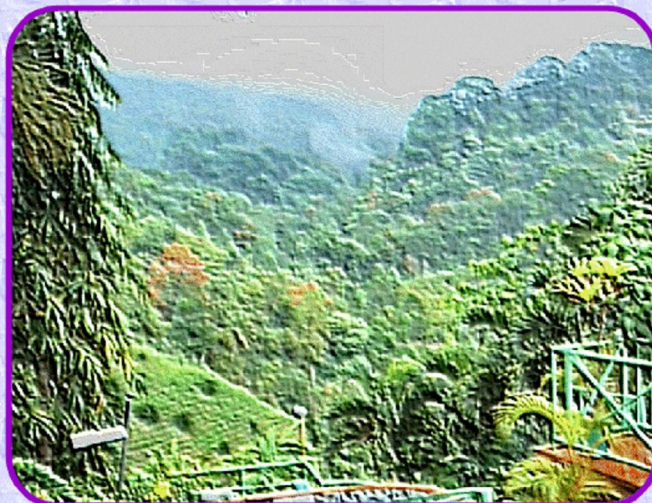
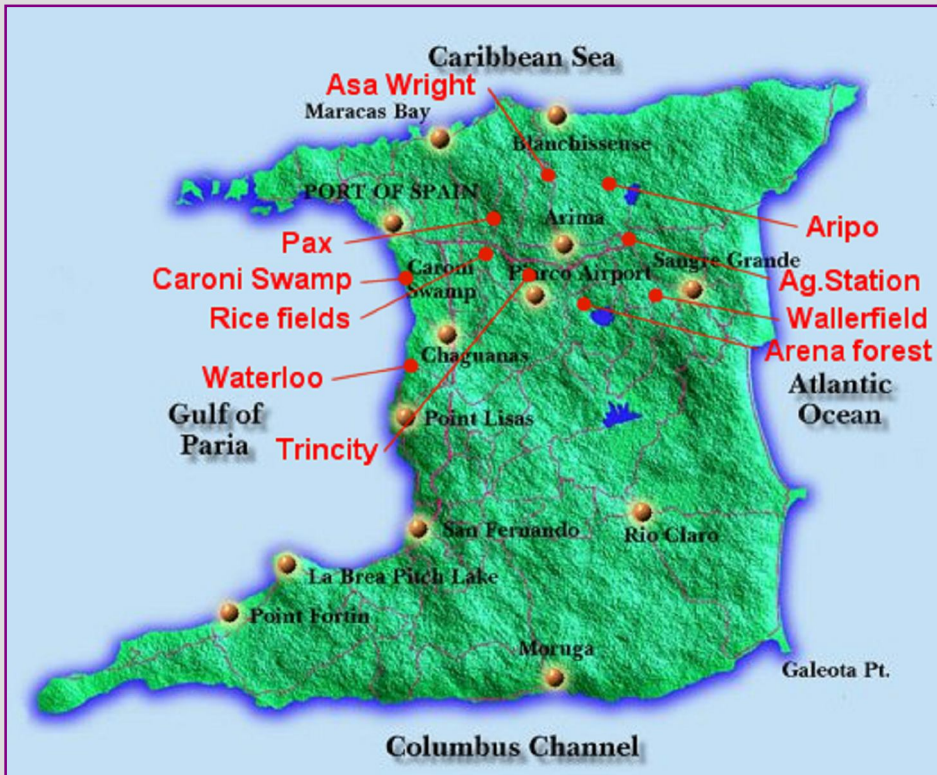


Trinidad



12th to 19th February, 2004



Thursday, 12 th	Tobago airport	17:00 – 17:30
Friday, 13 th	Aripo Cottage and Aripo Heights	6:20 – 18:10
Saturday, 14 th	Aripo Caves	6:20 – 18:00
Sunday, 15 th	Aripo Cottage Pax Guest House & Old Donkey Trail	6:20 – 8:00 13:40 – 17:40
Monday, 16 th	Pax Guest House Asa Wright Nature Centre Trincity Ponds	6:20 – 7:30 9:30 – 16:10 17:00 – 18:15
Tuesday, 17 th	Arena Forest Wallerfields & Aripo Savannah Aripo Agricultural Station	7:30 – 10:30 12:00 – 15:30 16:15 – 18:15
Wednesday, 18 th	Rice Fields Waterloo Aripo Heights (along l'Orange Road) Caroni Swamp	7:00 – 7:45 8:30 – 10:15 12:15 – 14:00 16:00 – 18:00
Thursday, 19 th	Old Donkey Trail, Mount St Benedict Pax Guest House Tobago airport	6:30 – 8:50 8:50 – 10:45 14:30 – 16:30

TRINIDAD

12th to 19th February, 2004

Introduction



Trinidad and Tobago are situated at the very southern end of the Caribbean chain of islands. The reason they are such a good birding destination is that they are only a short hop from the South American mainland of Venezuela, and so share many of the bird families of that continent. Trinidad is an ideal birding spot for a taste of some of the South American genera, in that a lot are represented on the island, without the confusing amount of individual species that occur further South on the mainland.

Despite being separated by only a narrow channel of water, Trinidad and Tobago have their own mix of bird species and habitats, which is reflected in the totals for each island – Trinidad has a list of over 400 species, while Tobago reaches only around half of that number (although some of the birds on Tobago are either absent or rare on Trinidad). This difference is mainly due to the much greater diversity of habitat on Trinidad, ranging from lowland and upland rainforest, to open savannah, mangrove swamp, coastal marsh, and mudflats. The whole of the island has something to offer from a birding point of view, but the best spots are in the North, and since we only had a week, this is where all of our birding was concentrated.

Pride of place for anyone visiting Trinidad has to be the **Asa Wright Nature Centre** (www.asawright.org). This spot is world famous, and a visit there shows exactly why. It is situated in upland rainforest, and a lot of work has been done to attract a staggering variety of birds to the feeders in front of the viewing terrace. In addition, a small fee buys a guided walk along one of the trails for birds which can't be seen from the buildings. A stay of 3 nights or more comes with a free visit to the Oilbird caves. These are a little limiting, since the Centre does not allow entry into the caves proper, but they are probably the most easily accessible of the 6 colonies on the island. We took the

option of a walk to the Aripo Caves from Aripo Cottage, the main benefit being entry to the cave, and no other birders around. The downside is that it is a very strenuous 2½ hour uphill trek (and the same time back again).

Another famous spot is the **Caroni Swamp** – famous enough for tours from the regular cruise ships which dock in the Port of Spain harbour. It is particularly well known for its Scarlet Ibis fly-in late afternoon, but is also enjoyable for the experience of travelling in a boat through the channels of the mangrove swamp, and has speciality birds not seen elsewhere (as well as the potential of seeing snakes). When we were there, it didn't seem necessary to book ahead (not sure if the cruise ships would make a difference), and it is very easy to find the boarding jetties (right next to the highway). Nadan's is the larger of the operators, but we used James Madoo, who is very knowledgeable about the birds, and offers much smaller groups with more individual attention. Cost is only \$TT60 each, and the boats left at around 15:45 when we were there.

The rainforest in the North of the island is bursting with birds, both in number and variety, and they are generally very approachable. The beauty of this area is that accommodation can be had in the midst of the forest itself, which not only means trails and birding days without touching a car, but even leisurely birding from the accommodation itself. The Aripo Cottage (see accommodation below) is located fairly high in the **Aripo Heights**, and birds can be seen all the way along the drive up to here, as well as in the Cottage area. Half way up (about 4 miles) a right turn is taken over a small bridge. Ignoring this and proceeding along **l'Orange Road** finds a small mansion with manicured gardens, supposedly good for hummingbirds, and a long walk up a track which covers the lower elevations of the Aripo Heights.

Other sites visited were:

Trincity Ponds. This is a collection of 4 sewage treatment lagoons, 2 of which are active, the other 2 have open water and marsh, which are situated right next to the Churchill-Roosevelt highway. They are very easily found – a left turn is made from the airport on to the highway, and the dirt track exit is after the first right hand curve in the road (it is the first turn that can be made on the road). There is a gatekeeper, who told us that the gates are open from 7:00-16:00, although he did eventually let us in after 17:00. The site is good for tyrant-flycatchers, jacanas, *hirundines*, and Yellow-hooded Blackbirds

Arena Forest. This is situated to the East of San Rafael, and the tracks can be fairly poor. It also contains the entrance to the Arena reservoir, although you must strictly have a permit to enter here. The forest itself is fairly dense, and remains quite dark, but there are some good birds in here if the time and effort is applied (we had our only White-tailed Trogon and Cocoa Woodcreeper here, as well as both Manakins).

Wallerfields and the Aripo Savannah. Wallerfields is an old world war II air base, and still has plenty of activity associated – construction traffic is fairly constant through the day, and it is reputed that the landing strips are used at night to ferry in less than reputable goods. This means that, even though that time and place is good for nightjars, it is not terribly safe. The approach tracks to the airfield are quite productive, and the scrub bordering the landing strips is also supposed to be good. The Aripo Savannah is just to the East of Wallerfields, but we were there in the heat of the day, so it was quite hot and quiet.

Aripo Agricultural Station. This spot turned out to be quite a surprise, mainly because Gerard (at Pax) thought that it was closed to birders still following the UK foot and mouth episode, but the people manning the entrance were more than happy to let us in. It is also very easy to find – the turn off is about a mile to the West of the Aripo Heights road, on the Old Eastern highway. We only walked about 400 metres along the track, just beyond some cattle sheds, but it was superb for waders, Marsh-Tyrants, seedeaters, and blackbirds, as well as hunting Savannah Hawks. This spot shouldn't be missed – it's easy and fun birding!

Waterloo. This small town is just to the South-east of Chaguanas, which in turn is a direct ride South on the Uriah-Butler highway from Port of Spain. It's main attraction is

the exposed mud, so timing the tides is important. We landed there shortly after low tide, and the place was a Mecca for waders, pelicans, skimmers, and gulls. There is also a rather curious "Temple by the Sea" here, which was well marked on our map, and is reputedly a target for Hindu worship.

Rice Fields. We called in here first thing one the morning, before venturing further to Waterloo. It is easily found – the turnoff to Caroni Swamp from the Uriah Butler highway is well signposted, and the left turn (heading East) is made at this junction (right for the swamp). A short way along here, on a right hand bend, the car can be parked and the raised embankment used as a lookout point. This was excellent for swift flocks, Giant Cowbirds, herons, and Limpkin.

Timing and weather

Birds can be seen at any time on the island. However, January to March seems to be the most popular season, since it is relatively dry (emphasis on relatively – it rained to some extent on every day of our visit, usually in short bursts), and a lot of the flowers which attract the birds are in bloom. Chief amongst these is the Immortelle tree, an orange flower clad oasis amongst the greenery of the forests which attracts a multitude of species like a magnet. One thing that does need to be known about February is that the carnival is usually held towards the end of the month. This is significant because flights and cars are booked up well in advance. We had great difficulty obtaining a hire car, even when trying to book at the end of 2003. Direct flights from the UK to Trinidad were also generally fully booked – we ended up booking a flight from Gatwick to Tobago, and then a very cheap (£18 return) flight from Tobago to Trinidad. This was also booked ahead using an e-ticket on the BWIA web site (www.bwee.com), which was a good move judging by the amount of people on standby. Since the rain is fairly constant, and there is a fair amount of off track birding, waterproof hiking boots with a good grip are essential. The 80°+ temperatures mean sunblock is also required, and some form of insect repellent helps keep the few mosquitoes and biting chiggers (a pain in the rainforest) at bay.

Accommodation

The most obvious place to stay when looking at reports is the Asa Wright Centre, due to its fame and doorstep birding. More specific benefits are that access to the centre for non residents is strictly between 9 to 5, and guides to the oilbird caves are provided when staying over three nights. However, the costs are high – approximately £80 full board per night per person – and birds are constantly seen from the terrace between visiting hours, and oilbird trips can be seen from both the places that we used, which were:

Aripo Cottage (www.aripocottage.com)

This was built and has been run by Gary Alleng since the late 90's. It is nothing short of a superb place to stay, being set high up in the Aripo Heights. It consists of 4-5 units, which are comfortable, have bathroom facilities, and are not expensive (our unit contained single bunks and a double bed for \$US70 per night). For a little extra cost, meals can be provided (\$US10 for dinner and \$US5 for breakfast). This is highly recommended – the meals are local recipes and are delicious, and are also taken outside with superb views over the rain forest. We had intended to bird the area for one of the mornings we were there (of the 3 nights booked), and use the car to travel to other sites. In practice, this just didn't happen – there is just too much quality birding on the doorstep. We spent the first full day on the trails around the Aripo area, the second on a walk to the Aripo Caves for the Oilbirds. The latter is arranged by Gary – Mervyn, his employee who lives on site, charged us \$10 each for a full day outing. As mentioned previously, this is a long and very strenuous uphill trudge, but for those that make it, worth the feeling of achievement as well as the personal views of the birds.



