

# THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

---

1st September 1973.

The next monthly meeting of the Club will be held at the St. Mary's College Library on Thursday 13th September 1973. The Club's business will commence at 5.30 p.m. and the lecture at 6.00 p.m.

## AGENDA

1. Reading and confirmation of Minutes.
2. Business arising out of the Minutes.
3. Membership.
4. Correspondence
5. LECTURE "Volcanic Eruptions" by Dr H. Sigurdsson.
6. Exhibits and Miscellaneous Notes.
7. Other business

FIELD EXCURSION The next Field Excursion of the Club will be held on Sunday September 30th, 1973, a walk to the summit of El Tucuche. We will be leaving St. Mary's College, Pembroke St. promptly at 6.30 a.m. and meeting Brian Cooper in St. Joseph's Square, a short distance along the road up the Maracas Valley from E.M. road, at 7.00 a.m. PLEASE BE PROMPT SO THAT THE STEEP PART OF THE CLIMB CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED BEFORE IT GETS TOO HOT! Dr Cooper, who is co-ordinating the El Tucuche Nature Trail Project, is leading the excursion and contributes the following advise for those intending to join the walk.

The hike up El Tucuche will involve a good deal of fairly strenuous exercise and we will be spending most of the day on our feet. The route is about 9 miles for the round trip and includes climbing 3000 feet. The first part of the trail is steep and quite rough so please come with suitable, sturdy, comfortable footwear. It is most likely to rain sometime during the day so come prepared for that too. You will need food and a water bottle, but don't bring more weight than necessary because you will find it feels twice as heavy by the time you get to the top! If the mosquitoes like you and you don't like them, some insect repellent is a good idea. Parking space at the start of the trail is limited so you are asked to "double up" and come in as few cars as possible.

Also see the paragraphs headed 'El Tucuche Nature Trail Project' and 'Beginners' Bird Watching'

## CARONI SWAMP - NATURAL RESOURCE OR INDUSTRIAL WATERWAY? by Ian Lambie

At a meeting of the Wildlife Conservation Committee held on 3rd April 1971 the Committee strongly opposed the use of the Blue River and No 9 Drainage Canal of the Caroni Swamp for the transportation of Shellane Gas by barges. A letter to this effect, dated 6th April 1971, was sent to the P.S. Ministry of Agriculture in reply to his enquiry, by the Conservator of Forests, who is Chairman of the Wildlife Conservation Committee. Nothing more was heard about this matter until earlier this year (1973) when it was drawn to our attention that Shell Trinidad Ltd., the applicant, had constructed a pipeline from their Bottling Installation to a point on No 9 Drainage Canal.

Dr Peter Bacon/

Dr Peter Bacon and myself visited the site on separate occasions to verify this information. Subsequent investigations indicated that in a letter dated 24.11.70 signed by the P.S. of the Ministry of Planning and Development it was stated that "there was no objection to the use of the Blue River and No 9 Drainage Canal for navigation as outlined by you" Shell.

The information on which this permission was granted was that the barge was to be "a small unit propelled by an outboard motor", also that "the route is estimated to be used once or twice a week by the barge". Thus permission had been granted by the Ministry of Planning and Development even before the matter had come to the attention of the Wildlife Conservation Committee, the Committee appointed by Government to advise the Minister of Agriculture in all matters relative to Wildlife Conservation.

Further it now appears that a much larger unit has been built by Shell Trinidad Ltd. and at present we are unable to determine whether the Ministry of Planning and Development had given permission for the use of this unit which we understand is 24' x 90' and powered by twin diesel engines.

WHAT HAS THE CLUB DONE?

In addition to having several discussions with members of the Press, Radio and Television, with officials of kindred groups S.C.A.P.E., Wildlife Society, H.A.T.T. etc: and with Government officials the Club has organised three Joint Public Meetings, organised a Panel Discussion on the Radio and written letters to several influential people. The Panel Discussion on TTT was cancelled by the Public Relations Division of the Prime Ministry Office.

- Joint Public Meetings
  - 10th July 1973 (San Fernando)
  - 16th August 1973 (Public Library POS)
  - 23rd August 1973 (Public Library POS)

Some members also participated in a meeting organised by the Wildlife Society.

