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# Book Reviews

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## **Views from the Bridge: A Memoir on the Freshwater Fishes of Trinidad**

Dr Julian S Kenny

98 pages, including Index

Published by Julian S. Kenny, 1995.

Available from

REAL (Rapid Environmental Assessments Ltd.) 41 Ana Street, Woodbrook, Trinidad.

Dr Julian S Kenny confuses amateur naturalists and natural scientists alike by choosing almost identical titles for his books on the Natural History of Trinidad and Tobago.

He says he gave this memoir the title "Views from the Bridge" because it described so well the times he spent on bridges while taking his students on field trips and directing their search for fish, amphibians and other fauna in the streams of Trinidad. When he was asked for a title for his "coffee table" full colour, hardback book which gave an overview of the flora and fauna of Trinidad, he pictured himself surveying the island from the Ridges of the Northern, Central and Southern Ranges of Trinidad - hence the title "Views from the Ridge".

This memoir (from the bridge) was the first book and was published in 1995. It is a book written as a series of seven essays, mainly intended for the professional natural scientist and the serious amateur.

In the Preface, Dr Kenny mentions his first encounter with freshwater fishes as a boy playing in the St Ann's River (where Lechmere Guppy discovered the fish that now bears his name - and today is known the world over). One would be lucky indeed to find any guppies in that river today.

In the first essay, "Faces and Places," Dr Kenny mourns the degradation of the environment through quarrying, bush fires and squatting. Even so, below bridge 1/71 on the Southern Main Road, Bonasse, there is abundant life, despite the fact that local residents find the river a convenient place to dispose of household garbage.

In contrast, in the upper reaches of the rivers of the Northern Range where the water is clear, there is much less life to be found.

The author gives an overview of the freshwater fish, not excluding the pools of the Pitch Lake in La Brea, ending the essay with some amusing anecdotes on the hardships endured by students, visiting scientists and naturalists while doing research on freshwater fish.

Essay Two tells the sad story of fish-farming, aquaculture, in Trinidad; of the rainbow trout; the carp; the North American catfish imported at the whim of senior bureaucrats in the Ministry, or travelling politicians impressed by fish-farms in places where aquaculture is a tradition dating back centuries. Most of those exotics provided a good meal for local predatory fauna, only tilapia has adapted to take its place in Trinidad ponds and reservoirs.

Essay Three considers Bridges and Barriers; currents from the Orinoco in flood bringing new species to Trinidad rivers; the land bridge in past geological ages; and the dangers of pontificating when, having pronounced that a certain species is never found in this location, a student/research assistant holds up the seine to show the exact species trapped in the net.

Essay Four describes the difficulties of producing an accurate, up-to-date list of freshwater fishes. It is a problem bedeviling all natural scientists to a greater or lesser degree due, in part, to the taxonomists' habits of changing scientific names with, so it appears, every new discovery. The problems seem to be compounded here by some persons' cavalier attitude to scientific data.

Essay Five, Homes and Ranges, is well illustrated with 48 maps to explain the text describing each species. Feeding and Breeding is the heading for the short Essay Number Six since comparatively little is known of these subjects.

Views from the Bridge, the last essay in this memoir, poses questions for the reader to ponder - perhaps to inspire the reader to take up Dr Kenny's challenge for further research.

Throughout this book Dr Kenny acknowledges the work and the help of colleagues and associates while, (as is only proper) omitting to mention the names of

stumbling blocks in the path of scientific research. A brief postscript, bibliography, black-and-white photographs of three dozen freshwater fish and an index complete this memoir.

Anyone with a serious interest in freshwater fish will find this memoir invaluable, while those who read to broaden their knowledge of the natural world cannot fail to be amused by Dr Kenny's wry asides and fund of funny, fishy stories.

**Anne Hilton**

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