Pax Guest House (www.paxguesthouse.com)

This is a popular destination, due to the location, excellent facilities and service, and reasonable price (\$US92 for a double room, \$US57 for a single room, both without ensuite facilities, but including dinner and breakfast). Although situated just above the busy town of Tunapuna, the building, formerly a monastery accommodation, is at the edge of the lower elevation forest, and has productive birding trails within a short walk. The terraces at the rear of the building are also very good for birds – feeders attract a healthy range of species, and the hills behind are excellent for raptors. Word must be mentioned of the hosts, Gerard and Oda. Gerard has been a keen birder on the island more or less since childhood, and is a mine of information. He enjoys doing the rounds with the guests, and this would include suggesting an itinerary for the following day. He can also arrange Oilbird trips, to caves in the Arima Valley, which are reputed to hold the largest colony on the island, and are not as difficult a hike as the Aripo Caves (although still 2 hours there and back). There is a very refined colonial feel to the establishment, and Oda helps to keep the atmosphere and running very congenial.



Getting around

Trinidad is not a large island, which means that travelling between sites can be done in a short time. From a base in the northern mountains, sites such as Nariva and Waterloo are barely $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour in the car. There are two quite well built highways running to the East and South from Port of Spain, and are usually reasonably freely running. Beware rush hour in Port of Spain and some of the larger towns – this can severely disrupt a journey. A lot of the roads are half decent, but the saloon car we had was hopelessly inadequate at some of the sites. A 4x4 would have been much more use at spots such as the Arena Forest, and even on the journey up the Aripo Heights road to the Aripo Cottage. Petrol is very cheap (much like US prices) but a major problem can be getting the stuff – petrol stations are few and far between, and there can be queues when you do find one. Planning ahead here is a good idea, although we found a reliable station near to the airport.

Currency and electricity

Even though \$US are reputed to be accepted around the island, and a lot of prices are quoted in this currency, it is best to use Trinidad and Tobago \$TT. This is bound to the \$US to the tune of approximately \$TT6 to \$US1, and this conversion does not vary. The pound was very strong against the \$US when we visited (about \$US1.8 to the £1), so prices on the island seemed very cheap. Travellers cheques can be cashed where banks are found (usually in the larger towns). Both Trinidad and Tobago airports will dispense \$TT from the cash machines available.

We had heard of various types of sockets that are used in Trinidad, but all those we found were the standard ones used in the US.

References

The South American influence of the birds in Trinidad is highlighted by the choice of identification guide used. Any guides to the birds of the West Indies are as good as useless, since the avifauna of both Trinidad and Tobago are almost totally different to the rest of the Caribbean islands. Most useful books to take are:

“The Birds of Venezuela”, Hilty, Princeton Press – the most recent addition is large, and heavy, but probably has the best illustrations and descriptions. Apart from the size, the main downsides are that not all Trinidad species have associated illustrations, although

all do have descriptions, and for some strange reason, the swifts page and some of the raptors are in black and white;

"A guide to the birds of Trinidad and Tobago", Richard Ffrench. Can be useful since only the birds found in the islands are described. Illustrations are not as useful as those in Hilty;

"A Birder's Guide to Trinidad and Tobago", William Murphy (1986) – a new edition to this old guide is supposedly planned. Even so, the edition we used is over 2 decades old, and still the best guide to the sites. The direction details are generally still reasonably accurate, and is an absolute essential companion;

Trinidad and Tobago Insight Map – larger scale maps are available, and are likely to be better than the one we used, since some of the roads are not shown (such as some of those through the rice fields). That being said, this map, in addition to Murphy, helped us find places we were aiming for;

"Checklist of the Birds of Trinidad", compiled by Richard Ffrench, 1996, published by Asa Wright Nature Centre – not only a useful checklist, but it also gives an indication as to the likelihood of species being seen.

SITES

Tobago airport

(Day 1)

Birding started even before we arrived at Trinidad. There was quite a gap between the incoming Tobago flight, and the hopper flight to complete our journey. As soon as we entered the airport, it was obvious that we were on "Caribbean Time" – no rush, no problems, no organisation, although we were informed that we might be able to get on an earlier flight, which still left half an hour to wander around away from the ramshackle airport and try to find some birds. This was duly done on the lawns and trees that surrounded the housing immediately outside of the airport. Even though not a single bird was seen from the plane to the airport buildings, there were plenty on this side of the fence. Immediately next to a small café was singing Bananaquit, and 3 Carib Grackles mingling with the punters at the tables, with 2 Black-faced Grassquits on the adjacent open lawn. The trees within about 100 metres of the perimeter were very productive, with prime birds such as 3-4 stunning Blue-grey Tanagers, and Black-throated Mango, supported by at least 2 Eared Doves, 2 Grey-fronted Doves, and a small collection of Caribbean Martins settling on trees with 2 Tropical Kingbirds.

From Trinidad airport to Aripo Cottage

The journey from Trinidad airport to Aripo Cottage the previous evening was far from straight forward. We favoured the Eastern Main Road to the Churchill-Roosevelt highway, and were taken through the town of Arima. There was some sort of a party going on in the centre, so the police had decided to shut off one of the main roads through. We did get a little lost in the back streets, but not to a great degree. Amazingly, we found the unlit sign showing the turning North to Aripo Village, about 15 miles to the East of where we joined the main highway. The track up to Aripo Cottage is far from the best. The first 4 miles, after which a right hand turn was taken over a small bridge, were winding but in decent repair, although the bridge did contain a small but dangerous hole. The track broke down severely for the rest of the journey. Almost there, and facing 4 wheel drive potholes, we were caught up by Gary, the owner of Aripo Cottage, which was very timely, since we had to stash the car in a neighbours drive, about 400 metres short of the lodging and took the last leg of the journey in his 4x4.

Aripo Cottage*(Day 2)*

Arising and shining at 6:20, the light was good enough to appreciate what a fantastic location this was. Gary and his team have put in a lot of work since 1999, to assemble 3 or 4 sleeping and living quarters in the midst of the Aripo Heights hills, giving sweeping views of the forests in all directions. The place is absolutely teeming with birds, and even at this time in the morning, we were treated to Yellow Oriole, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, plenty of Palm Tanagers, and the spectacular sight and sound of multitudes of mixed Orange-winged & Yellow-crowned Parrot flocks flying over the valley, some landing in the cottage grounds. We spent 1-1½ hours just wandering around the cottage gardens, and turned up more goodies such as Trinidad Euphonia, Silver-beaked Tanager, and distant raptors including Common Black-Hawk.

The track we had been driven up the previous evening was now descended on foot, where there were singing and dancing Blue-black Grassquits, and very shy Bare-eyed Thrushes, until we found the spot where the car was parked. Crested Oropendolas were back and forth constantly here, servicing the nearby colony (which could actually be seen from the terrace of Aripo Cottage). We also found a single Blue Dacnis, and very close Blue-grey Tanagers, as well as more birds that escaped identification.



It was now after 8:00, so we decided to head back to the cottage for a cup of coffee and sit on the terrace. Between coffee time and breakfast at 9:30, we spent the whole time wandering around the cottage grounds again. Raptors were now appearing in numbers. Most to the South seemed to be Turkey Vultures, with less numerous Black Vultures, and a couple of Common Black-Hawks for good measure. The northern aspect, which looked up to the higher elevations, was superb for White Hawks, with at least half a dozen in total, and 3 at once together. There was also what looked like a Great Black-Hawk

on this side of the property. More species popped up around the property as time went on: a tropical Kingbird had a favourite perch in front of the terrace, with Forest Elaenia in the bushes.

Aripo Heights

After breakfast, it was time to head off down the track again, and turn off to gently ascend Aripo Heights via the tarmac access road. It took only about 30-40 metres of walking downhill from the cottage to find a pair of Rufous-breasted Wrens, which were tending a nest which we found low down near the ground. The rufous colour on the chest of these birds is much brighter and more impressive than the books suggest. At the bottom of this descent, in a small clearing, we played a tape of Ferruginous Pygmy-owl,

and even a short burst of this had an immediate effect, bringing out American Redstart, Violaceous Euphonia, female White-shouldered Tanager, Blue-grey Tanager, and Palm Tanager. We played the tape 3 or 4 more times, and each seemed to have less effect than the last one, but new birds were lured, including a pair of Tropical Parula and a couple of male White-lined Tanagers. From this small clearing, an impressive colony of Crested Oropendolas could be seen, with the nests hanging down like a multitude of giant Penduline Tit constructions. The attendant birds flew to and fro from the colony constantly. Just around the corner from here, over a small stream, we saw the first of our honeycreepers – male Purple Honeycreeper with a streaked female.



We followed the track up from where car was parked, giving good views of the valley below, and the raptors overhead (Common Black-Hawks occasionally amongst the numerous vultures, as well as 1-2 Grey Hawks). It was also very good for hummingbirds, including Black-throated Mango, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, and an unidentified wholly green bird which only landed briefly. Views over the Aripo Valley here are impressive, and is fully covered by lush rainforest. In amongst this are orange flowered Immortelle trees, which bear nectar that attracts a host of species. The sun was out most of this time, but a refreshing wind from the East kept temperatures comfortable.

Further progress up the track found masses of Bananaquits, interspersed by the occasional White-beaked Tanager and quick fly-through hummingbirds, until we came upon a more open view of the canopy to the South. Plenty of Immortelle trees here, as well as an army of ants crossing the track itself in a regimented line. The Immortelles and the ants seemed to combine to produce a profusion of birds, with Tanagers in the form of Silver-beaked, White-lined & White-shouldered, all three species of Honeycreeper, Bananaquits, fly-through hummers, and a couple of Greyish Saltators. A pair of Common Black-Hawks were displaying high over the valley, one landing on an exposed branch a little later. Another colony of Crested Oropendolas was situated about 50m up from here, with some of the birds displaying a bizarre courtship ritual, as well as comical call, especially when welcoming another bird.

Barely another 100m up from the Oropendola colony was another productive Immortelle tree, which proved to be the best for variety of species that we were to find. It also offered shade from the sun, and superb lighting on the birds. We spent at least an hour staring up at its lively branches, being particularly good for hummingbirds, with stunning views of at least 2 White-necked Jacobins, a Brown Violet-ear which visited twice, and elusive small green birds which eventually proved to be Blue-chinned Sapphires. At least three different kinds of flycatchers were eventually seen on the tree – Piratic Flycatcher and Tropical Pewee were present for some time, but a much smaller bird, possibly a tyrannulet, didn't show well enough for identification. Male and female Green Honeycreepers were regular, with flocks of Tanagers flying through frequently (mainly White-beaked & White-lined, with the odd White-shouldered, as well as Blue-grey and the occasional Palm). More Common Black-Hawks were again overhead, with one landing only about 50m away briefly.

We then climbed a rather steeper rough track, which ended after a short way at what would have been a rather smart house, if it had been finished. Plenty of raptors from

here, including a pair of displaying Grey Hawks quite close to, and a fair few *Chaetura* swifts, which were mainly Grey-rumped Swifts, with a few Band-tailed Swifts amongst them.

Eager to please on the descent again, the favoured Immortelle tree produced White-breasted Emerald, alongside the already recorded White-necked Jacobins and Blue-chinned Sapphire. The Piratic Flycatcher was still in the same place, but another was much closer on wires a little further down the track. This was probably the first bird that we had seen using man made wires as a lookout post. Another hummingbird that we saw caused some problems, having plain green back and white underparts. However, it obliged by briefly hovering, showing rufous parts of the outer tail feathers, bordered by black and then white – only female Ruby-topaz Hummingbird shows these colours on the tail in Trinidad. We arrived back at Aripo Cottage at around 17:40, and watched the last birds of the day while sipping on a delicious local coffee. From the rear terrace, another



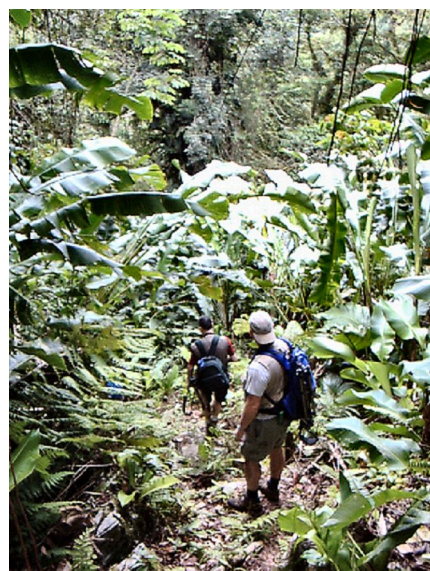
new bird was seen on the lower bushes – Yellow-bellied Elaenia right in front of us, along with yet more Blue-grey & Palm Tanagers. The setting of the rainforested valley below the terrace was breathtaking, capping a brilliant first day. We hadn't intended to do a full day at Aripo, since an afternoon excursion to another site in the car had been planned, but the birding was too good to miss, and we had covered only a portion of what could be seen here. It certainly proved to be a perfect place to stay, both for the comfort of the buildings and food, and the habitat on the doorstep.

