

# **TRINIDAD**

**FEBRUARY 23 – MARCH 1, 2009**

**LEADER: BOB SUNDSTROM  
LOCAL LEADERS: JOGIE AND MAHASE RAMLAL**

**COMPILED BY: BOB SUNDSTROM**

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A tropical winter week on Trinidad, just off the coast of South America, is an ideal entree to tropical birding in the Americas. Our tour allows for five full days of exploring and birding on Trinidad which, for an island its size, has a high diversity of bird life. All six nights lodging and meals are at the famed Asa Wright Nature Centre. A few daily highlights from our February 2009 trip help capture the magic of this tour:

**February 24:** Our group assembled on the legendary AWNC veranda in early morning. In those early moments, a Short-tailed Nighthawk coursed back and forth at close range. After sunrise a diversity of birds began to visit the feeders. Among the earliest were a pair of Blue-crowned Motmots, then both Cocoa and Bare-eyed thrushes. Red-rumped agoutis walked in to sample bread crumbs on the ground. The earliest morning hummingbirds included a Rufous-breasted Hermit, then a Black-throated Mango, plus a White-chested Emerald and a Copper-rumped Hummingbird. Soon someone announced a fancy male Tufted Coquette, which drew all onlookers to one end of the veranda. An elegant male White-necked Jacobin hovered, then perched, at a feeder within arm's-length of birders sipping their coffee. Fresh fruit on the feeding stands attracted wing-flashing White-lined Tanagers, noisy Great Kiskadees, Gray-fronted Doves, and a male Silver-beaked Tanager with feathers the texture of velvet. Soon numbers of boldly-colored Purple Honeycreepers and Green Honeycreepers jostled with Bananaquits for space on the nectar feeders and fruit platforms, and all gave way when large Crested Oropendolas approached the banquet. Parrots, swifts, and a pair of White Hawks flew farther out.

After breakfast, we walked the Centre entrance road, scoping a pair of Red-rumped Woodpeckers and both Bay-headed and Turquoise tanagers. A bit farther along the road we found a massive boa constrictor, soon the very slow moving object of all cameras in the group. Later that day, we walked a forest trail to find the Bearded Bellbirds we had heard from the veranda. One male bellbird perched in the open about 30 feet up in the canopy, calling with ear-splitting volume and showing off its long, rubbery black wattles. The walk revealed some other fine birds—a handsome Chestnut Woodpecker, a Collared Trogon, and darting, whirring White-bearded Manakins.

**February 25:** We left the Centre by van to search for birds at higher elevation. A pair of White-tailed Trogons were seen excavating a nest in a huge termite nest. A Speckled Tanager—a higher elevation specialty whose colors seem to shift from green to blue to gold—posed long enough for all to view it in the scope. At our picnic lunch spot, an Ornate Hawk-Eagle soared close overhead. Throughout the day, immense Blue Morpho butterflies winged along the roadside. The last stop of the afternoon was a marvel: As we scoped Yellow-rumped Caciques at a nest colony, and then turned the scope on a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars and a quartet of Blue-headed Parrots, toucans began calling. Before long, a Channel-billed Toucan flew to a nearby treetop and sat in plain view where we scoped its rich yellow, red, and blue tones, and its immense black bill.

**February 27:** In the lowlands, White-headed Marsh-Tyrants, Pied Water-Tyrants, and Grassland Yellow-Finches perched near the road. Wattled Jacanas flashed their yellow wings, a Yellow-hooded Blackbird male perched close at hand, and male Red-breasted Blackbirds showed crimson breasts and epaulets. A huge Cooi Heron shared an open pasture with stately Southern Lapwings, as lovely Savannah Hawks flew by. Late that afternoon, we stopped in a grove of

Moriche palms. As the sun dropped toward the horizon, flocks of Red-bellied Macaws screeched into the palm trees where we viewed them at close range, before they disappeared into their night roost in the palms.

**February 28:** The last full day of the tour. After breakfast, we walked down to the Oilbird cave on the AWNC grounds. A few steps into the cave were all that was needed to get splendid views of the unique Oilbirds, as dozens of adults perched on nests, some shrieking wildly. We also stopped at a display site for Golden-headed Manakins, where a couple of male birds “danced” in fancy slides along slender branches.

