviere, on the north coast and the most reliable location to see Trinidad Piping Guan. Not long after we arrived, a piping guan was spotted at the top of a distant tree. It was eventually joined by two more of these critically endangered birds. Other birds found here included Plumbeous Kite and Crimson-crested Woodpecker. Grand Riviere is also a major nesting location for leatherback turtles; sadly, we learned soon after we returned to Florida that many of the turtle nests on that beach were inadvertently destroyed by heavy equipment being used to prevent beach erosion.

Several of our day trips were devoted to lowland areas south of the Northern Range. One morning was spent at Aripo Agriculture Research Station, where water buffalo are raised. Birds seen here included Striated Heron, Pinnated Bittern, Long-winged Harrier, Savannah Hawk, Purple Gallinule, Southern Lapwing, Wilson’s Snipe, Wattled Jacana, Green-rumped Parrotlet, Smooth-billed Ani, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Pied Water-Tyrant, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Grassland Yellow-Finch, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater and Yellow-hooded and Red-breasted Blackbirds. On another morning, we covered areas north of the research station, where we found Striped and Little Cuckoo, Bran-colored Flycatcher, Rufous-browed Peppershrike and Masked Yellowthroat. At Aripo Savannah, we added White-winged Becard. We returned to the research station yet another night for some after-dark birding. Both vans saw **Tropical Screech-Owl**
and Common Pauraque, but only one van spotted a White-tailed Nightjar. That van also witnessed Rooldal’s rescue of a fledgling screech-owl that was stuck in a fence. A torrential rainstorm, complete with thunder and lightning, cut short our birding for the evening.

Other areas visited included Manzanilla Beach and Nariva Swamp, on the east coast, where we found Yellow-headed and Crested Caracara, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Black-crested Antshrike and Lesson’s Seedeeater. Red-shouldered Macaw, Fork-tailed Palm-Swift, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Sulphury Flycatcher and Moriche Oriole were all seen in Moriche Palm habitat at Wallerfield, an abandoned US military airfield. A boat trip at Caroni Swamp, home to Trinidad’s national bird, the Scarlet Ibis, was scheduled for our last evening in Trinidad. On the way, we stopped at Yerette, the home of Gloria and Theo Ferguson, where up to thirteen species of hummingbirds visit their feeders. We quickly added two new hummers to our trip list: Green-breasted Mango and the spectacular Ruby-topaz Hummingbird. We were also treated to a presentation of Theo’s breathtaking hummingbird photographs. The highlight at Caroni, of course, was the seemingly endless parade of Scarlet Ibis coming in to roost for the night. Other sightings during our boat ride included Ringed Kingfisher, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Northern Scrub Flycatcher, Bicolored Conebill and Masked Cardinal, plus a few each of Cook’s Tree Boa, Silky Anteater and Four-eyed Fish.

Our last three nights were spent on Trinidad’s sister island, Tobago, reached by a quick fifteen-minute flight from Port of Spain. We were met at the airport by Gladwin James, our Tobago driver and guide, who drove us by bus to Blue Waters Inn, at the opposite end of the island. Along the way, we visited wetland areas where we added a number of new birds, including Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, White-cheeked Pintail, Masked Duck, Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Least Grebe, Neotropic Cormorant, Eared and White-tipped Dove, Mangrove Cuckoo, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Caribbean Martin, Black-faced Grassquit and Giant Cowbird. The Blue Waters Inn, located right on the beach in a beautiful secluded cove on Tyrrels Bay, has added many new amenities, including an infinity pool, since my last visit. The birding around the grounds was also quite good. Rufous-vented Chachalaca roamed the grounds in search of fallen mangoes, and Trinidad Motmot and Rufous-tailed Jacamar were common sights along nearby roads. Other birds found in the vicinity of the lodge included Rufous-breasted Hermit, Black-throated Mango, Ruby-topaz Hummingbird, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Barred Antshrike, White-fringed Antwren, Yellow-breasted and Fuscous Flycatchers and Scrub Greenlet. Magnificent Frigatebirds were a constant presence overhead.