Aripo Caves

(Day 3)

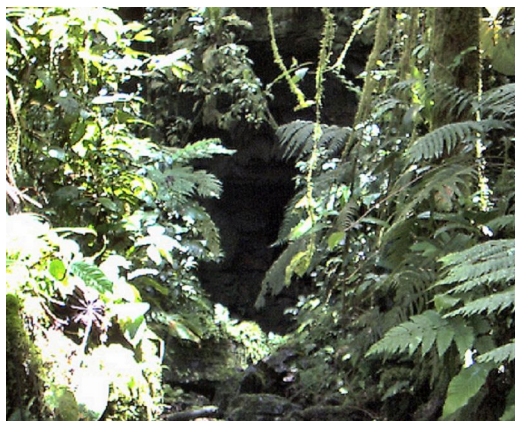
The target for today was to be walking the forest to the Aripo Caves for the Oilbirds. Any significant fall of rain tends to curtail these trips, presumably due to the type of steep muddy terrain that made up part of the route, so the sound of rain lashing on the roof over our heads through the night did nothing to endear the spirits. By the time we arose just after 6am, a lot of the standing water had dried up, and the rain clouds were lifting, and we were happily informed by Gary that Mervyn would be able to take us to the caves. The superb breakfast was all but finished by 7:30, but only after another hours birding beforehand. I took a small path to the rear of the premises through the gardens to a small stream. Hiking boots were a definite advantage here, tackling the combination of slope, mud and water admirably. In addition to the now usual species, there were also a few new species down here. Bare-eyed Thrushes continued to be unapproachable, disappearing from view almost as soon as they were picked up, but a Cocoa Thrush later was more accommodating. Nearby, a rather large hummingbird turned out to be Green Hermit, and one or two of these seemed to be hanging around the buildings on return. At the stream running at the base of the gardens, a Black-throated Mango was catching the light beautifully, and seemed to be doing more dancing in the air than feeding.

The walk to the Aripo Caves is not for the feint hearted. The first half an hour covered the track walked yesterday, up towards Aripo Heights, but as we turned up the steeper track towards the large house, we cut straight into the adjoining rainforest. The walk from there must have been about 2 hours, and it was obvious in some sections why rain would stop play – some almost vertical ascents (and descents) were on mud and slippery rocks. It is difficult enough even



when dry! The path goes through some very steep, rocky cuts, and up some dry river beds (ie, streamless, but still wet and muddy). Added to this were the heat and humidity (not in themselves high, until after exertion). Birds could certainly be heard along the way, and were sporadically seen, but the most productive times were when we stopped for a rest. The first such break found 3 Bright-rumped Attilas, and a pair of Long-billed Gnatwrens nearby, chasing through the undergrowth. While trying to track down what turned out to be another Bananaquit, a Plain-brown Woodcreeper landed upside down on one of the higher branches, only to leave about 10 seconds later.

The second stop was even better. Perhaps in a little more enclosed part of the forest, we quickly saw Ochre-bellied Flycatcher and White-necked Thrush. After only a couple of minutes sitting, a female Collared Trogon appeared and landed on a branch in front of us. This was followed a couple of minutes later by a male White-bearded Manakin. We had already seen one or two female manakins, but we weren't familiar enough with them for identification. This sighting made up for that. Another Plain-brown Woodcreeper was also seen here, with Chestnut Woodpecker flying through.



The Oilbird caves themselves are in the depths of the jungle, at a height of over 500m. How on earth they were found in the first place is anybody's guess, but once in the caves proper, one of the strangest birds is found. The noise given off by them is very raucous, and they are surprisingly large. We descended the slippery rocks past the mouth of the cave, to within about 10-20m of the nearest Oilbirds. When our eyes had adjusted to the lower light levels, we had some good views of flying and perching birds, with some seen through binoculars eventually in almost half light. It had been a very long and difficult walk, but worth it for the experience alone, as well as seeing the Oilbirds, and some other species that were only found in this part of the rain forest. This outing had a sense of achievement surrounding it.

The trudge back to the main track didn't seem to take nearly as long as the ascent, although we didn't emerge out of the rain forest until about 14:30. More birds were added on the return, including Blue Dacnis and close Bay-headed Tanager. Once we had had a short sit down, we turned the corner to the favoured Immortelle tree, which seemed to host fewer birds than the previous day. However, it did hold White-lined Tanager, Blue-chinned Sapphire, White-chested Emerald, Green & Red-legged Woodcreeper. After about 20 minutes of watching, it also threw in Southern Beardless-tyrannulet for the trip. More sensibly than yesterday, we found that lying on our backs in the road, with heads propped up on bags, made much more comfortable and practical watching.



When we left the flowering Immortelle, steady progress was made to where we had

seen the Ruby-topaz Hummingbird female the previous day. It reappeared in no time, which was no great surprise, since we found that it was actually tending a nest in the bush where it had been first located, right next to the track.

Aripo Cottage

(Day 4)

The rain had been bouncing off the roof again through the night, but continued until after daylight for the first time. Breakfast was supposed to be at 7:00, which translated into the Caribbean time of 8:00, so we had 1½ hours of dodging in and out of the rain showers chasing after birds. As well as the usual birds seen here, an early flock of parrots turned out to be our first Blue-headed Parrots feeding on the Immortelle tree just beyond the base of the garden. The Copper-rumped Hummingbird returned to its usual perch, but we also had what was probably a hermit of some type close by, and possible jacobin on fly through. Just as we were clearing off breakfast, a White Hawk landed in one of the trees right in front of the terrace, giving stunning views.

Pax Guest House



After waiting for Gary to return to the premises, and lead us through Tunapuna to buy some of the delicious local coffee, and then to his office to pay the Visa bill, we eventually arrived at the Pax Guest House at 10:30. This is a colonial style accommodation, being formerly a monastery annexe, a few hundred feet above the town of Tunapuna. When we gazed at the front entrance, there was the discouraging sight of a group of people trying to squeeze in (they turned out to be an organised sightseeing trip from one of the cruise ships), so we decided to locate the viewing terraces to the rear of the property, and start birding immediately, before even contemplating checking in. There are in fact two terraces – an upper one for all visitors, and a lower one reserved for guests. Both overlook the lower elevation rain forest. Various fruit and nectar feeders had been provided, and were best seen from the lower guest's terrace. We immediately had a plethora of the now common birds: Silver-beaked, White-lined, Blue-grey & Palm Tanagers, Kiskadees, Copper-rumped Hummingbirds, Bananaquits, and Tropical Mockingbirds. Hundreds of vultures were overhead, which reportedly also contain Zone-tailed Hawks at times.

With time rapidly passing by, we had abandoned the idea of leaving for another site for the rest of the day, and rather to spend the rest of the day exploring the Pax area. The feeders to the rear of the guest house provided lengthy entertainment, with a sponge cake laden feeder being particularly popular, with Cocoa & Bare-eyed Thrushes, White-lined, Palm & Blue-grey Tanagers, at least 4 Yellow Orioles, Ruddy Ground-dove, Kiskadees, and Tropical Mockingbird all hanging around here in



numbers. A single Greyish Saltator that popped in occasionally was much more elusive.

We grabbed some bananas and coke, and drove up the road to where it terminated, at St Benet Hall on Mount St Benedict Road. This was the place to park the car and the beginning of the Old Donkey Trail. It was now about 13:45. The first few hundred metres of the track followed the course of the dry stream bed below, and we did see Chestnut Woodpecker and White-lined Tanager, until we came to a right U-turn in the track, which marked the short course of the stream upwards (where bizarrely there were a couple of Virgin Mary statues at its head) – a spot reportedly good for breeding Rufous-breasted Hermits. We sat here for 15-20 minutes, missed out on the Rufous-breasted Hermits, but did see 1 or 2 Copper-rumped Hummingbirds, and a Green Hermit passing through briefly. Piratic Flycatcher and Violaceous Euphonia were overhead.

Just after leaving this small cul-de-sac, a calling bird just below the canopy led to backbreaking views (countered by lying on the back with backpack as headrest) of a small, preening russet brown passerine, with a supercilium, and second stripe further down the face. The upturned bill confirmed Streaked Xenops. It continued preening for a few minutes before flying off. Sparse but enjoyable forest birding continued as we approached what was marked as a manakin lek on the small map that we had from Pax Guest House. Around the area that we thought would hold the manakins, a Squirrel Cuckoo flew in, but no sign of the target birds. Once we climbed a little further, where the track took a sharp left turn, we thought we'd missed our chance, but followed up a couple of calling birds just above where we had begun our search. Within 5-10 minutes we had at least 2 male Golden-headed Manakins calling and occasionally showing very well. Not far up from this spot, we came across our first ant-eating birds, with a pair of White-flanked Antwrens. The male was all black, apart from rows of white spots on the wings; the female warm brown



The track from here became steeper and went through a small conifer stand. As we passed these conifers, we decided to turn back where the undergrowth was very dense, mainly due to the marching of time, but did find a little cut to the side, which led to a vista of the forested valley below and above. As soon as we peered through here, amongst the many vultures was a light phase Short-tailed Hawk, and Peregrine circling much higher.

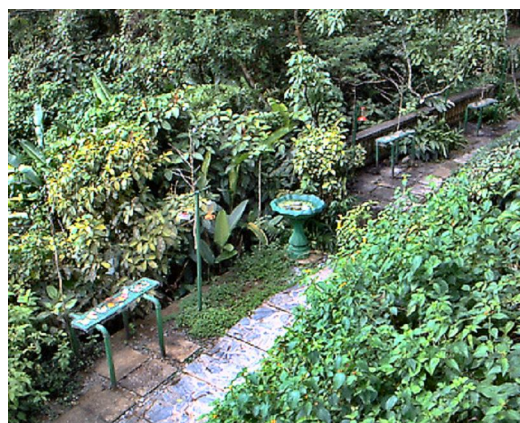
Asa Wright Nature Centre

(Day 5)



After ticking off Lilac-tailed Parrot and Short-tailed Swift in an hours birding before breakfast at Pax Guest House, we set off for the Asa Wright Nature Centre, which we

somewhat surprisingly found at the first time of asking. It was only about 50 minutes drive from Pax. As soon as we alighted from the car, we had amazing views of male and female Tufted Coquettes, feeding only metres from the car on a hedge of purple flowering shrubs. After tearing ourselves away from these magnificent little creatures, we ambled down to the reception desk and paid the \$TT180, which included both entrance and the 10:30 guided walk for 3. This left us with half an hour to spend on the viewing terrace. What a treat! This location is everything that we had expected, and these expectations were very high. Despite the construction noise in the background, we weren't distracted from the half a dozen tables and feeders placed directly below the terrace, and there was constant avian activity on these. In addition to the now expected Blue-grey, Palm, White-lined & Silver-beaked Tanagers, were all 3 species of Honeycreepers, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, White-breasted Emerald, Ruddy Ground-dove, masses of Bananaquits, Cocoa & Bare-eyed Thrushes – even a Crested Oropendola visited one of the tables to steal some food. The backdrop to this feeding area is beautiful, looking down the valley, and across the top of the rain forest for some miles. You can't help but be excited by the place.



