

Trinidad & Tobago
28th April – 5th May 2005
By Peter Nash

Introduction

We booked a “Twin Island Special Tour” with Holiday in Tobago. This gave us a week on Tobago in the Blue Waters Inn, Speyside, and a week in the famous Asa Wright Nature Centre on Trinidad. The price included international and local flights and all transfers.

Also included is a flexible program of birding excursions on Tobago with Newton George, two full days and two half days. Newton is very personable and is an acknowledged expert on the birds of Trinidad and Tobago and we were fortunate to have him to ourselves for some of the trips.

The service from Glyn Kirpalani of Holiday in Tobago was excellent, Glyn went out of his way to make sure we got the best out of our trip and offered many useful tips and suggestions.

References

“A Birdwatchers Guide to Trinidad and Tobago” by William L Murphy proved accurate and is a must have for any serious birder visiting the islands. The book contains site details and maps, bird lists and contact details for hotels, lodges and guides. I will assume that anyone using my report as part of their trip planning will have a copy.

“A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago” second edition, by Richard ffrench is not as good as it could be. The illustrations are poor and some birds are not illustrated at all. Some of the birds that are shown are the nominate race and not the ones found on T&T! The text somewhat redeems the situation with descriptions of local forms.

Money

The exchange rate for the TT dollar was around 12 to the UK£. Note that banks are open Monday to Thursday 0900 to 1500, and 0900 to 1300 Friday.

Transport

Holiday in Tobago offer economy seats on Excel Airways from London Gatwick to Crown Point airport on Tobago, and Tobago Express for inter island flights. Excel proved to be punctual and efficient and pretty good as economy flights go.

We used Tobago Express for our inter island flights.

Airport transfers were included, drivers from Blue Waters Inn and Asa Wright met us at the airports on our arrival and ferried us back for our departure flights.

Accommodation

Tobago

The Blue Waters Inn is in a perfect location. Located on the north east coast on Batteaux Bay near Speyside the Blue Waters is well situated for visits to the islands of Little Tobago and St Giles. The hotel offers air conditioned apartments and bungalows.

The hotel grounds are a haven for birds, Rufous-vented Chachalacas are noisy neighbours and Turnstones will join you at the bar. During our stay up to six Hawksbill Turtles were feeding in Batteaux Bay only 20 or 30 m from the beach. A dirt road on the left just before the first entrance gate follows the contour high above the coast. The birds along here are very confiding and there are great views over to Little Tobago.

Trinidad

“The Asa Wright Experience” is an accurate description. The Lodge is run in a very genteel way reminiscent of an earlier time. Most rooms are in bungalow style buildings in the grounds of the Lodge. The balcony has commanding views over the Arima valley.

Bird feeders positioned just a few feet away from the balcony provide great photographic opportunities. Fruit, bread and cake are put out and attract Tanagers, Thrushes, Honeycreepers etc. Hummingbirds come to the feeders and also to flowering plants and bushes in the gardens. The resident guides give very informative walks around AWNC (Asa Wright Nature Centre) and are always on hand on the balcony. Thanks to Denise, Cherry-Anne, Mukesh, Jason, Odin and Harold.

Guides

Tobago, Newton George.

We emailed Newton and gave him an idea of the birds we wanted to see. Newton organised trips to the islands of Little Tobago and St Giles to fit in with our itinerary.

Trinidad, Ramdass

The AWNC offers a full range of trips to birding areas throughout the island. Experienced guides are provided. We were lucky to have Ramdass for the whole week.

Trips may be booked a day in advance and packed meals are provided.

Email AWNC for details and prices.

Martyn Kenefick provided lots of details on finding hard to see birds. We met Martyn in the Blue Waters Inn as he guided a Naturetrek Tour.

Contacts

Holiday in Tobago, www.holidayintobago.com

Newton George, <http://tka.co.uk/birds/trinidadandtobago/guides/newtongorge.htm>

Blue Waters Inn, www.bluewatersinn.com

Asa Wright Nature Centre, <http://www.asawright.org/>

Ramdass can be contacted via AWNC

Martyn Kenefick, martynkenefick@hotmail.com
Peter Nash, www.c-web4pdn.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Daily account

21/04 Depart LGW 0930. Arrived at Crown Point airport Tobago at 1430 and met the driver provided by the Blue Waters Inn. Arrived at BWI 1700. Met Newton at the bar at 1900 to discuss birding possibilities.