A visit to Little Tobago Island was the highlight of our first morning’s itinerary. The island was once home to a population of Greater Bird of Paradise, introduced in 1909 in an attempt to save it from extinction in its native New Guinea; the population survived until the early 1960’s. Little Tobago is accessed via a glass-bottomed boat that leaves from the Blue Waters dock. Common Terns were seen near the dock; a pass by Goat Island added Brown Booby, Bridled, Sooty and Roseate Tern and Brown Noddy, plus Laughing Gulls with chicks. Two Scaly-naped Pigeons, recent colonizers to the island, flew over us as we approached the Little Tobago dock. Once on the island, our guide Frank led us up a trail leading to overlooks on the opposite side. We enjoyed up-close looks at White-tailed Nightjar and Trinidad Motmot along the way. The view from the overlook was spectacular: Red-billed Tropicbirds soared along the cliffs before
us, many at eye level, while Red-footed and Brown Boobies gathered on the rocks below. On the return ride, the boat slowed down as we passed over coral formations, including a massive brain coral that we could view through the boat’s glass bottom.

Our last full day was spent searching for Tobago’s higher elevation birds that inhabit the Main Ridge Forest Reserve. Gladwin led us to Gilpin Trace, a trail on the Roxborough-Bloody Bay Road. Rain showers prevented us from doing any roadside birding along the way, but the rains subsided by the time we reached the trailhead. As we hiked the muddy trail, we quickly found two of our target species: first a White-tailed Sabrewing, a hummingbird once thought extinct on Tobago, then a Yellow-legged Thrush. As we continued down the trail, the rain re-intensified and soon, we were forced to retreat, but not before getting distant views of a Venezuelan Flycatcher. After lunch at the trailhead, we drove to an area along the road where Blue-backed Manakin, another target species, is reliably seen. The rain eventually ended, providing Gladwin with an opportunity to call in a manakin. Eventually, everyone was rewarded with great looks at this stunning little bird. We also had even better looks at another White-tailed Sabrewing. Yet another target bird, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, was found a little farther down the road.

By the trip’s conclusion, the group and its various leaders had found and identified, by my tally, exactly 200 species of birds. Mammals seen included the aforementioned agouti and anteater, Red-tailed Squirrel and a few unidentified bats, including one that Joe Barros discovered one evening in our shower at Asa Wright. Uncounted were the assorted lizards, butterflies, spiders and other creepy-crawlies we encountered along the way. Thanks go out to our amazing guides and the top-notch staffs at Asa Wright and Blue Waters, all of whom helped to make this a fantastic trip. Special thanks go to Mark Hedden and Larry Lebowitz of Caligo Ventures, through which we arranged this outstanding tour.

Finally, thanks to Nancy and Bruce Moreland for the wonderful photographs that accompany this report. More of their Trinidad and Tobago photos can be found at [http://www.beehappygraphics.com/Trinidad.html](http://www.beehappygraphics.com/Trinidad.html)

**Bird list:**

- Little Tinamou (heard only)
- Black-bellied Whistling-Duck
- White-cheeked Pintail
- Masked Duck
- Rufous-vented Chachalaca
- Trinidad Piping-Guan
- Least Grebe
- Red-billed Tropicbird
- Brown Pelican
- Red-footed Booby
- Brown Booby
- Neotropic Cormorant
- Anhinga
- Magnificent Frigatebird
- Pinnated Bittern
- Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
- Green Heron
- Striated Heron
- Cattle Egret
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Tricolored Heron
- Snowy Egret
- Little Blue Heron
- Scarlet Ibis
- Turkey Vulture
- Black Vulture
- Osprey
- Swallow-tailed Kite
- Plumbeous Kite
- Long-winged Harrier
- White Hawk
- Common Black-Hawk
- Savanna Hawk
- Broad-winged Hawk
- Gray-lined Hawk
- Short-tailed Hawk
- Zone-tailed Hawk
- Crested Caracara
- Yellow-headed Caracara
- Common Gallinule
- Purple Gallinule
- Southern Lapwing
- Wilson’s Snipe
- Wattled Jacana
- Laughing Gull
- Brown Noddy
- Sooty Tern
- Bridled Tern
- Common Tern
- Roseate Tern
- Common Ground-Dove
- Ruddy Ground-Dove
- Rock Pigeon