Cameras and camcorders were trained on the birds below, but there were so many birds that the challenge was to capture them away from the feeders. Our proximity (less than a metre in some cases) to some of the nectar holders didn't deter White-necked Jacobin and White-chested Emerald from feeding within touching distance. One point that needs to be noted about the centre is that a guide is a must for the trails – they will not allow any other access to reduce disturbance. The benefit is that this uses the experience of the guides to point out the birds that would normally be missed. We almost had a guide to ourselves, before 5 non-birders ambled up to the group, but you can't always have everything! Harold led us down the Discovery Trail, which is a tidy footpath through mixed woodland and forest, ending at the base, near to a Bellbird lek. Some flowering shrubs have been planted alongside the path at the beginning of the trail, and this is a magnet for hummingbirds – we saw Tufted Coquette chasing Blue-chinned Sapphire, as well as Copper-rumped Hummingbird. In a tallish tree just off the path was a roosting Common Potoo, which Harold picked out of the leaves in the top branches. Continuing down the path, we came across a male White-bearded Manakin in a small round clearing. A male Golden-headed Manakin was found further down the trail, while Harold was attracting a Violaceous Trogon to within 30m or so of the group. Moving on, a male White-flanked Antwren was close to but brief, as was Long-billed Gnatwren. The target at the bottom of this walk was a Bearded Bellbird lek, and a few raucous birds could be heard from a distance. We staked out the lek for about 10 minutes, and could hear the birds almost constantly, but they seemed to be stationary a little further down. Next part of the plan was to traverse the tangled vegetation across the track to try to hunt them down. They were now only calling sporadically, so we returned to the main site of the lek, where a single calling bird was perched out in the open only a short distance from us. This was possibly one of the strangest birds yet – all white, apart from brown cap and dangling wattles, and the size of a pigeon, and an eerily far carrying call.



The timing of arrival from the walk was impeccable – when we were back under the shelter of the viewing terrace again, the heavens opened for over half an hour. However, quite dry and still birding, we witnessed birds such as White-necked Jacobin and White-chested Emerald making the most of the impromptu showering facilities. Almost as soon as the rain had stopped, the bird activity exploded, with the already busy feeders and bushes in front of us even more alive with birds. Pride of place on the feeders in front of us were Blue-crowned Motmot, and males of Barred Antshrike, manoeuvring briefly on the tops of the foliage, and, elusive at the base of the bushes, male Great Antshrike. The tree to the immediate left of the feeders was superb for variety, particularly for tanagers, eventually holding a brace of Turquoise and a trio of Bay-headed Tanagers. Also on here at least 2 Ochre-bellied Flycatchers, which were almost constantly present, and what looked like a Forest Elaenia. Violaceous Euphonia passed through. The trees further away from the terrace had manic displaying Crested Oropendola, Greyish Saltator, with an even more distant bare tree playing host to singles of Olive-sided Flycatcher and Violaceous Trogon. This also coincided with a peak in human activity, since there was at least one tour group here, taking their birding log call – we were pleased to have front row seats, despite the large size of the terrace building. They were cramped into two rows depth, but most probably still obtained good views of the birds on show. We also had lunch here, and while it was too tempting to break away from watching the birds, we munched our way through burgers that were large enough to fill a small army while still perched on the seats overlooking the terrace.

We eventually stayed at the centre, through yet more rain showers, until about 16:15. The birding display was too good to leave, curtailing plans to go to sites elsewhere. A variety of species continued to come and go into the afternoon, and we were just about to leave when a Golden-olive Woodpecker appeared on the branches directly in front of us, with a male White-bearded Manakin on the branches to the opposing side of the terrace.

Trincity Ponds

We wound our way down from Asa Wright Nature Centre in no time, eventually finding a petrol station near to the airport – they are few and far between on the island. A full tank of petrol only cost \$TT80. We then set off for the Trincity Ponds. These sewage ponds are located on the first small turning to the West of the airport / Churchill-Roosevelt highway interchange. On pulling up at the locked gate, the gatekeeper within more or less said “tough luck, we’re shut until tomorrow!” (the opening hours are supposedly 7am – 16:00). However, we must have been wearing our pathetic faces, because he let us in as we were about to leave. The site is a definite bonus. There are four square sewage ponds of equal size, two containing active water filters, one with some open still water, and the fourth with marsh interspersed by occasional bushes. There is a good mix of wetland species, some in huge numbers. The first active lagoon had hundreds of White-winged Swallows feeding over the surface water. The second sported a Caiman, slowly meandering across the open water, with Wattled Jacanas, Yellow-chinned Spinetails, and Pied Water-Tyrants around the edges. Just beyond this was a cultivated field full of cultivated green vegetables, which contained literally

hundreds of adult and juvenile Yellow-hooded Blackbirds, laced with many Shiny Cowbirds.



The third lagoon didn't seem to hold any standing or open water, but contained wall to wall low, marshy vegetation. Amongst the handful of Pied Water-Tyrants was a single adult White-headed Marsh-Tyrant. A superb, dapper bird, which enjoyed doing slow circuits of the lagoon by plant hopping. There seemed to be a family of Yellow-chinned Spinetails here, as well as a single female Yellow Warbler. Adding to the numerous White-winged Swallows was a handful of Southern Rough-winged Swallows, which seemed to prefer to feed and perch over the open fields. A Little Blue Heron flew in and landed next to the fourth, working lagoon, and a Ringed Kingfisher was glimpsed as it flew off into the distance.

By the time we were leaving, the light was fading, and most of the hirundines had gone, but it had been a very productive stop off on the way back to Pax. We had read in some reports that the ponds were a bit of a crime spot, but that seems to have been eradicated with the addition of the locked fence and the gatekeeper. I'm not sure if the opening hours he told us were true, but being pleasant to him seemed to do the trick.

Arena Forest

(Day 6)

After parking the car just off track, we entered the forest on one of the trails, and it remained dark under the trees for some time, due to the density of the foliage. First impressions were that the forest was almost birdless apart from the odd calling Bananaquit. We progressed along the Parrot Ride, which is a well marked trace into the forest, for about half a kilometre, and this trail ends at the bottom of a small decline at a very slow flowing stream (which actually looked almost stagnant). Sifting through the Bananaquits eventually weeded out males of both Golden-headed & White-bearded Manakins. Trogon calls were heard shortly after these, and we located a pair of White-tailed Trogons on a branch directly above us. These were calling for 5-10 minutes before switching off the sound again. A small brown, orange-legged bird near the stream may have been a female manakin. We patiently continued the difficult forest birding on the way back to the car, with a good number of calling birds in the canopy, but hard to pin down. This patience was rewarded with a Cocoa Woodcreeper, and 2 or 3 very small hummingbirds with green on the back, which we had hoped were Little Hermits, but could in no way be identified. 4 or 5 undistinguished Yellow-crowned Greenlets were picked up near the canopy.



Following this first foray into the Arena Forest, we wasted quite a bit of time looking for the Arena Dam and Reservoir – initially due to poor directions in Murphy, taking us

over very poor tracks which the car barely survived, and then, once we had found the dam entrance, entry was barred due to lack of permits. We abandoned further exploration of the forest, and decided to head for Wallerfields instead. However, we did pick up our first Yellow-rumped Cacique on the way back to the main highway, and our first Yellow-headed Caracara perched on a pole at the side of the main road South.

Wallerfields

The left hand turnoff on Cumuto Road was found, which is a bush and tree lined track which eventually ends on the southern strip of Wallerfields airfield. We stashed the car about 100m along this track to have a snack and look into the birds of the area at the same time. Many flowering plants were mixed in with the trees and large bushes, thus turning up Copper-rumped Hummingbird, Green Hermit, White-breasted Emerald, Barred Antshrike, Fork-tailed Palm-swift overhead, and the unusual sight of an Anhinga circling upwards in the thermals above us.



We progressed to the old airport runways, the smaller South one of which eventually joined the much larger counterpart. The latter was very wide and long, supposedly disused (it was built for World War II use), but still looks if it has its uses. We had been told that Nightjars are easy to see here after dusk, but also warned to be very careful, since the current nocturnal use of the airstrip is not exactly legal, or safe to watch. Continuing on around the airfield, which had constant traffic from the works within Wallerfields, we didn't see a great deal – probably not the best time of day! We did encounter a massive flock of Black Vultures on the ground, around the ruins of the old airport buildings.

Wallerfields sand quarry



A short way down from the track, we were back on Cumuto road, and crossed the Aripo River, and parked the car immediately after this on a poor track to the left. We followed this track, which was parallel to the river, to an old sand quarry, which was now

almost back to a natural state, with masses of varied and potentially productive habitat, having open areas of water surrounded by marsh, and palms to the South. It seemed an absolutely ideal spot for birds, so it was surprising that it turned out so quiet. The only birds around the open water were a Crested Oropendola and Fork-tailed Palm-swifts overhead. The palm stands even contained deep water and exposed roots, containing many fish of various sizes, ideal for kingfishers and waterthrushes, but again no joy.

Things livened up a little on the way back to the car, not so much due to numbers of birds, but a small variety of interesting species. About half way back, an elusive Rufous-browed Peppershrike was found singing on the underside of a tall palm frond about 10m high. An Osprey was soaring overhead a little further along, with Southern Rough-winged Swallows lower down over the river and treetops. A male Ruby-topaz Hummingbird was feeding briefly next to the car, and a Striped Cuckoo landed in the trees to the rear. The same stand of trees held a Grey Hawk, which had been calling since we started the walk.

Aripo Savannah

In the town of Cumuto, we quickly found the track to Aripo Savannah. This is right next to the Forestry Commission Offices, where there is a small car park. It might have been worth spending a little more time to check in here, since the Savannah does have a sign stating "Permit only". At the entrance to the track, we had good views of our first definite Sulphury Flycatcher. After all the Tropical Kingbirds we had seen, this bird had a much cleaner and deeper white throat, merging into yellow on the chest, and appeared to have a less shallow fork to the tail. Shortly after this, we also picked up our first definite Savannah Hawk flying overhead. After about 200m, a track to the left led on to the savannah proper, which is largely open flat grassland, with scattered stands of palms. We did walk one or two of these trails, but the time of day was again not the best (mid-afternoon), leading to only 2 more Savannah Hawks flying through.



Aripo Agricultural Station

We had planned to end the day at Nariva Swamp, but since the time had passed faster than we had expected, we decided to try our luck at the Aripo Agricultural Station, which is situated just to the West of the Aripo Village road. We had been informed by Gerard at Pax Guest House that this would be closed to us, but we decided to try our luck. Approaching the turn into the station, we had excellent views of a Savannah Hawk perched on a telegraph pole near to the main highway. It may have been a good omen, since the staff at the office just through the main gate were more than happy for us to bird the area. The only proviso was that we were careful of the herd of domesticated bison along the way after dark.



Once out of the car, a pair of White-winged Swallows landed on overhead wires, and a pair of tiny Green-rumped Parrotlets flew across and landed in a nearby lone bush. Barely away from the few buildings at the entrance, a Solitary Sandpiper was feeding in a waterlogged cowpen. From this spot, we picked out singing Red-breasted Blackbird, and a pair of Ruddy-breasted Seedeaters flew in and landed briefly. Still in the same spot, a lone Saffron Finch flew over, and a couple of White-headed Marsh-Tyrants posed on the fences lining the track. A female seedeater behind us remained unidentified (beige with dark eye – what chance did we have?).

There was a large cattle shed about 400m from the station entrance, with intimidating bison in the surrounding enclosed fields. Alongside these was a small stream filled ditch, which flowed under the track through a low bridge, which was teeming with Wattled Jacanas, Southern Lapwings, Striated Herons, and various other waders such as Killdeer, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Least Sandpipers. As we crossed over this bridge, a Greater Yellowlegs appeared from its opening underneath us. Pied Water-Tyrants were tending a nest a short distance downstream. We decided that we wouldn't have enough time before dark to reach a small pool just under a mile from the entrance, plus the fact that the bison seemed to be starting to be a bit nervy (the wire fence all of a sudden looked very flimsy), so turned back. This resulted in plenty of time to enjoy the birds we had already seen some more, including more Red-breasted Blackbirds, a couple of Spotted Sandpipers, and Grey-breasted Martin over. The agricultural station turned out to be a great birding success. Until then, some good birds had been seen, although the day had been very "bitty", particularly through the middle of the day, but the quality of this site was way above the rest of the day's experiences. To cap this, as we were approaching the car, a Yellow-chinned Spinetail landed near the cowpen which had earlier held the Solitary Sandpiper.

Rice fields

(Day 7)



After we had negotiated the early morning traffic of Tunapuna, and found the road South towards Caroni Swamp, the Rice Fields were located quite easily. Despite having taken the wrong set of traffic lights in town, we parked up on a corner, and above the noise of the constant traffic passing by, we spent some time looking over the flat fields, with a view of the hills in the distance. Most obvious birds here were huge flocks of Swifts – initially all Short-tailed, but a search through eventually weeded out Fork-tailed Palm & Chestnut-collared Swift. The latter were obvious due to their different shape, but the chestnut collars could also be seen on some with a little patience and in certain lights. Yellow-hooded Blackbirds were seen early on, with a Giant Cowbird over, joining a group of other congeners on a tree in the distance. Herons in the vicinity were white phase Little Blue, dark phase birds being seen later, and Striated Heron. 3 Limpkins were in the area.