The tour finale came aboard our boat tour of the Caroni estuary mangroves. Leaving the dock late afternoon, we paused for a perched Green-throated Mango, a Red-capped Cardinal, Green and American Pygmy kingfishers, several Cook’s tree boas, a cinnamon-furred silky anteater, and a Common Potoo. Well before sunset we had tied up to the mangrove edge where, rum punch in hand, we watched flock after flock of Scarlet Ibises wing across the estuary to perch on a small mangrove island. As the sun dropped lower, the crimson of the ibis flocks grew richer and deeper. The ibises were joined by hundreds of Tricolored Herons and Snowy Egrets. The Scarlet Ibis flocks grew in size as the sun dipped, some numbering in the hundreds, and the night-roost islet was soon heavily flecked with the reds, whites, and blues of thousands of wading birds. A colorful finish to a wonderful tropical tour.

### BIRD LIST

Unusual/very scarce/very lucky to see sightings in **bold**.

Very rare for the area sightings in ***bold italics***.

{ } = seen by one of the leaders/guides only

#### TINAMOUS

Little Tinamou (*Crypturellus soui*) – heard nearly daily on the Asa Wright grounds

#### SHEARWATERS & PETRELS

Leach’s Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) – dozens at Manzanilla Beach; a tour first

#### PELICANS

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – at Manzanilla Beach

#### CORMORANTS

Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – flying by at Caroni

#### FRIGATEBIRDS

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) – distantly at Nariva

#### HERONS, EGRETS, & BITTERNES

Cocoi Heron [White-necked Heron] (*A. cocoi*) – nice views at Aripo

Great Egret (*A. alba*)

Tricolored Heron (*E. tricolor*) – at Caroni, flying in to join roosting Scarlet Ibises

Little Blue Heron (*E. caerulea*)

***Little Egret*** (*Egretta garzetta*) – at Trincity; rare, mostly Old World, now nesting on Barbados

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) – hanging out with water buffalo and buffalypso

Striated Heron (*B. striatus*) – at the Nariva settlement

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Trincity

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – at Caroni

#### IBISES AND SPOONBILLS

Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*) – a perfect bird to finish to tour with

#### NEW WORLD VULTURES

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)

### **OSPREY**

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – common near Caroni

### **HAWKS, EAGLES & KITES**

Gray-headed Kite (*Leptodon cayanensis*) – a soaring bird some distance below AWNC

Pearl Kite (*Gampsonyx swainsoni*) – a brief view at Nariva from Mahase's van

Double-toothed Kite (*Harpagus bidentatus*) – fine scope view of a perched adult in the morning

Plumbeous Kite (*Ictinia plumbea*) – soaring by the veranda early one morning

**Long-winged Harrier** (*Circus buffoni*) – great looks at a male near Trincity

White Hawk (*Leucopternis albicollis*) – excellent views of at least three pairs!!

Common Black-Hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus*)

Savanna Hawk (*Heterospizias meridionalis*) – the long-legged, warm brown hawk at Aripo

Gray Hawk (*Asturina nitida*)

Short-tailed Hawk (*B. brachyururs*)

Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*)

**Ornate Hawk-Eagle** (*Spizaetus ornatus*) – soaring and calling over the Blanchisseuse road

### **CARACARAS & FALCONS**

Yellow-headed Caracara (*Milvago chimachima*) – perched atop a cow at Aripo

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) – a couple of winter visiting migrants

Peregrine Falcon (*F. peregrinus*)

### **LIMPKIN**

Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*) – fine views and a chance to hear their eerie calls

### **RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS**

Purple Gallinule (*Porphyryla martinica*) – several at Trincity and Aripo

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropous*)

### **JACANAS**

Wattled Jacana (*Jacana jacana*)

### **PLOVERS, LAPWINGS, SANDPIPERS & ALLIES**

Southern Lapwing (*Vanellus chilensis*) – one of world's most striking looking shorebirds

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularis*)

Solitary Sandpiper (*T. solitaria*)

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*)

### **TERNs**

**Large-billed Tern** (*Phaetusa simplex*) – at Trincity Ponds

### **PIGEONS & DOVES**

Rock Pigeon/feral pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Scaled Pigeon (*C. speciosa*)