Press Releases  
Letters Written

On 15th June and 22nd July 1973.  
To the following:-

- The Executive Director Caribbean Conservation Association 22nd June 1973
  - The Prime Minister 4th July 1973
  - The Hon. Kamaluddin Mohammed 14th July 1973
  - The Caroni County Council 14th July 1973
  - The Minister of Planning & Dev. 17th July 1973
  - Senior Fisheries Officer 17th July 1973
  - Caribbean Conservation Association 7th August 1973
  - Conservator of Forests 13th August 1973
  - Chairman of the Tourist Board 13th August 1973
  - Senior Fisheries Officer 13th August 1973
- All members were informed of the Club's objections in the July monthly Bulletin.

POSTSCRIPT

At the Public meeting on August 23rd members of the Action Committee (representatives of T.F.N.C., S.C.A.P.E., H.A.T.T., Cedros Fishing Co-operative, Caroni Youth Association etc: nominated at the meeting of August 16th) reported on their plans to prevent Shell's use of the Blue River and No 9 Drainage Canal. O.W.T.U.

The campaign they announced is in three stages:-

1. To seek talks with Shell Trinidad Ltd., the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Planning and Development.
2. To organise an extensive public education programme to make 'the man in the street' aware of what is at stake, primarily through distribution of leaflets and car stickers, and possibly culminating in a boycott of Shell products.
3. To physically prevent the barge 'Shell Pelican' from entering the Blue River by non-violent means.

Since this meeting four representatives of the Action Committee had a meeting with Shell on Monday 27th August and the Oilfield Workers Trade Union has announced that they are supporting the campaign.

Finally, as a result of the letter sent by the Club to the Prime Minister, Ian Mambie was invited to meet the Minister of Petroleum and Mines on Friday 24th August, and was accompanied by Mr. Ronald Williams of SCAPE. representatives were invited to meet the M/P&M.

THE TURTLE CONSERVATION PROJECT - by Peter Bacon

Beach patrols were made on the north and east coasts of Trinidad from the beginning of March through to the end of July at least one per week. The

*The intent to preserve can justify for the following reasons.*

The result was a good collection of nesting records and a small amount of tagging. Public interest in our turtles patrols increases every year, and during this season large numbers of persons from many different walks of life patrolled the beaches with us at night and were thrilled with the sight of the leatherback turtles nesting. As in previous years, there was a great deal of hunting and by the end of the nesting season the beaches were littered with carcasses.

In May a report was presented to the Ministry of Agriculture on the status of the sea turtle resources of Trinidad and Tobago. This summarised the researches of the Club over the last five or six years and made several recommendations for conservation of turtles in this country. Unfortunately there has been no active response from the Ministry and the Chief Fisheries Officer has not yet found time to discuss this report with me, despite several requests. Unless some action is taken on this report soon there will not be time to have the turtle protection legislation amended before the next nesting season. In view of the very great amount of time and effort that the Club has expended on this project over the years this lack of any obvious interest by the Ministry is disheartening. The Club must give some consideration to impressing on the Fisheries Department of the Ministry of Agriculture how important we consider these turtle resources to be.

On the international level there has been considerable progress in sea turtle conservation. At the 6th Annual Meeting of the CICAR Group (Cooperative Investigation of the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions) in Cartagena, Colombia, in July 1973, I presented a report - "Appraisal of the stocks and management of sea turtles in the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions" which summarised the present status of turtle populations in each country in the region and listed their conservation legislation and practices. This report was very warmly received and the member countries agreed that a Caribbean sea turtle conservation group should be established. This group will attempt to prepare conservation legislation to protect the turtle resources of the whole region, will formulate plans for restocking of depleted nesting beaches, will assist member countries in starting to farm sea turtles on a commercial basis and will serve to collect and disseminate information of turtles to interested persons in the region and to international agencies, such as IUCN with which it will be closely associated. I have been asked to take responsibility for getting this group started and hope to keep the Club informed of progress through subsequent newsletters.

One other piece of turtle news of great importance is that the world's first turtle farm - Mariculture Ltd., of Grand Cayman - has at last succeeded in producing its own hatchlings from eggs laid by females from the holding ponds on artificial beaches. This means that the farm is now self sustaining. Of further interest is that, after only five years since experimental farming operations began, this farm has an annual turnover of £1 Million Sterling! It's time we started farming turtles in Tobago!