22/04 An early start for a full day trip with Newton for his "Island Tour" Visited sites including Bloody Bay Recreational Area, Tobago Main Ridge Reserve, Arnos Vale, Buccoo Bay and Scarborough.

23/04 An early 0630 start for a visit to the Main Ridge Reserve and Gilpin Trace.

24/04 Afternoon visit to the seabird colony on Little Tobago. The island can also be visited using Franks Glass bottomed Boat Tours direct from the jetty at BWI, but note that less time is spent on the island as snorkelling and coral viewing are the main priority.

25/04 An 0700 start for Newtons "Wetlands Tour" Visited Bon Accord Water treatment Plant, Hilton Plantation, Pigeon Point and Grafton Bird Sanctuary.

26/04 Afternoon trip to St Giles Island, the sea conditions were quite choppy making photography difficult. There is no possibility of landing on St Giles.

27/04 Snorkelled with Hawksbill Turtles all morning. Made a second visit to Little Tobago for more bird viewing and snorkelling.

28/04 Transfer to Trinidad. 1200 flight to Piarco airport. Met by AWNC driver for the 40minute drive. Arranged a trip with Ramdass over the Northern Range to the coast at Blanchisseuse

29/04 A predawn start to the spectacular balcony at AWNC. After breakfast Blanchisseuse trip.

30/04 Early balcony viewing then after breakfast an introductory tour of the grounds with guide Cherry Anne.

01/05 Asa Wright trails all day. Arranged tours for the rest of our stay.

02/05 After an early visit to the Oilbirds at AWNC we met Ramdass for a trip to Aripo Livestock Station, Nariva Swamp and Waller Field.

03/05 Predawn 0300 start for a trip to Grande Riviere to see the Trinidad Piping Guans. Returned to AWNC in time for a 1630 start to Matura Beach for an amazing evening seeing Leatherback Turtle egg laying. The first turtles began clambering up the beach at 2030. Arrived back at AWNC 2230.

04/05 All day at AWNC.

05/05 Spent the early morning on the balcony and trails, then transferred to Piarco for 1200 flight to Tobago. Had time for a little birding around the airport before our homeward flight 1830.

06/05 Arrived LGW 0845.

Species Lists

Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*)
Trinidad and Tobago 14

Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus (assimilis) lherminieri*)
Little Tobago 2

Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*)
Little Tobago and St Giles 530

White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*)
Little Tobago 4

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)
Trinidad and Tobago 112

Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*)
St Giles 24

Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*)
Little Tobago and St Giles 140

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)
Little Tobago and St Giles 250

Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*)
Trinidad and Tobago 41

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*)
Trinidad and Tobago 1206

Pinnated Bittern (*Botaurus pinnatus*)
Trinidad 4 Nariva Swamp

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)
Trinidad and Tobago 2

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)
Trinidad and Tobago 3

Tricoloured Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

Trinidad and Tobago 5

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)

Trinidad and Tobago 4

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)

Tobago 1

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Trinidad and Tobago 230

Green Heron (*Butorides (striatus) virescens*)

Tobago 12

Striated Heron (*Butorides striatus*)

Trinidad 20

Black-crowned Night-heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

Tobago 1

Yellow-crowned Night-heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*)

Trinidad and Tobago 22

Black-bellied Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*)

Tobago 18

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*)

Tobago 1

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

Trinidad and Tobago common

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)

Trinidad and Tobago common

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Tobago 2

Pearl Kite (*Gampsonyx swainsonii*)

Trinidad 4 Nariva Swamp

Double-toothed Kite (*Harpagus bidentatus*)

Trinidad 1 AWCN

Plumbeous Kite (*Ictinia plumbea*)

Trinidad 12

White Hawk (*Leucopternis albicollis*)

Trinidad 1 AWCN

Savanna Hawk (*Heterospizias meridontalis*)
Trinidad 4

Common Black-hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus*)
Trinidad 2 at Rampanalgas

