

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

1st June 1973.

The next monthly meeting of the Club will be held at the St. Mary's College Library on Thursday 14th June, 1973. The Club's business will commence promptly at 6.00 p.m. and the lecture at 6.30 p.m. This later time is to enable the lecturer to illustrate his talk with slides; dusk is at about 6.30 p.m.

AGENDA

1. Reading and confirmation of Minutes.
2. Business arising out of the Minutes.
3. Membership
4. Correspondence
5. LECTURE "Nematodes and Man" by Dr C.W.D. Brathwaite.
6. Exhibits and Miscellaneous Notes (the plants included in the Tree Flowering Project will be displayed from 5.45 p.m.)
7. Other Business.

FIELD EXCURSION The next Field Excursion of the Club will be held on Sunday 24th June, 1973 to the Central Range. We will be leaving St. Mary's College, Pembroke Street at 7.30 a.m. and a short stop will be made at the junction of the Churchill-Roosevelt and Princess Margaret Highways at 7.50 a.m.

EL TUCUCHE TRAIL PROJECT

As arranged at the last Club meeting, members of this project group met on Thursday 15th May to begin planning the development of the existing trail from Ortinola Estate up to the summit of El Tucúche, second highest peak in Trinidad. It is planned to meet again on Sunday June 3rd to walk the length of the trail and to start some preliminary marking of the route through the estate.

Eventually we hope to produce a trail guide which will enable walkers to identify some of the features of biological and geographical interest as they follow the trail. We hope to have something ready for the Club visit in September. If you are interested in joining the group working on this project please contact Brian Cooper (662-4686 or c/o Dept. of Crop Science U.W.I.) or any Club officer.

TREE FLOWERING PROJECT

The purpose of the Tree Flowering Project is to collect basic information on the time of year when flowering, fruiting and leaf production occur in a number of native plants. We propose to concentrate our efforts on tree species and twelve have been selected as being particularly suitable for this kind of study although, of course, members are free to extend this list to other species which may be of particular interest to them. In addition to the twelve trees we are including four other plant species of special interest in this type of observational study.

We would like as many members as possible to help in this project. The trees selected are widespread and everyone should be able to find several in the vicinity of their home or place of work, although it would add considerably to the value of the data if some attempt could be made to collect information from the more remote parts of the island. We recommend that all observers record at least two of the species listed as this will make the task more interesting.

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The method of recording to be adopted is simple and should not take more than a few minutes for each selected tree. Surprisingly little is known about the environmental factors controlling flowering and fruiting of many of our common tropical trees and thus the cumulative value of the information we collect will be considerable. At the moment there are just so many things that we don't know; for example - do the pods of silk cotton trees in Diego Martin and St. Augustine burst within a few days of one another or within a few weeks? How closely synchronised are the flowerings of yellow pouis across Trinidad? etc. You can easily think of many similar questions yourself and this recording scheme may enable us to answer some of them in a few years time.

The recording scheme starts on July 1st, 1973, although members may add to their initial trees at any time after then. Recording sheets and instructions for filling them in will be available at the next meeting and a small exhibit will be mounted to help people in the identification of the species. the species we are recommending for the project are as follows:-

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|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Yellow Pou | Tabebuia serratifolia |
| Silk Cotton tree | Ceiba pentandra |
| Calabash | Crescentia cujete |
| Cocorite palm | Maximiliana caribaea |
| Barbados cherry | Malpighia coccigera |
| West Indian cedar | Cedrela mexicana |
| Cannon Ball tree | Couroupita guianensis |
| Devils Ear tree | Enterolobium cyclocarpum |
| Cunure | Calliandra guilgingii |
| Salt fish wood | Machaerium robiniaefolium |
| Bay rum tree | Pimenta racemosa |
| Red mangrove | Rhizophora Sp. |
|
 |
 |
| Cats claw creeper | Bigonia urquis-cati |
| Chaconia | Warszewiczia coccinea |
| Bromeliad | any species |
| Heliconid | any species |

Further recording sheets and other information can be obtained from the co-ordinators of the project:

Ian Lambie, 64 Roberts Street, Woodbrook, Port of Spain.