EL TUCUICHE NATURE TRAIL PROJECT by Brian Cooper

Work is continuing on this project and promises of help with the making of sign and information boards have been obtained from the Forestry Department. We are also investigating sources of funds for the production and printing of the Trail Guide, a preliminary edition of which we hope to have ready for your examination by the September outing. Preliminary marking of the trail and selection of the interest points has been done. We hope as many of you as possible will come on the September outing to give us your comments and help.

THE TREE FLOWERING PROJECT by Ray Fordham and Kate Gibbs

A start was made with this project in June, but few people who were not at that meeting have requested instruction and recording sheets from Ray or Ian so we are canvassing for more support. Earlier this year when we were at the planning stage of the project we had a large number of supporters, now is the time to stand and be counted. During the next couple of months we will be asking everyone in the Club which trees they are recording (and if not, why not?) in order to get some idea of the number and distribution of different species being recorded. So please come and tell us at the September or October indoor meetings which trees you are recording, or collect some recording sheets and make a start. Bring along any questions about the recording scheme, problems of identification etc: to the meeting too.

BEGINNERS' BIRD WATCHING by Geoff Gibbs

There are only a few people in the Club who can identify more than a handful of the island's birds, and this makes it difficult for a beginner to become more proficient. In the two years I have been here I have learnt to recognise many of the island's birds, and for this reason Ian Lambie has asked me to assist Club members who wish to take up bird-watching.

I intend to do this by inviting members to join me on bird-watching trips (day or part-day), and by leading a "bird group" on some of the Club's monthly field excursions. Anyone is welcome to join in, so long as they are Club members and can bring along a pair of binoculars and a notebook. If you are interested I suggest you do one or more of the following:-

1. Make yourself known to me or my wife at one of the Club's indoor meetings.
2. Write to me at The Chemistry Department, U.T.I., St. Augustine.
3. Turn up on the Tucuche field meeting - with your binoculars and notebook! ;,

BIRD NOTES by Geoff Gibbs

Trinidad is rather a wet place at the moment and the birds to look for are wading birds and swamp birds. Quite a few North American waders have appeared already on their way south, and Club members saw Yellowlegs, Stilt Sandpipers, Semipalmated and Solitary Sandpipers in the Fishing Pond rice fields on the August excursion. Hundreds of Giant Cowbirds were also in evidence - perhaps Rice Grackles is a better name after all!!

Another worthwhile place to visit is the south bank of No 9 Drainage Canal in the Caroni Swamp, easily accessible on foot from the Shell LPG terminal. The wet fields to the south of the Canal are flooded and afford feeding grounds for lots of Tricolour Herons and Great Egrets, with a good chance of seeing various bitterns, crakes and rails. The pools on the other side of the Canal just beyond the pumping station are also visible, and held a Roseate Spoonbill and several Black Skimmers the other day, while three more Spoonbills flew over at dusk.

CHAGUARAMAS DEVELOPMENT PLAN The Written Statement and set of 6 maps giving details of the Government's plans for Trinidad's N.W. peninsular are available for inspection by members of the public at the Ministry of Planning and Development, Trinidad House, St. Vincent St. and at the Town and Country Planning Division, 2 Edward St., P.O.S, also at the Ministry of Tobago Affairs, Scarborough. It would be very helpful if a number of Club members could inspect the Plan within the next 2 weeks and give any comments they have, in writing, to the Club Secretary, Ian Lambie. It is hoped that several Committee members will do the same and the Committee can then decide whether the Club has any Objections or Representations to make to the Minister. The time limit for these is the end of September, so we have to hurry!

THE NEXT BULLETIN The next longer issue of the Bulletin will be in early January before the AGM and will contain the report on Buccoo Reef, held over from this issue, and some comment on the history and status of the Cocrico in Tobago. The deadline for contributions is December 10th, (due to the pressure of other activities over the Christmas season), and should be sent to :- Mrs. K. Gibbs, 2 Los Godos Avenue, Santa Margarita Circular Road, St. Augustine.

42222