T&T BIRDING SCENE

June & July: a lull before the hoped for migratory storm

By Martyn Kenefick

Searching for rare or unusual birds these summer months can be hard work. Northbound migration has all but finished but there is always the hope of finding a displaced vagrant species and then the hoped for post-breeding wanderers from mainland South America and the first returning migrant shorebirds associated with the latter days of July.

Nevertheless, resident species can still be found in good numbers. The highest count for American Flamingos on our west coast reached 188; peak count of Trinidad Piping Guans, the highlight of birding the Grande Riviere forest, reached 18 on one day and an impressive count of 23 Yellow-headed Caracaras was tallied in the agricultural fields at Orange Grove. The most significant individual sighting was of a pair of Variegated Flycatchers nest-building in central Trinidad. Whilst breeding has been suspected for several years, this is a most important development. For rarity finders, the undoubted star of the show was an unusually confiding Paint-billed Crake at Carli bay on 29th June.

The trend for the last three years has been the presence of both Small-billed Elaenias and Dark-billed Cuckoos dispersing from the mainland. During the last week of July, not only were there two Dark-billed Cuckoos found at Pt. Gourde but also an impressive minimum count of 12 Small-billed Elaenias close to Caroni Rice Project with another reported from Carlsen Field.

Right on cue, Pectoral Sandpipers, traditionally the earliest of southbound migrant shorebirds, were first detected on 24th July. Much more unusual, however, was the presence of an adult Franklin's Gull, possibly a failed breeder, at Orange Valley on 26th July.
By James Fitzmyer Dougherty

Before arriving in Trinidad, most people I spoke to about my internship at Asa Wright began their response with “wow.” For the past two months, I have realized that “wow” is actually the most appropriate word for describing my experience here. I arrived, my first night, to a beautiful nature centre surrounded by lush rainforest and to the warm welcome of a single person, security staff member Richard Oudit. When I walked up to the verandah for the first time, I was immediately taken aback by the view and the abundance of hummingbirds. That first night, the space was unfamiliar and the nighttime intimidating, but it did not take long to become comfortable. Everybody from the guides to the cleaning staff never ceased to go out of their way to make me feel welcome and assist me however they could.

During work, I learned an incredible amount, from identifying plant species to exploring the intricacies of birds and insect colonies. Some examples of my projects include a plant inventory of the trails and a guide on species found at night. I had the opportunity to learn about people from different backgrounds as I gave tours, ate meals, or answered questions on the verandah. I enjoyed getting my hands dirty or soaking my clothes with sweat, but I also enjoyed the warm showers afterwards. One of the most rewarding aspects of my work was having the chance to pass on the knowledge taught to me. Whether I was giving tours or simply answering questions, I loved surprising and energising guests with new information. I have no way of knowing what kind of influence my work had, but I am happy to know I left Trinidad having supported the community and the environment.

Looking back on this experience, some of my fondest memories will be eating pelau by the beach while looking for leatherback turtles, getting to know guests over dinner, running on the driveway, night walks, starry nights, hummingbirds, White-bearded manakins, watching football and eating ice cream in Arima, and all the people I met. My time in Trinidad was surely one which I will carry with me through the years.

Thank you, Asa Wright Nature Centre and Trinidad.
Our first Sip & Paint

Photos and article by Johanne Ryan

Painting hummingbirds in the ambience of the rain forest while sipping on Asa Wright’s rum punch is a great combination. And for AWNC’s first Sip & Paint event, held on 27 July, everyone got to do just that. Everyone flexed their artistic muscles by painting a piece inspired by the charming White-necked Jacobin and Sanchezia plant – both of which are found at the Centre. The artist, Katrina Khan-Roberts gave easy and interactive instructions to the participants. From all the feedback, everyone enjoyed the afternoon. As Angelique Chandler said of the event, “this is a fabulous experience, mixing with people and just enjoying yourself.’ We were happy to have a good turn out and thank you to everyone who patronised the event. Many thanks to the Katrina Khan-Roberts for conducting the art session.

First you do the background

Look what I did!

The paintings look great so far

Katrina and her pieces
YOUNG ENVIRONMENTALIST OF THE MONTH

If you think your child, aged 5-16, has done something helpful to preserve the environment, please feel free to share it with us. Either write a short story or send a few pictures to asawrightconsedu@gmail.com. He/she may be selected as our Young Environmentalist of the Month. Once your child is featured in our monthly newsletter, he/she and two adults will be given a complimentary day visit to Asa Wright Nature Centre, which includes viewing birds/animals on the verandah, a nature tour and use of the clear water pool.

Katrina gives her instructions

A closer look at some of the paintings

Cheers to an afternoon well spent!