



# TOBAGO

March 19 - 24, 2016

## TRIP REPORT

Report by Dan Berard



Photos, top to bottom by Dan Berard: Southern Lapwing, Bananaquit, White-necked Jacobin, Red-billed Tropicbird, Rufous-vented Chachalaca, the beach at Blue Waters Inn



Sunrise Birding LLC

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## TOUR HIGHLIGHTS & FAVORITES:

- Red-billed Tropicbird (on the nest)
- Red-footed Booby
- Brown Booby
- Southern Lapwing (a group favorite)
- Common Potoo
- White-tailed Nightjar
- Rufous-breasted Hermit (on a nest)
- Ruby Topaz Hummingbird (inc. a nest)
- Trinidad Motmot (carrying food to a nest)
- Stripe-breasted Spinetail (building a nest)
- Barred Antshrike
- White-winged Becard
- Blue-backed Manakin

March 19:

Many members of the group stayed overnight at the Holiday Inn Express in Trinidad, so we met in the morning to introduce ourselves and get some birding in. After breakfast, a quick walk around the grounds turned up a few species not found on Tobago including Great Kiskadee and Plain-breasted Ground Dove as well as other interesting species like Red-breasted Blackbird (which is more specifically a meadowlark), Blue-gray Tanager, a pair of Tropical Mockingbirds feeding young and even a Yellow Warbler.

After our short plane ride to Tobago, we immediately noted several Bananaquits nesting building right outside the airport! Little did we know that this was a foreshadowing how many of Tobago's species we'd be lucky enough to see nesting!

Our first stop of the afternoon was the Bon Accord Sewage Treatment Plant, because really, what birding trip is complete without a trip to a sewage treatment plant? The moment we stepped off the bus it was obvious that we were not in North America. Wattled Jacanas, Purple Gallinules (Photo: Dan Berard), Common Gallinules and Least Grebes were feeding in the marsh while Black-faced Grassquits, Yellow-bellied Elaenias and Pale-vented Pigeons sang. We even had a couple rare birds for Tobago – a Glossy Ibis and Cliff Swallow!

Next up, we checked out the Hilton Ponds which was packed with herons, Anhingas and a few Spectacled Caimans.



We arrived at Cuffie River in the afternoon, and were greeted by four species of hummingbirds including Ruby Topaz Hummingbird and White-necked Jacobin.

That evening we got our first taste of the local cuisine thanks to our extremely gracious host Regina Dumas, who not only made certain we didn't go hungry but explained each component of every meal. We did take a break before dessert to watch the Common Potoo and White-tailed Nightjars feeding just outside the dining area.

March 20:

Today, we took full advantage of the amazing nature (and pool) around us at Cuffie River and spent the whole day nearby.

Several of us started early and were able to experience the beginning of the dawn chorus as bats were going in to roost back in the forest and White-tailed Nightjars and Common Potoos got their last songs of the night in. This is also when we had our first encounter with the pair of Trinidad Motmots (Photo: Dan Berard) that were nesting in an embankment nearby. It was difficult to choose between watching the motmot pair bring food to the nest and watch the other amazing birds of Cuffie. Other highlights from the morning included Smooth-billed Ani, Piratic Flycatcher, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Crested Oropendola and White-winged Becard (a rare nesting species on Tobago).



After breakfast we met up with local naturalist Desmond who brought us to several trails nearby where we had our first looks at Blue-backed Manakin, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White-fringed Antwren, Plain Antwren and our first Rufous-breasted Hermit nest of the trip. How many times can you say you saw multiple hermit nests?!

In the afternoon we divided our time relaxing by the pool, watching the extremely active hummingbird feeders and enjoying the local beer and wine.



March 21:

Our destination today was the Grafton Estate, making stops at the coast along the way with Gladwyn James, son of Adolphus James who is arguably Tobago's most famous birder.

The first stop was an extremely active marshy area where we had excellent views of Purple Gallinules, Whimbrel, Little Blue Heron, Green Heron, Green-rumped Parrotlet, and both Black-faced Grassquits and Barred Antshrike collecting nesting material and a White-tipped Dove on a nest.