Great Black-hawk (*Buteogallus urubitinga*)
Trinidad and Tobago 6

Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*)
Trinidad and Tobago 8

Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*)
Trinidad 1

Yellow-headed Caracara (*Milvago chimachima*)
Trinidad and Tobago 9

Rufous-vented Chachalaca (*Ortalis ruficauda*)
Tobago 160

Trinidad Piping-guan (*Pipile pipile*)
Trinidad 2 Grande Riviere

Purple Gallinule (*Porphyryla martinica*)
Trinidad 12

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)
Trinidad and Tobago 24

Wattled Jacana (*Jacana (spinosa) jacana*)
Trinidad and Tobago 30

Southern Lapwing (*Vanellus chilensis*)
Trinidad and Tobago 44

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)
Tobago 3

Common (Wilson's) Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago delicata*)
Trinidad 1 Nariva Swamp

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)
Tobago 1

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*)
Tobago 1

Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*)
Trinidad and Tobago 6

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis (hypoleucos) macularia*)
Tobago 3

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)
Tobago 26

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*)
Tobago 550

Royal Tern (*Sterna maxima*)
Tobago 4

Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*)
Tobago 8

Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus*)
Little Tobago 40

Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*)
Little Tobago 60

Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*)
Little Tobago 80

Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*)
Tobago 1 Bon Accord

Scaled Pigeon (*Columba speciosa*)
Trinidad 6 AWNC

Pale-vented Pigeon (*Columba cayennensis*)
Trinidad and Tobago 36

Eared Dove (*Zenaida auriculata*)
Tobago 6

Common Ground-dove (*Columbina passerina*)
Trinidad 6 Waller Field

Ruddy Ground-dove (*Columbina talpacoti*)
Trinidad and Tobago 30

White-tipped Dove (*Leptotila verreauxi*)
Trinidad and Tobago 68

Grey-fronted Dove (*Leptotila rufaxilla*)
Trinidad 2 AWNC

Red-bellied Macaw (*Orthopsittica manilata*)
Trinidad 18 Waller Field

Green-rumped Parrotlet (*Forpus passerinus*)
Trinidad and Tobago 16

Lilac-tailed Parrotlet (*Touit batavica*)
Trinidad 22 AWNC

Blue-headed Parrot (*Pionus menstruus*)
Trinidad 2 AWNC

Orange-winged Parrot (*Amazona amazonica*)
Trinidad and Tobago 88

Mangrove Cuckoo (*Coccyzus minor*)
Tobago 1 Pigeon Point

Squirrel Cuckoo (*Piaya cayana*)
Trinidad 2 AWNC

Smooth-billed Ani (*Crotophaga ani*)
Trinidad and Tobago 100

Striped Cuckoo (*Tapera naevia*)
Trinidad 2

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)
Trinidad 1 Matura Beach

Ferruginous Pygmy-owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum*)
Trinidad 4 AWNC

Oilbird (*Steatornis caripensis*)
Trinidad 120 Dunston Cave AWNC

White-tailed Nightjar (*Caprimulgus cayennensis*)
Tobago 1

Band-rumped Swift (*Chaetura spinicaudus*)
Trinidad 30

Grey-rumped Swift (*Chaetura cinereiventris*)
Tobago 140

Short-tailed Swift (*Chaetura brachyura*)
Tobago 100

Fork-tailed Palm-swift (*Tachornis squamata*)
Trinidad 3 Waller Field

Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift (*Panyptila cayennensis*)
Trinidad 1

Rufous-breasted Hermit (*Glaucis hirsuta*)
Trinidad and Tobago 14

Green Hermit (*Phaethornis guy*)
Trinidad 2

Little Hermit (*Phaethornis longuemareus*)
Trinidad 4

White-tailed Sabrewing (*Campylopterus ensipennis*)
Tobago 14 Gilpin Trace

White-necked Jacobin (*Florisuga mellivora*)
Tobago 60

Black-throated Mango, *Anthracothorax nigricollis*)
Tobago 80

Ruby-topaz Hummingbird (*Chrysolampis mosquitus*)
Tobago 54

Tufted Coquette (*Lophornis ornatus*)
Trinidad 18 AWCN

Blue-chinned Sapphire (*Chlorostilbon notatus*)
Trinidad 20

White-tailed Goldenthrout (*Polytmus guainumbi*)
Trinidad 1 Nariva Swamp

White-chested Emerald (*Agyrtria brevirostris*)
Trinidad 12

Copper-rumped Hummingbird (*Saucerottia tobaci*)
Tobago 38

Long-billed Starthroat (*Heliomaster longirostris*)
Trinidad 2 AWNC

White-tailed Trogon (*Trogon viridis*)
Trinidad 8

Violaceous Trogon (*Trogon violaceus*)
Trinidad 8

Collared Trogon (*Trogon collaris*)
Trinidad and Tobago 10

Blue-diademed Motmot (*Momotus momota*)
Trinidad and Tobago 28

Rufous-tailed Jacamar (*Galbula ruficauda*)
Tobago 14

Channel-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos vitellinus*)
Trinidad 6 AWNC

