

# TRINIDAD

**FEBRUARY 23 - MARCH 1, 2009**

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*This tour promises a wonderful entrée to the natural history of the American tropics and its varied bird life. Trinidad has a diverse, but not overwhelming number of birds, plants, and animals. Here newcomers and experienced birders or naturalists alike can get acquainted with almost all of the New World families of birds and sharpen their skills on an avifauna of nearly 400 species.*

*The tour includes six nights at the world-famous Asa Wright Nature Centre. Over the years the Centre has hosted a veritable Who's Who of scientists, such as William Beebe and David Snow. Some of their pioneering studies of fruit-eating birds and of the relationships between frugivorous birds and their host plants are classics which laid the foundation for later work by others. We will explore the grounds of the Asa Wright Nature Centre and also make a round of visits to other areas in Trinidad, including the famous Caroni Swamp, the Nariva Swamp, the montane forests at Blanchisseuse and Aripo, and the savanna regions on the island. Here you will be introduced to some of the fascinating natural history of birds and plants of northern Trinidad.*

*During our stay at Asa Wright Nature Centre, we should see representative birds of many New World tropical families such as parrots, trogons, woodcreepers, antbirds, manakins, and motmots, as well as come to appreciate the fascinating expansion that several familiar groups, such as flycatchers and finches, have undergone. The Centre grounds are also home to one of the most accessible Oilbird roosting/nesting caves, and we will walk down to Dunstan Cave for a look at these avian wonders. During the field trips and natural history studies, we should encounter a number of particularly spectacular tropical birds, including the Scarlet Ibis, White Hawk, Blue-crowned Motmot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Channel-billed Toucan, Bearded Bellbird, Golden-headed and White-bearded manakins, and a variety of tanagers, flycatchers, and finches. Throughout our stay at Asa Wright the pace will be relaxed, ensuring an opportunity for repeated and often close observation of birds, as well as time to delve into the natural history of some of the fascinating birds, plants, and animals that we'll observe. This is one of our least strenuous tropical American tours.*

**February 23, Day 1: Arrival in Trinidad.** Participants should plan to arrive in Port of Spain on the island of Trinidad today. You will be met at the airport and transferred to the Asa Wright Nature Center.

NIGHT: Asa Wright Nature Centre

**February 24-28, Days 2-6: Asa Wright Nature Centre and Day Tours out from the Centre.** We'll have six nights lodging and meals at Asa Wright, which are sure to be fondly remembered. Most mornings we'll bird early from the famed Asa Wright veranda. The nectar feeders and fruit trays swarm with Purple Honeycreepers and Green Honeycreepers, not to mention legions of Bananaquits, but make way for larger visitors like handsome Chestnut Woodpeckers and Blue-crowned Motmots. Silver-beaked Tanager wows the onlookers, with plumage like maroon velvet and a bill that glints like polished silver. Brilliant Turquoise Tanagers and Bay-headed Tanagers often visit the nearby "tremor tree," and Channel-billed Toucans call from a tree top perch. Hummingbirds swarm the feeders and challenge one another: flashy White-necked Jacobins, miniature Tufted

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Coquettes, glittering Blue-chinned Sapphires, White-bellied Emeralds and Copper-rumped Hummingbirds. Massive Crested Oropendolas clatter in, and huge Lineated Woodpeckers scale nearby trees.

A walk down the Discovery Trail should offer many new sights: snapping White-bearded Manakins, a perched Common Potoo, a Violaceous Trogon overhead, a tassel-tailed Green Hermit visiting ginger flowers. A bit of searching—and following its very loud “bok!” calls—will help us find a Bearded Bellbird male, for frame-filling scope views. Its long, rubbery wattles shake as it shouts out its many decibel call.

Each day on Trinidad opens new birding vistas. One day we bird our way north and at higher elevation along the Blanchisseuse Road. We'll look here for flocks of brilliant tanagers: Bay-headed and Speckled Tanagers, mixed with vivid Blue Dacnis. With good fortune we may see the huge, rare Trinidad Piping-Guan—with blue face and silvery patches in the wings—the sole endemic bird species of Trinidad and Tobago.