Waterloo

After leaving the Rice Fields, we headed South on the main highway, passing bumper to bumper hold-ups heading in the opposite direction on the opposite side of the road, and turned off to the South-west after 9 miles. We wound our way to eventually find the mud flats of Waterloo. We hit lucky, since the tide was well out, revealing a vast expanse of exposed mud, with a Hindu temple on a promontory to the South side of the flats. It was a case of not knowing where to look first on the mud and sea, with so many different species in large numbers. Directly in front of us, some grounded boats awaiting the next incoming tide were decorated with Laughing Gulls, joined on one by a few Brown Pelicans. A Large-billed Tern was perched on one side of these (a Royal Tern to the other), with a third flying over towards the mud flats. Herons were abundant, with most being Little Blue (which was present in scores over the whole of the exposed mud). Great

Blue, Yellow-crowned & Black-crowned Night-heron, Striated Heron, and Great White Egrets added to the list. Waders included Turnstones, Willets, Greater Yellowlegs, with a roost composed of Southern Lapwings, Short-billed Dowitchers, and Semipalmated Plovers. A small collection of impressive Black Skimmers flew in and rested amongst the throng. A handful of Ospreys were perched on driftwood far out in the mud, some feeding on fish.



We ambled along the walkway to the Temple, to get a better look at Neotropic Cormorant, finding yet more exposed mud to the South, although not as expansive or populous as on the northern aspect. However, quite close to the path, on some exposed shingle, was a mixed collection of Western & Semipalmated Sandpipers and Semipalmated Plover. The majority of the peeps were Westerns, but allowed comparison when close to each other.

Lower elevation of Aripo Heights

After heading into Port of Spain, which is a delightfully awful collection of concrete, we made the final payment for the hire car, and decided to return to the base of the Aripo Heights before meeting up with our boat for the Caroni Swamp tour. This was a very good decision from the off, since soon after we made the turn from the main highway to the Aripo Village road, a couple of Sulphury Flycatchers were followed by a perched Pearl Kite, on telegraph wires directly above the car. We hadn't expected to see this scarce bird – this added to the appreciation of a beautifully compact, small and streamlined raptor.

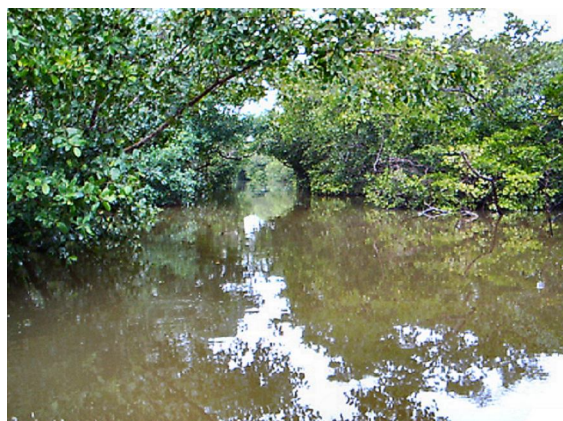


We drove to the bridge which we crossed to find Aripo Cottage, but this time went straight on along L'orange road, and parked up just on the other side of a concrete bridge after about a mile, opposite the entrance of a small "mansion". This possesses a veranda and manicured gardens, which are reputed to hold over 10 species of hummingbird. We did see a few here, including brief Ruby-topaz & Copper-rumped, with a Plumbeous Kite perched on an exposed bare tree on the opposite ridge of trees, and Yellow Oriole plying to and fro. We left the mansion grounds and followed the track below for about 400m. This produced the usual species already seen for this area, as well as Northern Waterthrush and Golden-fronted Greenlet.

Caroni Swamp

We drove from Aripo Heights around mid-afternoon, found petrol a little easier than last time, and very easily located James Madoo's boat dock. We arrived about ¾ hour too early, so found a bit of birding nearby on the marshes. This wasn't too productive, apart from Yellow-headed Caracara overhead. We decided to wait at the boat dock, whereupon the heavens opened up in a deluge of rain. It looked like a wet journey around the

swamp, but the rain stopped about 5 minutes before departure. The seats at the front were kindly dried off for us. The tour only cost us \$TT60 each, and we were lucky because the rain had put most people off, leaving only 3 others to share our boat. James was very accommodating, perhaps partly due to the lack of other passengers to see to, and took the pace fairly steadily through the swamp, stopping when some decent birds were suspected. The first bird seen was Black-throated Mango, which just preceded Green Kingfisher, which flew across the front of the boat. Unfortunately, it didn't land. This is a species that we had hoped for on other trips for some time.



We made our way through some quite narrow channels, with impressive mangroves to each side. The channels widened as we approached the main target of the ibis roost, until we arrived at a wide, open expanse of water. On the way, we saw various goodies, including Straight-billed Woodcreeper, 2 or 3 Bicoloured Conebills (much more impressive in real life than expected), and a resting Tree Boa. Also a little surprising, with the tide quite high, were small collections of waders, such as Short-billed Dowitcher, Lesser Yellowlegs, Turnstone, and Spotted Sandpiper, perched on the exposed mangrove roots.

James docked the boat just after 17:00, tying it to some overhanging branches, facing an island in the centre of the large expanse of water. Small flocks of Snowy Egrets were the first to make their way to roost, and these contained two's and three's of Tricoloured Heron. Some Scarlet Ibises had been seen within the mangroves, but the first of the incoming birds was seen around 15 minutes after stopping the boat. Numbers steadily increased until flocks of up to 50 Scarlet Ibis (and similar numbers of Snowy Egrets)



were seen to some in. The majority of the Scarlet Ibis flew on to a more distant roost, but many still landed on the island in front of us. Along with the Egrets, the island started to look like a huge red and white berry bush. Something that we noticed as the birds swarmed in was that the Scarlet Ibis tended to fly in over the tops of the trees, compared to the Egrets that hugged the surface of the water. We departed this spectacle well before dark, making it safer to negotiate the maze of mangroves. We were the first of the 3 boats present to leave, with Nadan's two jam-packed sardine cans following us later.

Pax and the Old Donkey Trail

(Day 8)

Up and out of the accommodation by 6:30, we planned to use the first couple of hours before breakfast to complete some more local birding around the Pax and Mount St Benedict area. We set off up the hill towards St Benet's Hall, and on the way found adult White-breasted Emeralds feeding a fledged immature. I was going to head off on the Parula Trail, when a local in a van warned me that the trail was not the safest place to

go. Perhaps the warning was a good omen, since the trees around the camp accommodation at the start of the trail were very lively. Pride of place went to a lively pair of Squirrel Cuckoos, both of which were uncharacteristically playing out in the open. A handful of Tropical Parulas were restlessly feeding higher up. A couple of elaenias were scrapping with each other as they passed through, showing irate white crest stripes as they tussled.



We tore ourselves away from the birding around St Benet's Hall, to descend the Old Donkey Trail, aiming for the supposed Rufous-breasted Hermit nesting site at the head of the dry stream. A superb Rufous-breasted Wren was singing on the descent. All we had for our troubles at the stream was a Copper-rumped Hummingbird, which seemed intent on chasing away allcomers. Climbing back up the track again, good views of a pair of Plain-brown Woodcreepers were eventually to be had. A Streaked Xenops, hammering away at the end of a broken branch, looked very similar to a small woodpecker at first. A singing Rufous-breasted Wren also eventually showed itself out in the open.

We arrived back at Pax for breakfast at 9:00, peering around the open doors to watch the raptor rising on thermals outside. Following Short-tailed Hawk, possible Double-toothed Kite, and White Hawk, our first Zone-tailed Hawk appeared directly in front of us, before slipping away down the valley.

Tobago airport

Back in Tobago airport again, with a couple of hours until our onward flight, and we were lucky enough to be able to check in the cases immediately, leaving the maximum amount of time possible for walking around the immediate area. As soon as we exited the buildings, Carib Grackles and Grey Kingbirds flew over. Shortly after Bananaquits and Blue-grey Tanager, a pair of Eared Doves landed on wires directly over us. These were not seen on Trinidad, and were distant on our first foray before the Trinidad connecting flight. A short walk to the West, along the northern perimeter of the airport, brought us to the shores of the Caribbean Sea, overlooking one of the bays. In amongst the hordes of happy sun worshippers, was a small collection of Laughing Gulls and Royal Terns. Caribbean Martins were overhead. We turned the corner to the South, and found a Yellow-bellied Elaenia. This short road met the airport runway again, so we veered to the right, finding Brown-crested Flycatcher, and very briefly what may have been a Red-crowned Woodpecker – another not seen on Trinidad.

This road again terminated at the shores of the Caribbean, with planes flying in low above us. Two floating platforms about 100m into the sea from here held a collection of 2 dozen or so Brown Boobies, and a pair of Brown Pelicans. Most were juveniles, with 2-3 smart adults in attendance. Our target along the South side of the airport was a group of freshwater ponds, but they were quite a trek, so we decided to turn back so far along – missing the flight wouldn't have been worth it (probably!). Just as we completed the U-turn, a Yellow-headed Caracara flew by. We had passed what looked like a feral pigeon earlier – it was still here, but proved to be a Pale-vented Pigeon, showing poorly against the backlight. Another first for the trip, presented by Tobago. After adding a second Pale-vented Pigeon near to the airport entrance, we saw some Blue-black Grassquits, half a dozen Smooth-billed Anis together, and more Grey Kingbirds. All in all, this is one of the best airports that I have flown through for easy accessibility of birds within walking distance of the gates.

SPECIES SEEN

Brown Pelican

Pelecanus occidentalis

These were only seen on the 2 days when we were at the coast. 3 birds were on the boats with Laughing Gulls at Waterloo, and at least 20 birds were flying past and fishing over the sea adjacent to Tobago airport



Brown Booby

Sula leucogaster

2 groups totalling ~16 birds were resting on 2 floating platforms just off the beach from Tobago airport. Most were juveniles in wholly brown plumage, with only 2-3 adults in dapper brown and white livery

Neotropic Cormorant

Phalacrocorax brasilianus

Only one was seen on the coast at Waterloo, perched on a buoy just offshore, but more were seen flying over Caroni Swamp



Anhinga

Anhinga anhinga

Only one bird was seen, in perhaps the most surprising of places – circling high on thermals with raptors over Wallerfields

Magnificent Frigatebird

Fregata magnificens

The only inland bird was a singleton high over the Pax Guest House, with more predictable birds at Waterloo (~8) and over the sea just off Tobago airport (~20)

Great Blue Heron

Ardea herodias

Only one seen – perched for some time on the mudflats at Waterloo

Great Egret

Ardea alba

4 birds were feeding together on the mud at Waterloo, and 6 flew over Caroni Swamp later that day

Tricoloured Heron

Egretta tricolor

4 birds were in the distance on the mudflats at Waterloo, but most were seen at Caroni Swamp, where in excess of 80 birds flew in with Snowy Egrets to roost

Little Blue Heron

Egretta caerulea

After a single bird flying in to the Trincity Ponds, the most impressive numbers were feeding on the mudflats at Waterloo, with at least 50 birds present. A further 6 birds were seen over the Rice Fields earlier that same morning, with an additional 30 or so at Caroni Swamp

Snowy Egret

Egretta thula

6 birds were feeding on the mudflats at Waterloo, but the most impressive numbers were the hundreds flying in to roost with the Ibis at Caroni swamp. Many flew on to roost elsewhere, but a large number landed in the trees in around the large open lagoon



Cattle Egret*Bubulcus ibis*

Abundant

Striated Heron*Butorides striata*

2 were around the stream and cattle sheds at the Aripo Agricultural Station, one appearing from beneath the bridge over the track; 1 close in perched on an exposed piece of wood at Waterloo mud flats; 6 at Caroni Swamp

Night Heron*Nycticorax nycticorax*

Only 2 were seen – 1 on the mudflats at Waterloo, and 1 in the mangroves at Caroni Swamp