Pale-vented Pigeon (*Columba cayennensis*) – perched on utility wires as we were enroute to Arena

Eared Dove (*Zenaida auricularis*) – flying across the road as we drove to Caroni

Plain-breasted Ground-Dove (*Columbina minuta*) – Mahase ID'd a pair in the Caroni mangroves

Ruddy Ground-Dove (*Columbina talpacoti*) – the common, rusty dove of the lowlands

Gray-fronted Dove (*L. rufaxilla*) – a regular at the feeders

### **PARROTS, MACAWS & ALLIES**

Red-bellied Macaw (*Ara manilata*) – their arrival at the palms at Waller Field was a trip highlight

Green-rumped Parrotlet (*Forpus passerinus*) – tiny, mint-green parrots at the picnic dinner site

Blue-headed Parrot (*Pionus menstruus*) – great views of a very mobile parrot

Orange-winged Parrot (*Amazona amazonica*) – the big, noisy parrot seen daily

### **CUCKOOS & ANIS**

Little Cuckoo (*Piaya minuta*) – in the Nariva mangroves for a quick view

Smooth-billed Ani (*Crotophaga ani*)

**Striped Cuckoo** (*Tapera naevia*) – superb scope study enroute to Arena

### **BARN OWLS**

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

### **TYPICAL OWLS**

Tropical Screech-Owl (*Otus choliba*) – perched on a bare branch for nighttime scope views

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum*) – calling daily, but elusive

### **OILBIRD**

Oilbird (*Steatornis caripensis*) – another tour highlight

### **POTOOS**

Common Potoo (*Nyctibius griseus*) – scoped at night at Aripo and seen from the boat at Caroni

### **NIGHTHAWKS & NIGHTJARS**

**Short-tailed Nighthawk** (*Lurocalis semitorquatus*) – seen well from the veranda

Pauraque (*Nyctidromus albicollis*)

White-tailed Nightjar (*Caprimulgus cayennensis*) – sitting on the road in the Aripo area

### **SWIFTS**

Band-rumped Swift (*Chaetura spinicauda*)

Gray-rumped Swift (*Chaetura cinereiventris*) – the most commonly seen, numerous swift

Short-tailed Swift (*Chaetura brachyura*)

Fork-tailed Palm-Swift (*Tachornis squamata*)

### **HUMMINGBIRDS**

Rufous-breasted Hermit (*Glaucis hirsuta*) – the large hermit without the tail tassel

Green Hermit (*Phaethornis guy*) – seen at several AWNC locations coming to blossoms

Little Hermit (*Phaethornis longuemareus*) – seen best on the Blanchisseuse roadside

White-necked Jacobin (*Florisuga mellivora*) – in your face on the veranda

Green-throated Mango (*Anthracothorax viridugula*) – perched in the Caroni mangroves

Black-throated Mango (*Anthracothorax nigricollis*) – a truly beautiful, dark-hued hummer

Ruby-topaz Hummingbird (*Chrysolampis mosquitus*) – great views near Waller Field

Tufted Coquette (*Lophornis ornata*) – visiting the *Lantana* alongside the veranda

White-chested Emerald (*Agyrtria brevirostris/Amazilia chionopectus*)

Copper-rumped Hummingbird (*Saucerottia tobaci/Amazilia tobaci*)

### **TROGONS**

White-tailed Trogon (*Trogon viridis*) – a pair was seen excavating a nest in an arboreal termite nest

Violaceous Trogon (*T. violaceus*) – the smaller yellow-bellied species, seen well from the veranda

Collared Trogon (*T. collaris*) – seen at several spots along Blanchisseuse Rd. and at AWNC

### **KINGFISHERS**

Ringed Kingfisher (*Ceryle torquata*) – at Trincity and Caroni, the huge kingfisher

Green Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle americana*) – seen well from the Caroni boat

**American Pygmy Kingfisher** (*Chloroceryle aenea*) – also seen well at Caroni

### **MOTMOTS**

Blue-crowned Motmot (*Motmotus momota*) – exquisite hues of blue each morning at the veranda

### **JACAMARS**

Rufous-tailed Jacamar (*Galbula ruficauda*) – a pair scoped along the Blanchisseuse Rd.