We'll look for Lilac-tailed Parrotlets, which prefer arboreal termite nests to excavate their own nests in, and Red-bellied Macaws, which munch on enormous Moriche palm seeds. The final day culminates with a boat trip among the Caroni mangroves where, before sunset, the boat ties up opposite a mangrove covered island. Nearing sunset, flock after flock of stunning, impossibly red Scarlet Ibises fly in and perch in the mangroves on the island, joined by hundreds of Snowy Egrets and Tricolored Herons. We'll raise our rum punches to the red glow of thousands of Scarlet Ibises, an ideal ending to our days of great birding on Trinidad.

NIGHTS: Asa Wright Nature Centre

**March 1, Day 7: Departure for Home.** After breakfast this morning, we will be forced to say goodbye to the Asa Wright Nature Centre. Transfers will be provided to Piarco International Airport in Port of Spain in time for various for morning departures.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour is limited to 14 participants.

**TOUR LEADER:** David Ascanio and local guides

**David Ascanio**, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent the last 22 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Guyana, northern Peru, western Ecuador, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations, and has a private library containing sounds of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela, including some which are the only ones known to science. David speaks excellent English and combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published several manuscripts about the birds of the *llanos* (plains) and the tepui endemics for which he has become an authority. He is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him the most popular naturalist/guide in his country

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$1995** per person in double occupancy from Port of Spain, Trinidad. This includes all food from breakfast on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 7, lodging, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the leader. It does not include airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs. If the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for the tour is **\$615**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**ACCOMMODATIONS AT ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE:** Single accommodations are often limited and singles may be asked to share. If so, you will be credited accordingly. Also note that “closer in” rooms can be requested for participants with mobility problems.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is \$500 per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$300 per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$300.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE:** Application forms for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

**CLIMATE:** The temperature averages about 72-95 degrees. The lowlands tend to be a bit more hot and humid than at Asa Wright. The rainy season extends from April or May to December. As with most tropical areas, the “rainy season” simply means it rains more often than in the dry season.

**CLOTHING:** Lightweight clothes are best for the field, including long-sleeved shirts and either long pants or shorts. Shorts are good on most days and are cooler. Bring a hat and raingear, including an umbrella. Sneakers or

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walking shoes are fine; we recommend a pair of walking shoes or lightweight hiking boots with a Vibram or other good gripping sole, as the trails at Asa Wright Nature Centre can be a bit slippery and/or muddy. Walking sticks are available at the Centre. Rubber boots are also useful (particularly from May through December) because of potentially wet grass and muddy trails, and as protection against chiggers, but are not essential. Dress will be casual at all times.

**CONDITIONS:** Several of the outings on Trinidad, including the walk to the Oilbird cave at Asa Wright Centre, are moderately strenuous, as they follow paths up and down hillside slopes. Also, most of the accommodations at Asa Wright require walking up and down one or more flights of stairs.

**LAUNDRY:** Laundry service is available at Asa Wright Nature Centre for a reasonable fee.

**CURRENCY:** U.S. dollars are accepted in Trinidad, but it is best to convert a small amount to local currency. There is a bank open until 10 p.m. every night at the airport. The Asa Wright Nature Centre may also convert small amounts and will accept U.S. dollars or credit cards for purchases of items in their store.

**DOCUMENTS:** A valid passport, along with an ongoing or return air ticket, is required. Visas are not required for entry by United States citizens for stays of less than two months. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. Please hold on to the immigration card you receive en route, and keep it along with your passport in a safe place. You must surrender this card on departure.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra digital storage media or film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag.