Ray Fordham, Dept. of Biological Sciences, U.W.I. St. Augustine.

FIELD EXCURSION TO TOBAGO, 27th-29th APRIL.

About 30 members and friends joined this field excursion and most of the party "camped" in conditions of great luxury at Grafton Estate through the hospitality of Mrs. Alefounder. Everyone in the party is now familiar with the call of the Cocrico and we also enjoyed seeing numbers of very tame Metmots and RedCrowned Woodpeckers, to mention two of the more colourful birds which were all around the house.

On Saturday the party made a tour down the coast of Tobago to Roxborough and then crossed over the ridge to visit Bloody Bay. A number of stops were made to examine the erosion of old lava flows, which had been metamorphosed and then weathered to form clays, and are now causing considerable problems for Tobago's road works dept. Looking at the forest, ten years after hurricane Flora, someone asked why a number of trees were killed, although they were still standing. They give a stagshorn appearance to the forest, the dead branches of these pre-hurricane trees sticking up above the canopy of the trees grown since 1963. A possible explanation is that though some trees remained standing after the hurricane, many of those around them were blown down, creating quite different climatic conditions for the remaining isolated trees. Exposure to strong winds causing excessive drying compared with the humid, stiller atmosphere within rainforest could have been enough to kill them.

A variety of seabirds were seen at Bloody Bay including Laughing gulls, Pelicans, Least, Royal and Noddy terns and one Brown Booby. On the return journey a stop was made at Fort George, Scarborough.

On Saturday evening turtle patrols at Grafton beach draw a blank, but the group at Turtle beach watched and tagged a turtle, which nested and returned to the sea successfully largely due to their efforts. Sunday morning was spent visiting Buccoo reef, where in addition to seeing the corals and fish we saw some cheeky Laughing gulls standing all over the heads and backs of Pelicans attempting to pinch fish from them. A number of people were alarmed by an apparent decrease in the numbers of fish at Buccoo and it is hoped to discuss this in the September issue of the Bulletin.

FIELD EXCURSION TO PARIA AND PETIT TACARIB BAYS, 26th = 27th May.

About 25 members and a party from St. Anthony's College took part. Paria Bay was reached by lunch time, following which half the party went on to Petit Tacarib while the remainder constructed a shelter on the beach at Paria.

The Paria party patrolled the beach from 8.30 p.m. until 11.30 p.m., but, probably because of the presence of parties of hunters, fishermen, motor-cyclists, and other campers, no turtles appeared, although we were told that four had nested the previous Saturday. When Murphy Bay, adjacent to Paria on the East side, was inspected next morning, it was apparent that three turtles had nested there the previous night!!

The Tacarib party, exhausted from their long hike, and hampered by a shortage of water and an excess of food, did not begin patrolling until 11 p.m., by which time the only turtle of the night had laid its eggs and departed.

As always, the social and recreational aspects of the weekend were not allowed to suffer at the expense of the scientific programme. However, although no turtles were seen or tagged, useful information was obtained on nesting along these inaccessible north coast beaches.

SHORT NOTES

Seminars at the Asa Wright Nature Centre. Two week-long seminars in Tropical Ecology are being held at the Asa Wright N.C. during July, under the direction of Dr. Joseph Copeland. Members or anyone else interested is invited to attend as a resident or commuter to the Centre for the whole or part of one of the seminars. This could be a most interesting and valuable experience for anyone wishing to improve their understanding of Trinidad's natural history. Further details from:- The Manager, The Asa Wright Nature Centre, G.P.O. Bag No. 10, Port of Spain. Also, Dr. Peter Bacon, Dept. of Biological Sciences, U.W.I. St. Augustine. Turtle patrols at Matura beach. These have been held every week since March and a number of turtles have been tagged, but a large number have also been killed by poachers.

Nature Trails in the Arima Valley. The nature trails at Los Lapas and at the Asa Wright Nature Centre have now been permanently marked and the self-guiding leaflets are available at the Nature Centre. Schools from Port of Spain and Tunapuna have recently made use of the facility, and it is hoped that more will do so before the end of the school year.

