

## **"Too many hunting camps"**

The Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalists' Club would like to voice our support for the Minister of the Environment and Water Resources' recent decision to see to the removal of illegal hunting camps scattered about the forests of south-eastern Trinidad. It is our observation that some hunting areas have become excessively popular so that the concentration of hunters in these places during hunting season makes a mockery of conservation. One such area is the Edward Trace/Guayaguayare Main Field connecting road.

In October 2011, Club members conducted a survey of illegal hunting structures erected in the Guayaguayare oilfields and along the connecting road from Guayaguayare to Edward Trace. These structures were built for the purpose of overnight and/or weekend stays in the forest thus removing the last form of defense for wildlife populations i.e. remoteness from areas of population.

At that time, photographs and locations of 22 camps were noted in the survey and at least 11 other camps were known in Edward Trace and Navet, but time did not permit their recording. The total number was probably at least twice the total documented. Neither is it suggested that this is the only area with illegal camps. The problem exists throughout Trinidad and no doubt, Tobago.

Petrotrin, the party having a lease on these areas, has apparently had some policies in the past that attempted to prevent hunting in the Navet and Moruga West oilfields. This is evidenced by painted signs advising the prohibition of hunting within the oilfield. However, some of these structures have gone far beyond the stage of simple shelters using natural materials, and it would appear that they enjoy a level of indifference from Petrotrin. One of the better established camps then included a generator, water supply and was apparently permanently occupied. Additionally, in 2011 in the 307 area of the Navet field, one group had even built a 'hunting tractor' which was commonly parked at the old 307 compressor shed. This tractor was a D4 Caterpillar with two decks, the first having accommodation for hunting dogs and the upper level for transporting personnel. With such a vehicle hunters could penetrate far into the forest away from roads with equipment and supplies, so causing a disproportionate amount of disturbance to remote wild life habitats. It is noted that the tractor was parked on Petrotrin roadways in full view in areas covered by their "No Hunting" signage.

The Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalists' Club is not advocating the banning of hunting in properly regulated seasons, but believes that the Government, Petrotrin and other holders of active leases in forested areas have a responsibility to ensure that the abuse of our plant and animal resources does not take place under their watch.

**Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club**

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