Red-crowned Woodpecker (*Melanerpes rubricapillus*)
Tobago 26

Red-rumped Woodpecker (*Veniliornis kirkii*)
Tobago 8

Golden-olive Woodpecker (*Piculus rubiginosus*)
Tobago 4

Chestnut Woodpecker (*Celeus elegans*)
Trinidad 1

Lineated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus lineatus*)
Trinidad 2

Crimson-crested Woodpecker (*Campephilus melanoleucos*)
Trinidad 1 Grand Riviere

Pale-breasted Spinetail (*Synallaxis albes
cens*)
Trinidad 2 Nariva Swamp

Stripe-breasted Spinetail (*Synallaxis cinnamomea*)
Tobago 4

Yellow-chinned Spinetail (*Certhiaxis cinnamomea*)

Trinidad 8

Streaked Xenops (*Xenops rutilans*)

Trinidad 1

Plain-brown Woodcreeper (*Dendrocincla fuliginosa*)

Trinidad 3

Olivaceous Woodcreeper (*Sittasomus griseicapillus*)

Tobago 1

Cocoa Woodcreeper (*Xiphorhynchus (guttatus) susurrans*)

Tobago 17

Great Antshrike (*Taraba major*)

Trinidad 6

Black-crested Antshrike (*Sakesphorus canadensis*)

Trinidad 2

Barred Antshrike (*Thamnophilus doliatus*)

Tobago 24

Plain Antvireo (*Dysithamnus mentalis*)

Tobago 3

White-flanked Antwren (*Myrmotherula axillaris*)

Trinidad 2

White-fringed Antwren (*Formicivora grisea*)

Tobago 12

Silvered Antbird (*Sclateria naevia*)

Trinidad 2 Grande Riviere

White-bellied Antbird (*Myrmeciza longipes*)

Trinidad 2

Bearded Bellbird (*Procnias averano*)

Trinidad 8 AWNC

White-bearded Manakin (*Manacus manacus*)

Trinidad 40 AWNC

Blue-backed Manakin (*Chiroxiphia pareola*)

Tobago 5 Gilpin Trace

Golden-headed Manakin (*Pipra erythrocephala*)

Trinidad 20 AWCN

Southern Beardless Tyrannulet (*Camptostoma obsoletum*)
Trinidad 8

Yellow-bellied Elaenia (*Elaenia flavogaster*)
Tobago 14

Ochre-bellied Flycatcher (*Mionectes oleagineus*)
Trinidad 6

Slaty-capped Flycatcher (*Leptopogon superciliaris*)
Trinidad 4

Yellow-breasted Flycatcher (*Tolmomyias flaviventris*)
Tobago 2

White-throated Spadebill (*Platyrinchus mystaceus*)
Tobago 1 Gilpin Trace

Bran-coloured Flycatcher (*Myiophobus fasciatus*)
Trinidad 2

Fuscous Flycatcher (*Cnemotriccus fuscatus*)
Tobago 24

Euler's Flycatcher (*Lathrotriccus euleri*)
Trinidad 12

Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Contopus borealis*)
Trinidad 2

Tropical Pewee (*Contopus cinereus*)
Trinidad 12

Pied Water-tyrant (*Fluvicola pica*)
Trinidad 12 Nariva Swamp

White-headed Marsh-tyrant (*Arundinicola leucocephala*)
Trinidad 6 Nariva Swamp

Venezuelan Flycatcher (*Myiarchus venezuelensis*)
Tobago 2 Gilpin Trace

Brown-crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*)
Tobago 14

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*)