Other items should include a flashlight or headlamp and extra batteries, an alarm clock, notebook and pens, sunglasses, hat, sunscreen, and plastic protective bags or coverings to protect anything you want to keep from dust or moisture. It is important to bring a water bottle, as we will spend some days in the field all day. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

**HEALTH:** At this time, no vaccinations are required for travel to Trinidad. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) highly recommend that your yellow fever and tetanus be up to date. In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

At the Asa Wright Nature Centre, pitchers of purified water are provided and there is a large container of purified water on the veranda at all times if you run out. There are few insects, but you should bring pump or spray repellent for chiggers, which are common in the grass around the Nature Centre, or wear rubber boots.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

**A Note About Chiggers:** This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or hu-

mans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking, or standing in particular, in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutters" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutters" or "Off." Repellants with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to your skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

**MISC:** Departure Tax - \$100 Trinidad (approximately US \$17 per person) – amount and conditions subject to change without notice.

Electricity - The Asa Wright Nature Centre operates on 110 volt current.

Language - The national language is English, often spoken with a lilt. Hindi dialects, French patois, Spanish, Chinese, and Urdu are heard in some areas.

Time - 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Because of the many birds at feeders by the Asa Wright House, this is an excellent place for bird photography.

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website at [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com) offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com), or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com), which specializes in ornithology books.

***Birds:***

Ffrench, Richard. revised edition. *A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*. Wynnewood, Pennsylvania:

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Livingston Publishing Company, 1991. Excellent field guide/handbook. A must for birders visiting Trinidad.

Hammick, John and Richard Ffrench. *Bird Song of Trinidad and Tobago: an Aid to Identification*. Mandarin Productions, 2004. [3 CD set with 179 species]

Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelbourne, VT: Chapters Publishing Ltd., 1994. Subtitle: "A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity."

Hilty, Steven. *Guide to the Birds of Venezuela*. Second Edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. Better plates than Ffrench book.

Restall, Robin; Clemencia Rodner and Miguel Lentino. *Birds of Northern South America. An Identification Guide. Volume 2: Plates and Maps*. Helms Field Guides, 2007.

### **Other Vertebrates:**

Murphy, John C. *Amphibians and Reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago*. Malabar, Florida: Kreiger Publishing Company, 1997. Excellent thorough coverage of the islands' herps.

### **General Ecology:**

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Scribners, 1984. A good layman's introduction to tropical biology. Highly recommended.

Kricher, John C. *A Neotropical Companion: An Introduction to the Animals, Plants and Ecosystems of the New World Tropics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989. Another good introduction to Neotropical biology.

Snow, David W. *The Web of Adaptation: Tropical Bird Studies*. Collins, 1976. Excellent introduction to the ecology of fruit-eating birds. Written in popular, readable style and based mostly on studies conducted in Trinidad. Good list of references. Recommended!

### **Fish:**

Chaplin, Charles C.G. *Fishwatcher's Guide to West Atlantic Coral Reefs*. Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Harrowood Books, 1972. Waterproof.

Greenberg, Idaz. *Guide to Corals and Fishes of Florida, the Bahamas and the Caribbean*. Miami, FLA.: Seahawk Press.

### **Trees/Plants:**

Duncan, E. Julian. *A Guide to the Wild Flowers of Trinidad and Tobago*. Asa Wright Center, 1993.

Hargreaves, Dorothy and Bob. *Tropical Trees Found in the Caribbean, South America, Central America, Mexico*. Kailua, Hawaii: Hargreaves Publishing Company, 1965. Available at Asa Wright Nature Center.

Hargreaves, Dorothy and Bob. *Tropical Blossoms of the Caribbean*. Kailua, Hawaii: Hargreaves Publishing Company, 1960. Available at Asa Wright Nature Center.

Seddon, S.A. and G.W. Lennox. *Trees of the Caribbean*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1980. Available at Asa Wright Nature Center.

### **Cultural Background:**

De-Light, Dominique and Polly Thomas. *The Rough Guide to Trinidad & Tobago*. London: The Rough Guides, 2001. Current, thorough tourist guide with lots of background essays.

Naipaul, V.S. *A House For Mr. Biswas*. New York: Vintage Internationals, 1961,1989. The Nobel Prize winning author's most acclaimed novel about life in postcolonial Trinidad.

**TIPPING:** As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on June 19, 2008 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.