REVIEW

A Cheap Book on Tropical Birds. Members frequenting bookshops may have seen the excellent Hamlyn all-colour paperback series, with titles including "Bird Behaviour", "Butterflies" and "Snakes of the World". A recent addition is "Tropical Birds" by Clive Roots, on sale in Trinidad for two dollars and forty cents. It is full of gorgeous full-colour illustrations, including at least 20 birds found in Trinidad (nice pictures of Scarlet Ibis and Oilbird), and is worth buying for these alone. The text is arranged on ecological lines, with the first half of the book describing the birds found in different habitats (Lowland forests, Tropical islands etc.) and the remainder is devoted to chapters on such topics as "Tropical birds and Man" and "Birds in danger".

Rather surprisingly there are a number of serious errors in the text: African flycatchers are described as Tyrannidae, whereas these are the totally unrelated New World tyrant-flycatchers. The Boat-tailed Grackle (Cassidix mexicanus) is described as being a common species around Port of Spain whereas the local species is the Boat-tail or Carib Grackle (Quiscalus lugubris).

Some of the illustrations are slightly inaccurate, and the Silverbeak sitting on a Trinidad bird-table (p.99) is unrecognisable, although a superb Kiskadee sits on the other end!!

In conclusion, worth buying if you are at all interested in birds; although the text is rather advanced in some chapters, anyone would enjoy the pictures.

P.S. If you only buy one book a year, don't buy this - wait for Richard French's.

Future Issues of the Bulletin.

We intend to produce longer issues of the Bulletin, such as this, quarterly, and the next will be in September. Contributions welcome; the deadline for the September Bulletin will be August 25th and contributions should be sent to:- Mrs. K. Gibbs, 2 Los Godos Avenue, Santa Margarita Circular Road, St. Augustine.

Report from the Club's representative on the Wildlife Conservation Committee

On 20th June, 1958 an Act was passed in the then Legislative Council " to make better provisions for the Conservation of Wild Animal Life in Trinidad & Tobago"

During the Federal Election Campaign of the following year (1959) one of the candidates in the Eastern Counties made frequent attacks on the P.N.U. Government and the proposed Wildlife Ordinance which he said provided for a tax to be imposed on hunters in the form of "a manitou tax".
The P.N.U. Candidate failed to win this seat.

Since then, it would appear, that the Government has been extremely cautious in dealing with matters relative to Wildlife Conservation. Hence nearly five years had elapsed before the Wildlife Conservation Ordinance was proclaimed on 14th March 1963.

As provided for in the Law, a Wildlife Conservation Committee was appointed to advise the Minister on all matters relative to Wildlife Conservation.

I have served on this Committee as the Club's representative for the three terms, during the ten years of its existence and while I greatly admire the sincerity and enthusiasm which prevailed at the more than 50 meetings which were held during the period very little has been accomplished.

This has been most frustrating to me, and no doubt to other members of the Committee who have given so much of their time, very often at great inconvenience to themselves, during this ten year period.

Six years ago the Committee recommended that the sale of "wild meat" be prohibited;
Six years ago the Committee submitted a proposal for the establishment of a Wildlife Sanctuary at Chaguaramas;
Six years ago the Committee submitted recommendations for amending the Wildlife Conservation Ordinance;

The Committee has been repeatedly requesting a substantial increase in the Wildlife Patrols and equipment;

To date nothing has changed or if it has, it has been to the detriment of wildlife.

More recently (nearly three years ago) the Committee suggested that a proper investigation by qualified personnel, be undertaken into the status of the Cocrico in Tobago, which was accused of attacking food crops there.

Again more than a year ago the Committee recommended that permission be denied Shell Trinidad Limited, to use the Blue River and No. 9 Canal of the Caroni Swamp to transport liquified Petroleum Gas by Barges.

The Committee has recently been informed that decisions contrary to the last two recommendations mentioned above have been taken by the Ministry without even the courtesy of discussion with the Committee on its recommendations.

Wont you agree that the work of the Committee during the 10 years of its existence has been an exercise in futility?

IAN LAMBIE

31.5.73.