**Yellow-crowned Night-heron***Nycticorax violacea*

5 on the mudflats at Waterloo; 6 at Caroni Swamp

Scarlet Ibis*Eudocimus ruber*

The spectacle of hundreds of birds coming in to roost at Caroni Swamp is world famous, and we found that this was not disappointing. We paid \$US10 each for a ride on James Madoo's boat through the swamp, which also passes other bird species on the way. Single and small groups of birds were seen on the journey through, but the main mass of birds was seen later in the afternoon. The boat is parked opposite an island in a large clearing of water, and the birds started appearing at around 17:00. They tended to come in high, and most went on to roost at other parts of the swamp, but a sizeable number landed on the island in front of us

Blue-winged Teal*Anas discors*

The only wildfowl we saw were ~12 of these birds flying over us while waiting for the Scarlet Ibis at Caroni Swamp

Black Vulture*Coragyps atratus*

Abundant

Turkey Vulture*Cathartes aura*

Abundant

Osprey*Pandion heliaetus*

1 over Wallerfields; 6 at Waterloo (including 4 perched on posts on the mudflats); 1 over Caroni Swamp

Pearl Kite*Gampsonyx swainsonii*

The sighting of this bird came as a bit of a surprise, since they are not too common on the island. The single bird we saw was perched on wires right above the car at the base of the road to Aripo Heights. They are deceptively small and delicate (smallest raptor here – even smaller than Bat Falcon), but probably one of the most impressive birds that we saw

**Double-toothed Kite***Harpagus bidentatus*

A single bird was perched in the distance at Asa Wright Nature Centre

Plumbeous Kite*Ictinia plumbea*

This is a migratory species, and so we weren't expecting any to be present at the time of our visit. We were pleasantly surprised to find that they were not too difficult to see in the Aripo Valley, with 4 on both days in the Aripo Heights area, when walking from the Aripo Cottage, and a single bird perched on the tops at the end of the week when again visiting the lower elevation of the Aripo Heights. Once seen flying, they have a distinctive shape, with pointed wings reminiscent of a falcon

White Hawk*Leucopternis albicollis*

This is a most impressive raptor, with contrasting black and white plumage, and large but compact shape in flight, due to its very broad wings and short tail. Most were seen in flight, but one bird landed in trees twice very close to us in the grounds of Aripo Cottage. Aripo Heights (8 on 13th, 1 on 14th, 1 on 15th); 2 from the terrace of Pax Guest House (19th)

Common Black-Hawk*Buteogallus anthracinus*

These were seen every day, most being in the mountainous areas. The peak was 10 on the 13th (Aripo Heights)

**Great Black-Hawk***Buteogallus urubitinga*

These are not always easy to separate from Common Black Hawk, since size and shape comparison is not reliable to the inexperienced. However, tail patterns were seen well on the 2 birds identified as this species (1 each on the 13th and 14th – Aripo Heights)

Savannah Hawk*Buteogallus meridionalis*

What was likely to be our first sighting of this species was a bird tantalisingly perched on wires next to the main highway south of Tunapuna, but we weren't able to stop and look at it properly. However, the 3 birds at Wallerfields / Aripo Savannah were easily identified in flight. At the Aripo Agricultural Station later that same day, much better views were obtained of one bird perched on a telegraph pole as we entered the station, and a second hunting for insects on the ground. Another 4 were over the Rice Fields the next day

Grey Hawk*Asturia nitidus*

Seen at Aripo Heights (5 on 13th, 1 on 14th), Waterloo (1), Aripo Heights lower elevation (1 perched), and Caroni Swamp (1)

Short-tailed Hawk*Buteo brachyurus*

This dapper and small Buteo is quite easy to see at Pax Guest House. The first was seen when we found a view over the valley from the Old Donkey Trail. 3 further birds were seen from the terrace of the guest house during our stay there

Zone-tailed Hawk*Buteo albonotatus*

One of the best places to see this species is from the terrace to the rear of Pax Guest House, but the best time to see them is mid-morning, and we were usually out by this time. However, we didn't leave the area until 11 o'clock on the morning of our departure, and so one obligingly soared right in front of us some time before leaving

Yellow-headed Caracara*Milvago chimachima*

3 single birds seen – perched on a telegraph pole next to the road on the way to Wallerfields; over Caroni Swamp; flying adjacent to the airfield on Tobago airport

Peregrine Falcon*Falco peregrinus*

2 birds seen circling over the hills behind Pax Guest House, on the 15th and 19th

Limpkin*Aramus guarauna*

3 separate birds on the Rice Fields

Wattled Jacana*Jacana jacana*

An initial 15 or so birds were seen on the Trincity Ponds. None were particularly close, since they were at the centre of one of the marshy lagoons, although they could be seen well with optics. However, the Aripo Agricultural Station held the most birds (~60), and many of these were just on the other side of a small barbed wire fence next to the track, and were very approachable. Included in these were a good number of juveniles

**Southern Lapwing***Vanellus chilensis*

We took our opportunity to get a good look at a single individual in the grounds of a

house at Wallerfields, but the 10 seen relatively close in at Waterloo, and the even more numerous birds (~30) at Aripo Agricultural Station made that action redundant



Semipalmated Plover

Charadrius semipalmatus

~30 birds were at Waterloo, the majority being close in on the South side of the Temple by the sea path, mixed in with peeps, another group being a little more distant on the mudflats to the South

Killdeer

Charadrius vociferous

1 at the Aripo Agricultural Station

Short-billed Dowitcher

Limnodromus griseus

Waterloo (~30); Caroni Swamp – about 20 birds within the mangroves, with some quite close to the boat



Spotted Sandpiper

Actitis macularia

Trincity Ponds (6); Aripo Agricultural Station (2); Caroni Swamp (12); Tobago airport (1)

Solitary Sandpiper

Tringa solitaria

5 were quite approachable in the wet areas next to the track at the Aripo Agricultural Station, and a single bird was on the mud at Waterloo



Greater Yellowlegs

Tringa melanoleuca

1 was in the stream at very close quarters at the Aripo Agricultural Station; the 10 at Waterloo mudflats were a lot more distant; and the 15 at Caroni Swamp were attempting to roost with other waders on the roots of the mangroves

Willet

Captotrophus semipalmatus

Waterloo (~20); Caroni Swamp (2)

Lesser Yellowlegs

Tringa flavipes

2 were in the stream channel at Aripo Agricultural Station

Turnstone

Arenaria interpres

~10 at Waterloo; 5 in the Caroni Swamp

Knot

Calidris canutus

Waterloo (~20)

Semipalmated Sandpiper

Calidris pusilla

A flock of peeps next to the path leading to the Temple by the Sea at Waterloo contained both these and Western Sandpiper, allowing comparison between the two. Only 6 of these were identified

Western Sandpiper

Calidris mauri

In the mixed flock mentioned above, this was by far the most numerous species, with ~50 birds

Least Sandpiper*Calidris minutilla*

The ~20 at the Aripo Agricultural Station were all very close and approachable, including a couple of birds under the barbed wire fence next to the track

Lesser Black-backed Gull*Larus fuscus*

1 resting on a large branch in the centre of the Waterloo mudflats

Laughing Gull*Larus atricilla*

Very common at the coast, with good numbers at both Waterloo and next to Tobago airport

Large-billed Tern*Phaetusa simplex*

10 of these robust, yellow billed terns were either perched or flying around the mudflats at Waterloo. When we searched through the terns over the sea at Tobago airport, they seemed to be less common than the similar, orange billed Royal Terns (10)

Royal Tern*Sterna maximus*

~20 flying past and resting on a wall next to a small resort at Tobago airport, and one perched on a rock at Waterloo

Black Skimmer*Rynchops niger*

~25 birds were seen at Waterloo. These consisted of a group flying in from the sea, a single bird feeding over the mudflats, and another group resting towards the centre of the mudflats

Scaled Pigeon*Patagioenas speciosa*

The only bird seen was some distance away, perched at the top of a tree in the Asa Wright Nature Centre

Pale-vented Pigeon*Patagioenas cayennensis*

Only 2 of these supposedly common birds were seen, and even they were separately perched in trees next to Tobago airport

Eared Dove*Zenaida auriculata*

Again only seen next to Tobago airport, with a total of ~10 seen

**Ruddy Ground-dove***Columbina talpacoti*

Abundant

Grey-fronted Dove*Leptotila rufaxilla*

The books make this and White-tipped Dove reasonably easy to identify, but the truth in the field isn't quite like that. Although the latter does have noticeable white on the tail, Grey-fronted also has some white, so this is not a definitive field mark unless seen extremely well. Also, the orbital ring around the eye can differ in colour, and is not always easy to see. The 6 birds identified all had obvious grey on the front of the crown, which again is not always easy to see (Asa Wright Nature Centre – 2; Caroni Swamp – 2; Tobago airport – 2)

**Green-rumped Parrotlet***Forpus passerinus*

2 birds flew across us at the entrance to the Aripo Agricultural Station, and landed in a tree next to where our car was parked. They are a tiny parrot, and the 2 we saw allowed us to get quite close

Lilac-tailed Parrot*Touit batavicus*

A single bird flew in front of us and then landed out of sight while watching from the terrace of the Pax Guest House on the 16th

Blue-headed Parrot*Pionus menstruus*

A group of ~30 birds landed on one of the tall trees only 30 metres or so from the front terrace of the Aripo Cottage on the morning of the 15th. They fed here for quite some time. The only 2 other birds landed on tree just below Pax Guest House on the 18th

Yellow-crowned Parrot

Amazona ochrocephala

Large numbers of this species and Orange-winged Parrots could be seen and, most definitely, heard in the hills. Unless the wings or facial patterns are seen well, they cannot be identified as either species. Good views of both were seen through the week, although none were seen on the 18th or 19th



Orange-winged Parrot

Amazona amazonica

These were often mixed in with Yellow-crowned Parrots, or could not be separated (many of the large numbers of birds were flying overhead). Again seen, every day but the 18th, with 4 on the morning of the 19th near to Pax Guest House

Squirrel Cuckoo

Piaya cayana

These birds are extremely impressive, with their long black and white barred tails complementing their rufous colour. Despite their size, they are usual quite difficult to see, since they spend their time in thick foliage (as the bird seen on the Old Donkey Trail at Pax Guest House was). However, 2 birds on the 19th were out in the open for some time next to St Benet's Hall at the head of the Mount Benedict road up from Pax



Smooth-billed Ani

Crotophaga ani

Very common, seen in groups of usually 5-10 birds on every day apart from the 17th. Greatest daily number was ~30 birds on the 16th

Striped Cuckoo

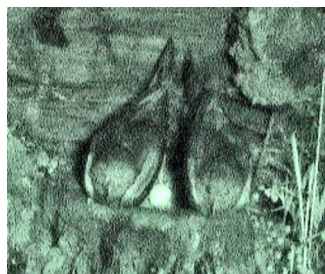
Tapera naevia

A single bird landed briefly near to where the car was parked when returning from the sand pit lagoons at Wallerfields

Oilbird

Steatornis caripensis

This is probably the bird that the island is best noted for. There are 6 caves holding colonies around Trinidad. We took up the offer of a day long walk to the Aripo Caves. This only cost us \$US10 each, with Mervyn from the Aripo Cottage as our guide. The hike there and back is around 2½ hours each way, and is a lot more strenuous than those offered by the Asa Wright Nature Centre and Pax Guest House. However, once at the cave, we had reasonably close views of the birds (closest about 25 metres), and we were the only people there. For viewing, a powerful torch is ideal, although my video camera has a night shot incorporated, and the birds could be seen well using this. Not only are these birds one of the strangest to look at, but the raucous calls coming from the cave are also quite loud and unique



Common Potoo

Nyctibius griseus

We had been hoping to see one of these on the boat trip through Caroni Swamp, since they are quite regular there. Despite looking in what seemed an appropriate place, James

failed to find one. This was not too disappointing, since Harold, our guide at Asa Wright Nature Centre, had pointed one roosting at the top of a tree on the Discovery Trail

Chestnut-collared Swift *Streptoprocne rutila*

We had thought that we had seen some of these earlier in the week, within large flocks of *Chaetura* swifts. However, they do need to be seen well, and it wasn't until the visit to the Rice Fields that we identified 6, including some showing the chestnut collar, which is often difficult to see, amongst a huge mixed flock of swifts

Band-rumped Swift *Chaetura spinicaudus*

Much smaller numbers seen than Grey-rumped in the hills around Aripo, with up to 10 seen each day. A further 6 were seen in the hills on the approach to Asa Wright Nature Centre

Grey-rumped Swift *Chaetura cinereiventris*

The most common swift in the hills, where it was seen in the hundreds during all 3 days at Aripo

Short-tailed Swift *Chaetura brachyura*

This is the common swift of the lower hills and lowlands – small numbers were regularly seen around the Pax Guest House, but the largest numbers were hundreds over the Rice Fields