### **TOUCANS**

Channel-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos vitellinus*) – wonderful scope views

### **WOODPECKERS**

Red-rumped Woodpecker (*Veniliornis kirkii*) – the tiniest of the island's woodpeckers

Golden-olive Woodpecker (*Piculus rubiginosus*) – excellent looks at AWNC

**Chestnut Woodpecker** (*Celeus elegans*)

Lineated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus lineatus*) – perching most morning near the veranda

### **OVENBIRDS**

Yellow-chinned Spinetail (*Certhiaxis cinnamomea*) – perching openly in the marshes

Gray-throated Leaf-tosser (*Sclerurus albigularis*) – heard only

### **WOODCREEPERS**

Cocoa (Buff-throated) Woodcreeper (*Xiphorhynchus susurrans*) – heard daily, but evasive

Straight-billed Woodcreeper (*Xiphorhynchus picus*) – seen from the boat

### **TYPICAL ANTBIRDS**

Great Antshrike (*Taraba major*) – shy visitors to the feeding tray area; amazing red eyes!  
Black-crested Antshrike (*Sakesphorus canadensis*) – seen twice in mangroves, very fancy  
Barred Antshrike (*Thamnophilus doliatus*) – zebra-striped males and coppery females  
White-bellied Antbird (*Myrmeciza longipes*) – a terrific view after a good bit of coaxing

#### **ANTTHRUSHES & ANTPITTAS**

Black-faced Antthrush (*Formicarius analis*) – heard only

#### **COTINGAS**

Bearded Bellbird (*Procnias averano*) – hard to believe a bird could call so loudly

#### **MANAKINS**

Golden-headed Manakin (*Pipra erythrocephala*) – the gold and black males were stunning

White-bearded Manakin (*Manacus manacus*) – a white ping pong ball with a black head

#### **TYRANT FLYCATCHERS**

Forest Elaenia (*Myiopagis gaimardii*)

Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet (*Camptostoma obsoletum*)

Ochre-bellied Flycatcher (*Mionectes oleagineus*)

Slaty-capped Flycatcher (*Leptopogon superciliaris*)

Bran-colored Flycatcher (*Myiophobus fasciatus*)

Tropical Pewee (*C. cinereus*) – seen well along the entrance road

Pied Water-Tyrant (*Fluvicola pica*) – one of two black-and-white flycatchers

White-headed Marsh-Tyrant (*Arundinicola leucocephala*)

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – its calls were one of the most familiar sounds of Trinidad

Streaked Flycatcher (*Myiodynastes maculatus*) – scoped along the entrance road

Boat-billed Flycatcher (*Megarynchus pitangua*) – heard

Sulphury Flycatcher (*Tyrannopsis sulphurea*)

Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)

Gray Kingbird (*T. dominicensis*)

Bright-rumped Attila (*Attila spadiceus*) – heard each morning below the veranda

Black-tailed Tityra (*Tityra cayana*) – scoped from the veranda

#### **SWALLOWS**

White-winged Swallow (*Tachycineta albiventer*)

Gray-breasted Martin (*P. Chalybea*)

Southern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*)

#### **WRENS**

Rufous-breasted Wren (*Thryothorus rutilus*) – the finest short musical theme of the Trinidad forest

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) – some split this as Tropical House Wren

#### **MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS**

Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus gilvus*)

#### **THRUSHES**

Cocoa Thrush (*Turdus fumigatus*)

Bare-eyed Thrush (*T. nudigenis*) – instantly recognizable by its bold yellow eye-ring

White-necked Thrush (*T. albicollis*)

#### **GNATCATCHERS**

Long-billed Gnatwren (*Ramphocaenus melanurus*)

#### **VIREOS & ALLIES**

Golden-fronted Greenlet (*Hylophilus aurantiifrons*)

Rufous-browed Peppershrike (*Cyclarhis gujanensis*) – heard everywhere, seen with persistence

#### **SISKINS, CROSSBILLS & ALLIES**

Violaceous Euphonia (*Euphonia violacea*) – very confiding just off the veranda

#### **NEW WORLD WARBLERS**

Tropical Parula (*Parula pitaiayumi*)

Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*)

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*)

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*)

Masked Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis aequinoctialis*)

Golden-crowned Warbler (*Basileuterus culicivorus*) – good looks at a pair on Blanchisseuse Rd.