At the Grafton Estate we were greeted by the welcoming committee (a group of Rufous-vented Chachalacas) and a pair of Blue-black Grassquits (known locally as Johnny Jump-ups) building a nest. Along the trails we recorded a good number of forest species like Yellow-breasted Flycatcher, Scrub Greenlet, White-fringed Antwren and we even flushed a roosting White-tailed Nightjar and got killer looks at Blue-backed Manakin.

After lunch we made another stop by the coast and added Royal Tern and Sandwich Tern to our list and saw an amazing show of Brown Pelicans plunge diving right in front of us!

That evening, we returned to the coast to look for nesting sea turtles and while none came to shore that night, we had a wonderful dinner on the beach and learned a lot about sea turtles and their history on Trinidad and Tobago from an incredibly knowledgeable local researcher.

March 22:

Today, we left the forest of Cuffie River for the ocean side of the Blue Waters Inn. On the way, we birded the Gilpin Trace portion of the Main Ridge – the oldest legally protected forest reserve, having been established in 1776.

We didn't make it far into the preserve before we pulled over to check out a very active area. Venezuelan Flycatcher, Blue-backed Manakin, Barred Antshrike and Red-eyed Vireos were actively feeding roadside.

Not far down the road was the entrance to the Gilpin Trace and another fruiting tree with Golden-olive Woodpeckers, White-lined Tanagers, and Red-legged Honeycreepers. Soon after entering the Gilpin Trace we found a White-tailed Sabrewing on a nest and a pair of Stripe-breasted Spinetails nest building. We didn't make it too far down the trail as we were

treated to great views of the following species nest building or on the nest – White-necked Jacobin, Rufous-breasted Hermit, Copper-rumped Hummingbird, Blue-backed Manakin, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Fuscous Flycatcher, and Yellow-breasted Flycatcher. We also got excellent views of Cocoa Woodcreeper, Yellow-legged Thrush, White-necked Thrush and even a trapdoor spider!



We arrived at Blue Waters Inn in the late afternoon and enjoyed our complimentary welcome rum punch and the sunset before dinner.

March 23:

After a leisurely breakfast, we walked the trails around the Blue Waters Inn and found a pair of Yellow-bellied Elaenias nesting, Brown-crested Flycatchers (Photo: Dan Berard) building a nest and a pair of Red-rumped Agoutis – a medium sized mammal straight from a Dr Seuss book.



In the afternoon, we boarded a glass bottom boat and headed to Little Tobago, where we were treated to great views of Red-billed Tropicbird, Brown Booby, Red-footed Booby, and Magnificent Frigatebird (Photo: Dan Berard). We were even able to watch a Red-billed Tropicbird ‘walk’ up the path and take off in the middle of our group!

Besides the amazing seabird show, the unique water feeders on Little Tobago attracted a motley crew of species including Spectacled Thrush, White-tipped Dove, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, and Bananaquit.

Brown-crested Flycatcher, Blue-gray Tanager, Palm Tanager, and Bananaquit.

Another highlight of Little Tobago was seeing a male Ocellated Gecko (*Gonatodes ocellatus*), a small beautifully patterned gecko endemic to Tobago.

On the way back to Blue Waters, we made a stop by Angel Reef to do some snorkelling and saw an amazing variety of fish including Stoplight Parrotfish, Queen Angelfish, Sergeant Major, Blue Tang, even Trumpetfish just to name a few. It was also an excellent way to cool off!

In the evening, we did our final species tally for the trip and voted on the favorite species. It was a tie between Red-billed Tropicbird (Photo: Dan Berard) and Trinidad Motmot.

**Editor’s Note:** Many times, Tobago is offered as a short extension to tours in Trinidad. With all it has to offer, Tobago is a brilliant winter birding getaway on its own. This tour proved it. If you are interested in future tours to Tobago, contact [gina@sunrisebirding.com](mailto:gina@sunrisebirding.com).



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*Photos, top to bottom:*  
Cocoa Woodcreeper  
Orange-winged Parrot  
Barred Antshrike  
Smooth-billed Ani  
Group at Blue Waters  
Inn.