Fork-tailed Palm-Swift *Tachornis squamata*

These birds are an incredible shape – very long and pointed, and quite different in appearance to other swifts. It is quite easy to distinguish from the Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift that also occurs on the island, since it shows a much more pronounced white belly (dark on the latter). Wallerfields area had ~25 birds, and a further 10 were in amongst the large swift flocks over the Rice Fields

Green Hermit *Phaethornis guy*

Of the 3 different hermit species possible on the island, this was the only one seen, and also one of the few species that we did see that was always in flight. They are a characteristic bird, with longish decurved bill, eyestripe, and long central tail feathers tipped white

White-necked Jacobin *Florisuga mellivora*

The males of this species are probably the most dapper of the hummingbirds on the island, with well demarcated green on the back, blue face and throat, and white belly and collar. The first birds that we saw were generally hanging around the Immortelle trees at Aripo Heights, and had to be looked up at from the ground. However, the birds at Asa Wright Nature Centre were ridiculously close, with some on feeders literally in front on your nose. Best views were of the pair of males lapping up the rain near to the feeders in front of the terrace (Aripo Heights – 2+, 1, 1; Asa Wright Nature Centre – 3 males, 1 female)



Brown Violet-ear *Colibri delphinae*

This is one of the more difficult to see species, and we were lucky to see a regularly returning bird on a favourite Immortelle tree in the Aripo Heights

Black-throated Mango *Anthracothorax nigricollis*

This species was seen on all days apart from the 15th, and was the first hummingbird of the trip – a single bird just outside of Tobago airport. The females are equally as stunning, with the black central line being flanked by white rather than the green of the male (Aripo Heights – 4 male and 3 females on 13th, 1 on 14th, 1 on 18th; Asa Wright Nature Centre – 1; Wallerfields – 1; Caroni Swamp – 1; Tobago airport – 2 more on the 19th)

Ruby-topaz Hummingbird *Chrysolampis mosquitus*

This is another of the more difficult to see hummingbirds. We were thus very surprised to find a nest with sitting female on the track up the Aripo Heights road from Aripo Cottage. The plain green and white bird stumped us at first, but the sight of chestnut outer tail feathering bordering by black and white confirmed identification. 3 separate males were seen very briefly towards the end of the week, at the Wallerfields sand pit lagoons entrance, mansion grounds at Aripo Heights, and Tobago airport. They are generally a lot darker than appear in the books, but the rufous tail is a useful field mark


Tufted Coquette
Lophornis ornatus

The tiny size and remarkable appearance of these birds has to be seen to be believed. We had camped out next to some likely flowering bushes at Pax Guest House one morning in the hope of seeing the bird, but that was totally unnecessary, since a small group were feeding on the flowering bushes at Asa Wright Nature Centre as soon as we got out of the car. Some also appeared at the feeders in front of the terrace, but the first ones seemed to be more regular and could be approached quite closely

Blue-chinned Sapphire
Chlorostilbon notatus

These were only seen feeding on the flowering Immortelle trees at Aripo Heights, where 6 were seen on the 13th, and ~12 on the 14th

White-chested Emerald
Agyrtia brevirostris

Seen every day apart from 18th (Aripo Heights – 2, 2; Pax Guest House – 1, 4; Asa Wright Nature Centre – 3; Wallerfields – 2)


Copper-rumped Hummingbird
Saucerottia tobaci

Not only is this bird the most commonly seen of the hummingbirds (present every day), it also appears to be the most aggressive, chasing away all comers. This is not always a good thing – some individuals chased away less common hummers that we wanted to see more closely. Our first bird became the most well known – a regular branch within the grounds of Aripo Cottage was almost guaranteed to host the bird. (Aripo Heights – 2, 6, 3, 4; Pax Guest House – 4, 2, 4; Asa Wright Nature Centre – 4; Wallerfields – 1; Caroni Swamp – 2, Tobago airport – 1)

White-tailed Trogon
Trogon viridis

This was the last of the three trogons to fall. A pair were together high in the canopy but directly above us in the Arena Forest

Violaceous Trogon
Trogon violaceus

2 were seen at the Asa Wright Nature Centre. The first was brought to within about 20 metres by our guide calling on the Discovery Trail. The second was seen later in the day, perched in the open on a dead tree about 70 metres from the viewing terrace


Collared Trogon
Trogon collaris

We were surprised that only one of these was seen, a female alighting on a branch a short distance in front of us when walking to the Aripo Caves

Ringed Kingfisher
Ceryle torquatus

The 2 that we recorded were only seen briefly, one flying away from us at Trincity Ponds, the other perched above a roadside stream while travelling East on the Churchill-

Roosevelt Highway. Despite this, the almost full chestnut underparts on both could be seen clearly

Green Kingfisher

Chloroceryle americana

This was a species that we had been hoping to see for some years (potentially during previous trips to Mexico and Arizona). A perched bird would have been the ideal, but we had to settle for a single bird flying across the front of the boat at the early part of the Caroni Swamp ride

Blue-crowned Motmot

Momotus momota

We had thought that these stunning birds would be more commonly seen, but the only one recorded was a single bird which kept returning to the feeders at the Asa Wright Nature Centre. That being said, it was a superb bird, and lingered for a short time on each visit



Channel-billed Toucan

Ramphastos vitellinus

A pair of birds were perched for a considerable length of time about 80 metres in front of the viewing terrace at Asa Wright Nature Centre

Golden-olive Woodpecker

Piculus rubiginosus

The first sighting was of a pair of birds on one of the flowering Immortelle trees next to the track ascending the Aripo Heights. The 3rd bird was much more obliging, landing on the tree to the left of the feeders in front of the terrace at the Asa Wright Nature Centre. This was only a few metres away, and the bird obligingly lingered here for some time



Chestnut Woodpecker

Celeus elegans

It was this species, rather than Golden-olive, that we had expected to see at close quarters from the Asa Wright Nature Centre viewing terrace. However, we had seen 2 birds by then, reasonably briefly at Aripo Heights and the Old Donkey Trail near Pax Guest House

Yellow-chinned Spinetail

Certhiaxis cinnamomeus

These are birds that seem to prefer wet conditions, so it was no surprise that we found a family group of 6 or so birds at Trincity Ponds. A further single bird was also at the Aripo Agricultural Station

Streaked Xenops

Xenops rutilans

These are supposedly reasonably easy to see in the forests around Pax Guest House, and this is where we saw our 2 birds, both from different parts of the Old Donkey Trail. They have quite a unique character, with noticeably upturned bill being used to probe around at the end of dead branches. They seem to behave in some ways like a woodpecker



Plain-brown Woodcreeper

Dendrocicla fuliginosa

The most common and obliging of the woodcreepers seen. 2 were in the rain forest of Aripo Heights. A single bird was then seen at the start of the Old Donkey Trail near Pax Guest House, and this was possibly one of the pair seen on the last morning there in the same part of the forest. A little bit of patience with the latter birds eventually found one motionless on the trunk of a tree for some time

Cocoa Woodcreeper

Xiphorhynchus susurrans

1 seen in the Arena Forest close to

Straight-billed Woodcreeper

Dendroplex picus

1 was seen near the boat at the Caroni Swamp

Great Antshrike

Taraba major

This rather large and impressive bird was also quite elusive. Fortunately, a single male made 2 or 3 appearances on the feeding terrace at Asa Wright Nature Centre. Most of the time that it was present, which was generally not very long, the bird kept to the undergrowth or low branches, but it did deign to visit the tables briefly



Barred Antshrike

Thamnophilus doliatus

This is even more impressive than the Great Antshrike in appearance, due to its startling barred plumage and staring yellow eye. This does not make it any the less elusive – the 3 males seen were not for too long each time, although they were a little higher in the foliage and more open than the latter species. 2 were at Asa Wright Nature Centre, 1 on the bushes behind the feeders of the terrace, the other in the lane towards the car park, with a 3rd bird along the track on the approach to Wallerfields air base

White-flanked Antwren

Myrmotherula axillaris

A pair of birds were seen briefly when returning along the Old Donkey Trail near to Pax Guest House, and a 2nd male was fairly close, again briefly, along the Discovery Trail at Asa Wright Nature Centre

Bearded Bellbird

Procnias averano

This is another contender for the strangest bird of the trip award. They are a lot larger than would be expected (“the size of a chicken” to quote our guide at Asa Wright Nature Centre). They are also unbelievably loud – the characteristic calls can be heard from some distance away. There is a sizable lekking area for 10 or so birds at the base of the Discovery Trail, and the birds are supposedly more or less guaranteed here. This is not always so, since it took us some time and searching to eventually pin down a calling bird which in the end was quite close. The calls are almost tantalisingly constant, but the birds can be a lot more distant than they sound



Golden-headed Manakin

Pipra erythrocephala

The 2 manakins on the island are amongst the top target birds, particularly when lekking. We didn't see them doing this, but, on the other hand, we had found males of both species ourselves before going to the almost guaranteed habitat at the Asa Wright Nature Centre. This was the second of the 2 to be found. We already knew of the lekking area on the Old Donkey Trail at Pax, but when looking up from the trail, no birds could be found. However, when we rounded the corner of the trail, so that we were effectively looking down on the site, we waited and watched for some unfamiliar calls coming from near the canopy (now just above eye level), and were rewarded with at least 2 males. A 3rd male was seen from the Discovery Trail at Asa Wright Nature Centre, and the 4th in the Arena Forest. Female manakins were also seen, but we were not familiar enough with them to usher positive identification



White-bearded Manakin*Manacus manacus*

5 males of this species were seen. The first bird was on the trail to Aripo Caves. 2 at Asa Wright Nature Centre were in different settings – the first was in a small clearing on the Discovery Trail, the second appeared as we about to leave the centre, being in a large tree just behind the feeding area in front of the terrace. 2 further males were seen – 1 in the Arena Forest, and 1 in the lower forest of Aripo Heights

Forest Elaenia*Myiopagis gaimardii*

The smaller Elaenias all tended to be of this species, with a pair fighting opposite St Benet's Hall near Pax showing the white crest stripe beautifully (Aripo Heights – 4, 1; Asa Wright Nature Centre – 1; St Benet Hall, Pax – 2)

Yellow-bellied Elaenia*Elaenia flavogaster*

These are a characteristic species within what can be a difficult family of birds to separate. They are quite large, have a usually obvious yellow belly, but obligingly usually raise their shaggy crest, displaying the white crown line underneath. It does seem strange that we spent a full weeks birding in Trinidad to see only one bird on the first day at Aripo Heights, but then found 2 very much more confiding birds just outside Tobago airport

**Southern Beardless Tyrannulet***Camptotstoma obsoletum*

The tyrannulets seem to have a carriage and feeding action very different from other flycatchers, being much more horizontal, and creeping around branches feeding off vegetation. The 2 separate birds seen on flowering Immortelle trees at Aripo Heights were no exception to this

Slaty-capped Flycatcher*Leptopogon superciliaris*

We had not realised that this species had been seen until we got home and edited the video tapes. A small flycatcher had been filmed at Aripo Cottage on the rainy morning of the 15th, but not looked at particularly well (at all?). The characteristic cheek patches could be seen well on playback, and the somewhat wet grey crown

**Ochre-bellied Flycatcher***Mionectes oleagineus*

1 bird in an Immortelle tree on the Aripo Heights road; at least 2 birds at one time on the tree to the left of the viewing terrace at Asa Wright Nature Centre

Olive-sided Flycatcher*Contopus cooperi*

2 birds were perched at the top of dead trees about 70 metres in front of the viewing terrace at Asa Wright Nature Centre

Tropical Pewee*Contopus cinereus*

The 4 birds seen were all in Aripo Heights

Pied Water-Tyrant*Fluvicola pica*

These are definitely in the category of "better than they look in the books". Like Marsh-Tyrant and Yellow-chinned Spinetail, they prefer wet areas, so it was no coincidence that all 3 species were seen at the same sites - Trincity Ponds and the Aripo Agricultural Station. The birds at Trincity Ponds were in small family groups, with a total of ~10 birds, all being found in the marshy lagoons. The birds at the Aripo Agricultural Station were a pair that had built a nest over the running stream next to the cattle sheds, and would frequently be seen collecting for the nest close to


White-headed Marsh-Tyrant
Arundinicola leucocephala

These are a supremely dapper little bird, and are everything you would expect from looking in the books. They also prove to be quite approachable. We hadn't expected to find the lone bird patrolling one of the marshy lagoons at Trincity Ponds, but it was a good prelude to the very close birds (3) that we saw at the Aripo Agricultural Station