### **BANAQUIT**

Bananaquit (*Coereba flaveola*) – the most ubiquitous forest bird of the tour

### **TANAGERS, HONEYCREEPERS & ALLIES**

Bicolored Conebill (*Conirostrum bicolor*) – heard in the Caroni mangroves

White-lined Tanager (*T. rufus*) – black males and warm brown females, common at the fruit trays

Silver-beaked Tanager (*Ramphocelus carbo*) – males with velvety feathering and silver lower bill

Blue-gray Tanager (*Thraupis episcopus*) – powder blue, and a careful look shows lavender epaulets

Palm Tanager (*T. palmarum*) – seen from the veranda and on the veranda

Turquoise Tanager (*Tangara mexicana*) – a gem: dark blue, a yellow belly, and turquoise highlights

Speckled Tanager (*Tangara guttata*) – shifting color from blue to green to gold – in the scope

Bay-headed Tanager (*Tangara gyrola*) – tiny, lovely tanagers, seen daily

Green Honeycreeper (*Chlorophanes spiza*) – iridescent green-blue males and lime females

Purple Honeycreeper (*Cyanerpes caeruleus*) – grape colored males with garish yellow legs

Red-legged Honeycreeper (*C. nitidens*) – one seen along the entrance road

### **BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & SEEDEATERS**

Blue-black Grassquit (*Volatinia jacarina*) – black males bouncing in display in grassy fields

**Grassland Yellow-Finch** (*Sicalis luteola*) – perched close by at the Aripo agricultural station

Red-capped Cardinal (*Paroaria gularis*) – we were fortunate to see this beauty up close at Caroni

### **BLACKBIRDS, ORIOLES & ALLIES**

Yellow-hooded Blackbird (*Agelaius icterocephalus*) – the yellowest of yellow hoods

Red-breasted Blackbird (*Sturnella militaris/Leistes militaris*) – with glowing red breasts

Carib Grackle (*Quiscalus lugubris*)

Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*)

Giant Cowbird (*Molothrus oryzivorus/Scaphidura oryzivora*) – massive icterids

Yellow Oriole (*Icterus nigrogularis*) – in flashy pairs, we saw several pairs very nicely

Yellow-rumped Cacique (*Cacicus cela*) – black and yellow, flashing into their nest colonies

Crested Oropendola (*Psarocolius decumanus*) – nesting in front of the veranda, where males sang their gurgling trills while hanging upside down

### **Mammals**

Red-rumped Agouti (*Dasyprocta agouti*) – one escorting two small young

Red-tailed Squirrel (*Sciurus granatensis*)

Silky Anteater (*Cyclopes didactylus*) – sleeping, a ball of cinnamon brown fur

White-lined Sac-winged Bat (*Saccopteryx bilineata*) – the small day-time bat in the forest  
other bat species

### **Herps**

Spectacled Cayman (*Caiman crocodilus*) – at Trincity ponds

House Gecko (*Hemidactylus frenatus*)

Golden Tegu (*Tupinambis teguixin*) – the large banded, gold colored lizards at AWNC

Common Ground Lizard (*Ameiva ameiva*)

Trinidad/Bronze Skink (*Mabuya bistrriata*) – small lizard that Isabel photographed

Cook's Tree Boa (*Corallus hortulanus cookii*) – in the mangroves on the boat trip, including a twosome just becoming intertwined

**Boa Constrictor** (*Boa constrictor constrictor*) – a very large one (at least 8', later seen with two smaller boas (about 4'), along the AWNC entrance road

**Fer-de-lance** (*Bothrops atrox*) – carefully observed along the Guacharo Trail, and carefully monitored by AWNC naturalist Mukesh; at least 4', this venomous snake was completely indifferent to being watched and photographed from a few feet away

Yellow-throated Frog (*Mannophryne trinitatis*) – a *dendrobatid* or “arrow poison” type frog

Four-eyed Fish (*Anableps anableps*)

## **Invertebrates**

Caligo/Owl Butterfly (*Caligo* species)

Peleides Blue Morpho (*Morpho peleides*)

Postman Butterfly (*Heliconius erato*)

Tiger-stripe Butterfly

Leafcutter Ants

fireflies

tree crabs