Trinidad 24

Boat-billed Flycatcher (*Megarynchus pitangua*)
Trinidad 1 AWNC

Streaked Flycatcher (*Myiodynastes maculatus*)
Tobago 10

Sulphury Flycatcher (*Tyrannopsis sulphurea*)
Trinidad 2 Waller Field

Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)
Tobago 92

Grey Kingbird (*Tyrannus dominicensis*)
Tobago 60

Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*)
Trinidad and Tobago 6

Black-tailed Tityra (*Tityra cayana*)
Trinidad 1

Caribbean Martin (*Progne dominicensis*)
Tobago 180

Grey-breasted Martin (*Progne chalybea*)
Trinidad 122

White-winged Swallow (*Tachycineta albiventer*)
Tobago 4 Stonehaven Bay

Southern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*)
Trinidad 6

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica erythrogaster*)
Tobago 20

Rufous-breasted Wren (*Thryothorus rutilus*)
Tobago 8

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*)
Tobago 4

Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus (polyglottos) gilvus*)
Tobago 56

Yellow-legged Thrush (*Platycichla flavipes*)
Tobago 2 Gilpin Trace

Cocoa Thrush (*Turdus fumigatus*)
Trinidad 24

Bare-eyed Robin (*Turdus nudigenis*)
Trinidad and Tobago 60

White-necked Thrush (*Turdus albicollis*)
Tobago 8

Long-billed Gnatwren (*Ramphocaenus melanurus*)
Trinidad 2

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*)
Tobago 42

Scrub Greenlet (*Hylophilus flavipes*)
Tobago 6

Golden-fronted Greenlet (*Hylophilus aurantiifrons*)
Trinidad 8

Rufous-browed Peppershrike (*Cyclarhis gujanensis*)
Trinidad 1

Tropical Parula (*Parula pitiayumi*)
Trinidad 2

Blackpoll Warbler (*Dendroica striata*)
Tobago 1 Pigeon Point

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*)
Trinidad and Tobago 9

Masked Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis aequinoctialis*)
Trinidad 6 Nariva Swamp

Golden-crowned Warbler (*Basileuterus culicivorus*)
Trinidad 2 AWNC

Bananaquit (*Coereba flaveola*)
Tobago 190

White-lined Tanager (*Tachyphonus rufus*)
Trinidad and Tobago 58

Red-crowned Ant-tanager (*Habia rubica*)

Trinidad 2 AWNC

Silver-beaked Tanager (*Ramphocelus carbo*)
Trinidad 40

Blue-grey Tanager (*Thraupis episcopus*)
Tobago 200

Palm Tanager (*Thraupis palmarum*)
Tobago 200

Trinidad Euphonia (*Euphonia (chlorotica) trinitatis*)
Trinidad 2

Violaceous Euphonia (*Euphonia violacea*)
Tobago 26

Turquoise Tanager (*Tangara mexicana*)
Trinidad 3 AWNC

Speckled Tanager (*Tangara guttata*)
Trinidad 12

Bay-headed Tanager (*Tangara gyrola*)
Trinidad 6

Blue Dacnis (*Dacnis cayana*)
Trinidad 5

Green Honeycreeper (*Chlorophanes spiza*)
Trinidad 32

Purple Honeycreeper (*Cyanerpes caeruleus*)
Trinidad 40

Red-legged Honeycreeper (*Cyanerpes cyaneus*)
Trinidad and Tobago 30

Blue-black Grassquit (*Volatinia jacarina*)
Trinidad and Tobago 26

Black-faced Grassquit (*Tiaris bicolor*)
Tobago 22

Grassland Yellow-finch (*Sicalis luteola*)
Trinidad 8 Aripo Livestock Centre

Greyish Saltator (*Saltator coerulescens*)

Trinidad 4

Yellow-hooded Blackbird (*Agelaius icterocephalus*)

Trinidad 4

Red-breasted Blackbird (*Sturnella militaris*)

Trinidad 6

Carib Grackle (*Quiscalus lugubris*)

Trinidad and Tobago 90

Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*)

Trinidad and Tobago 92

Giant Cowbird (*Molothrus oryzivorus*)

Trinidad and Tobago 38

Moriche Oriole (*Icterus (cayanensis) chrysocephalus*)

Trinidad 2 Waller Field

Yellow Oriole (*Icterus nigrogularis*)

Trinidad 6

Yellow-rumped Cacique (*Cacicus cela*)

Trinidad and Trinidad 8

Crested Oropendola (*Psarocolius decumanus*)

Trinidad and Tobago 60