Piratic Flycatcher
Legatus leucophaeus

The Trinidad checklist has these down as breeding visitors, so we thought we might be a little too early to see them. This was not to be the case – 2 were seen on consecutive days around Aripo Heights, and a 5th bird was around the top of the Mount St Benedict road near Pax


Great Kiskadee
Pitangus sulphuratus

Very common and noisy – seen every day


Sulphury Flycatcher
Tyrannopsis sulphurea

Not always easily told from the much more common Tropical Kingbirds, the only definite sightings were of 1 at Wallerfields, and 2 together at the base of the Aripo Heights road

Tropical Kingbird
Tyrannus melancholicus

These birds are very common – seen every day and in almost any habitat. There is the potential that some could have been Sulphury Flycatcher, but the differences are not always easy to see, and not all the Kingbirds can be checked


Grey Kingbird
Tyrannus dominicensis

3 birds around Tobago airport

Brown-crested Flycatcher
Myiarchus tyrannulus

1 on the fence of Tobago airport

Bright-rumped Attila
Attila spadiceus

A group of 3 noisy birds were together in the rain forest on the way to Aripo caves

White-winged Swallow
Tachycineta albiventer

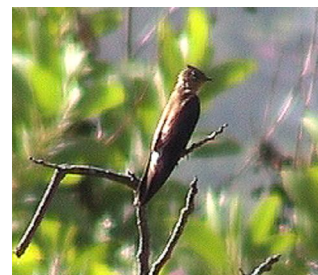
Apart from the hundreds of birds feeding over the active lagoons at Trincity Ponds, these were seen in small numbers throughout the week: Aripo Heights (1,1); Pax Guest House (1,2); Wallerfields (2); Aripo Agricultural Station (2); Caroni Swamp (2)

Grey-breasted Martin
Progne chalybea

Aripo Agricultural Station (1); Waterloo (2); Caroni Swamp (2); Pax Guest House (2)

Southern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*

Small numbers were seen at Pax Guest House (2,4); Trincity Ponds (4); Wallerfields (4); Asa Wright Nature Centre (4); Tobago airport (2)

**Rufous-breasted Wren** *Thryothorus rutilis*

The rich rufous colour of this secretive but vocal bird comes as quite a surprise. The first pair that we saw, at the base of the rough track up to Aripo Cottage, were busily tending a nest found low to the ground. The only other bird seen was a singing and preening individual at the start of the Old Donkey Trail near Pax

House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*

Seen in small numbers every day of the trip: Aripo Heights (1,1,1); Pax Guest House (1,2); Arena Forest (1); Aripo Agricultural Station (3); Asa Wright Nature Centre (2); Tobago airport (2)

Tropical Mockingbird *Mimus gilvus*

Very common – seen every day

**Cocoa Thrush** *Turdus fumigatus*

Aripo Cottage grounds (1); Pax Guest House (3 coming to feeders below the terrace); Arena Forest (1); Asa Wright Nature Centre (4, with 2 coming to the terrace feeders)

**Bare-eyed Thrush** *Turdus nudigenis*

Aripo Heights (4,1,1); Pax Guest House (3,1, including one at the feeders); Arena Forest (2); Tobago airport (1)

White-necked Thrush *Turdus albicollis*

Much more difficult to see than the above 2 thrushes, the 2 we saw were much deeper into the rainforest, on the hike to Aripo Caves, and in Arena Forest

Long-billed Gnatwren *Ramphocaenus melanurus*

The first pair we saw were very active, chasing each other through the vegetation on the trail in the rainforest to Aripo Caves, with a second pair alongside the Discovery Trail at Asa Wright Nature Centre

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*

2 of these introduced birds were seen briefly at Trincity Ponds

Golden-fronted Greenlet *Hylophilus aurantiifrons*

This is a very plain bird, and can often be overlooked. The yellow colour to the front of the head tends to be difficult to see (Arena Forest – 6; Wallerfields – 2; Asa Wright Nature Centre – 2)

Rufous-browed Peppershrike *Cyclarhis gujanensis*

Once we got our ears tuned to the song, it was likely that quite a few of these elusive

birds were heard. They tend to keep deep into the vegetation, and the colouring doesn't help find them against the greenery. However, we did eventually see 2 in the Wallerfields area

Trinidad Euphonia *Euphonia trinitatis*

6 birds – a mix of males and females – were in the Aripo Cottage area on the 13th

Violaceous Euphonia *Euphonia violacea*

Seen much more regularly than Trinidad Euphonia: Aripo Heights (12,4,1); Pax Guest House (1); Asa Wright Nature Centre (3)



Tropical Parula *Parula pitiayumi*

Aripo Heights (5); trees around St Benet Hall, Mount St Benedict (2)

Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*

Pax Guest House (2,1,1); Trincity Ponds (1); Rice Fields (1)

American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*

A single male responded to the tape of Ferruginous Pygmy-owl in a tree at the bottom of the bank from Aripo Cottage

Northern Waterthrush *Seiurus noveboracensis*

Aripo Heights (1); Arena Forest (1); Caroni Swamp (1)

Golden-crowned Warbler *Basileuterus culcivorus*

3 of these distinctive wood-warblers were seen, 2 together on the road up towards Aripo Heights from Aripo Cottage, and a lingering, singing bird around the entrance to Aripo Caves. An important point to note about the race *olivascens* seen on Trinidad is that it sports a greyish white supercilium, and the crown stripe also appears whitish, neither with the yellow or orange colour expected when looking at the field guides, which probably show the types more likely to be seen on the mainland



Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola*

Abundant – this bird seems to be everywhere. The race here is the yellow bellied, dark throated type

Bicoloured Conebill *Conirostrum bicolor*

This is a speciality species, found from the boat touring the Caroni Swamp. It is also a much brighter blue grey than depicted in the books, and a lot more appealing than would be predicted. 2 separate birds were feeding in the trees above the mangroves



White-shouldered Tanager *Tachyphonus luctuosus*

Only seen at Aripo Heights, with ~10 on 13th, and only 1 the following day

White-lined Tanager *Tachyphonus rufus*

The almost all black male contrasts starkly with the all rufous coloured female, so much so that they could pass off as separate species. It is another very common tanager, being seen every day in most habitats and in good numbers



Silver-beaked Tanager*Ramphocelus carbo*

Another commonly seen tanager, although nowhere near the numbers of Blue-grey & Palm, the deepness of its wine red plumage, compared to the white of its lower mandible, makes it an outstanding bird to see. Greatest numbers were in the Aripo Heights area, but up to 8 in a day were seen in the lowlands, apart from none on the last morning

**Blue-grey Tanager***Thraupis episcopus*

The powder blue breast and deeper blue of the wings makes this a surprisingly impressive tanager. Despite being very common, seen every day in good numbers, they were always worth looking at

Palm Tanager*Thraupis palmarum*

Much more drab than its blue grey counterpart, this species is also even more common, again being seen on every day

**Turquoise Tanager***Tangara mexicana*

2 birds were on the tree to the left of the feeders at Asa Wright Nature Centre

Bay-headed Tanager*Tangara gyrola*

1 was in the rain forest on the walk back from Aripo Caves; 3 were in the same tree at one time, to the left of the Asa Wright Nature Centre terrace, and 1 was near St Benet's Hall, Mount St Benedict on the last morning before leaving

Blue Dacnis*Dacnis cayana*

The first bird was rather distant – perched on bare branches around 100 metres away near to Aripo Cottage. The male and female seen en route to the Aripo Caves were much closer, feeding beneath the canopy in the rain forest

Green Honeycreeper*Chlorophanes spiza*

The iridescent green of this bird in reality has to be seen to be believed, with the females a rather strange lime green. They were regularly seen on both the Immortelle trees around Aripo Heights (12, 4), and almost constantly on the feeders and bushes in front of the terrace at Asa Wright Nature Centre (20+)

**Purple Honeycreeper***Cyanerpes caeruleus*

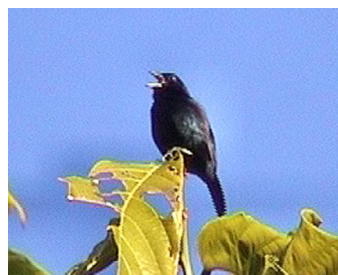
Very similar to Red-legged Honeycreeper, the 2 are difficult to mix up unless at a distance or if seen only briefly. It was certainly more common than its other purple counterpart, with ~15 on the Immortelle trees at Aripo Heights on the first day (only 1 on the second day), and at least 12, including many regularly visiting the feeders with females, at Asa Wright Nature Centre

Red-legged Honeycreeper*Cyanerpes cyaneus*

The least seen of the 3 honeycreepers, a fair few were still around. 6 were seen on both the first and second days in Aripo Heights, usually feeding on Immortelle flowers, but they were only seen occasionally on the feeders at the Asa Wright Nature Centre (3)

**Blue-black Grassquit***Volatinia jacarina*

The glossy black of some of these males is impressive, as is their attempt at a dance for a courtship display – they basically select a favoured perch, and jump about half a metre into the air, flapping wings and calling. Aripo Heights (10,6); Arena Forest (1); Tobago airport (6)

**Ruddy-breasted Seedeater***Sporophila minuta*

The seedeaters are generally quite difficult to find on the island, so the appearance of a pair of males at the Aripo Agricultural Station was surprising and welcome

Black-faced Grassquit*Tiaris bicolor*

2 birds were seen feeding next to the tables of the outdoor café at Tobago airport on the 12th

Saffron Finch*Sicalis flaveola*

As with the seedeaters, these tend to be quite localised – 2 birds also at Aripo Agricultural Station

Greyish Saltator*Saltator coerulescens*

Aripo Heights (6,6,1); Pax Guest House (1 on the feeders); Asa Wright Nature Centre (3)

Yellow-hooded Blackbird*Chrysomos icterocephalus*

The sight of hundreds and hundreds of these attractive birds, interlaced with Shiny Cowbirds, in and around the vegetable fields of Trincity Ponds is superb. Most of the birds were in smart adult plumage, but many others were juveniles. The vast majority of the flock was feeding on the ground within the vegetable field itself. Only other birds seen were a group of 4 at the Rice Fields

**Red-breasted Blackbird***Sturnella militaris*

The first male was seen on wires near to the entrance of the Aripo Agricultural Station, with a further group of 3 to the rear of one of the fields at the station. A single bird was in the Rice Fields the next morning

Carib Grackle*Quiscalus lugubris*

Seen every day once away from the Aripo Heights, with a maximum ~30 on 17th

**Shiny Cowbird***Molothrus bonariensis*

Highest concentration of birds were in the vegetable field adjacent to Trincity Ponds, where there were probably hundreds of birds mixed in with the even more numerous

Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Apart from 10 birds feeding with Carib Grackles outside Tobago airport, the only other sightings were of singles at Pax Guest House feeders, Arena Forest, and Wallerfields

Giant Cowbird

Molothrus oryzivorus

After a single bird was seen flying over the Rice Fields, a further 20 birds were picked up in a bare tree on the opposite side of the highway

Yellow Oriole

Icterus nigrogularis

These smart birds can be very confiding, often attending the feeders. Many more birds were seen in the forests away from the feeders, however: Aripo Heights (3); Pax Guest House (2 in the forest, and 4 in the feeding area at one time); Arena Forest (1); Asa Wright Nature Centre (2)



Yellow-rumped Cacique

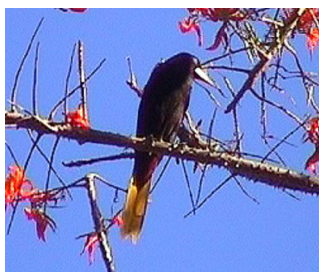
Cacicus cela

We tried in vain to find the nesting colony at Cumuto, which was supposed to be in the vicinity of the police station. Even asking a policeman didn't help! However, we did see 3 separate birds in the area

Crested Oropendola

Psarocolius decumanus

These birds go out of their way to be noticed, since they are not only large with stripes of colour in their black plumage, but they build obvious pendulous nests in colonies, and have the most comical display, throwing their heads back and more or less cackling. Funny! Plenty of colonies were found, and the presence of even a single bird usually meant that more would be around somewhere. Nesting trees holding up to 50 birds were found in the Aripo Heights area (4, including one which could be seen from the breakfast area at Aripo Cottage), Arena Forest, Asa Wright Nature Centre (directly in front of the viewing terrace), and Wallerfields



TOTAL SPECIES = 163