

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

28th December, 1973.

Dear Member,

You are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Club to be held at the St. Mary's College Library on Thursday 10th January 1974 at 5.30 p.m. 1973 has been a very lively and eventful year for the Club so please come to the A.G.M. and help launch us into an equally promising 1974.

A G E N D A

1. Reading and confirmation of minutes of the last A.G.M.
2. Business arising out of the minutes.
3. Membership.
4. Correspondence.
5. Honorary Secretary's Report for 1973.
6. Honorary Treasurer's Report for 1973.
7. Election of Officers for 1974.
8. Any other business.

Mr. Bill Miln-Home does not wish to stand re-election for the post of President of the Club, which is therefore vacant. Members should remember to obtain the agreement of any other member, before nominating him or her for election to the management committee.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please pay your Club membership subscription of \$5 to the Honorary Treasurer (25, Baden Powell St., Woodbrook, P.O.S.) promptly and so save the Club time and money in sending out reminders. Why not take the opportunity of paying it at the A.G.M.? Members who were recently notified that their 1973 subscription is in arrears are respectfully reminded, that according to the Rules of the Club if the Treasurer has not heard from them by the end of January 1974, they will no longer be considered members of the Club, thus losing the privileges of membership.

FIELD EXCURSION

On Sunday 27th January the Club will be visiting Mt. Tamana in the Central Range. We will be leaving St. Mary's College, Pembroke St. at 7.30 a.m. and will make a short stop on the Princess Margaret Highway outside the National Brewing Company at 7.50 a.m.

EASTER EXCURSION - An invitation by our sister Society in Guyana

Mr. N.S. Poonai of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society of Guyana has invited members of the TFNC to join their excursion of 3 or 4 days over the Easter weekend. The excursion will be to the Rupununi or Matthews Ridge areas of Guyana, and the cost within Guyana will be up to \$90 for the Rupununi and up to \$30 for Matthews Ridge. If a group of people are going from the Club it may be possible to get a reduction in the return air fare to Georgetown, which is currently about \$120. Anyone interested should contact Ian Lambie or Kate Gibbs as soon as possible.

CLUB OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES IN 1974. by Kate Gibbs

The Club's programme of indoor meetings and field excursions will, we hope, be as varied and interesting as in previous years, and 1974 should see the completion of the El Tucuche Nature Trail Project and the continuation of the longer term Turtle and Tree Flowering Projects. A large part of the success of the El Tucuche Nature Trail Project has been the way in which the group have defined what they wanted to achieve, then broken up the task into stages, and of course, they have also met regularly to ensure that progress is maintained - see the Annual Report for details. Should we already be planning a successor to this project? A number of other trails have been suggested e.g. to Maracas waterfall, Palo Seco mud volcanos, Los Lapas trace and Caroni swamp also the exciting idea of a long-distance Northern Range Ridge hiking trail. Are there any project leaders stepping forward?

Another field in which the Club might consider playing a more positive role is in the planning and management of 'conservation areas', whether they be national parks, nature reserves or wildlife sanctuaries. In the long run we have to work with or through Government to achieve our conservation aims, by convincing them of the soundness of our ideas and the practical nature of the schemes we propose. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by taking the initiative of doing our own study of an area and then submitting this document to all departments and persons, whom we think ought to be interested, as a 'Proposed Management Plan' or Management Objectives for' such and such an area. In itself the study would be a valuable exercise for us to sort out what we consider are the real priorities and needs of an area, the uses to which it should and should not be put etc.

Two areas of Trinidad for which management plans are in the process of being considered or written are Caroni swamp and the Chaguaramas Development Area. Should the TFNC, on its own, or in conjunction with SCAPE or an interested group at UWI set up a working party to make management proposals for one or both of these areas? The proposals to be submitted to the relevant government departments by the end of 1974. If anyone is interested in any of the above ideas or has some of their own, please come along to the A.G.M. and let's hear from you.

THE COCRICO IN TOBAGO. by Richard French

The Cocrico (or, more properly, the Rufous-vented Chachalaca *Ortalis ruficauda*) is essentially a bird of light woodland and secondary scrub, although it also inhabits true primary forest. It is not surprising, therefore, that its numbers have increased in Tobago since the 1963 hurricane, which devastated much of Tobago's forest and also caused the temporary abandonment of many small farms and gardens. However, its numbers may well be over-estimated, since the species' loud calls, often in chorus, echo around the valleys, giving the impression of large numbers, when in fact there are only one or two families present.

All chachalacas are mostly vegetarian, living on berries, leaves and young shoots of wild plants. No doubt they will feed on certain cultivated plants if given the opportunity and if other food is not available. Farmers in Tobago have complained that the Cocrico causes destruction to their gardens. If this is the case, it will probably be to a very small degree and the damage may well be caused by several other species of birds too. The farmers may be overstating their case in order to obtain firearm

licences (which the authorities are reluctant to grant), and because, as everyone knows, the Cocrico is good to eat. Whatever happens, if an animal is accused of destroying crops, it should get a "fair trial", and a properly appointed investigation should be carried out, as the Wild Life Conservation Committee requested - a request turned down by the Minister of Agriculture for reasons of his own.

If the Cocrico is acquitted of the charge, or if it only takes crops in very small quantity, like many other birds and animals, which may benefit farmers in other ways by destroying insect pests, then the authorities should respect the Cocrico's status as National Bird of Tobago and restore it to its fully protected position, ensuring this by the appointments of suitably qualified Wild Life Wardens.

THE CLUB'S CHRISTMAS PARTY by Patricia Gouveia

Due to inclement weather on the night for which the party was originally scheduled, the Christmas party was held on Tuesday 11th December at Chagville; a suitable location providing plenty of shelter.

A fairly large group of members attended including three honorary members, namely Mr. C.L. Williams, Mr. Andrew Carr and Capt. Alex Mendes. We also welcomed back Dr. Tikasingh on his return from Brazil. Barbecued chicken and steak comprised the menu which was enjoyed by all, and there was a well stocked bar to which everyone did justice.

Music was supplied by cuatros and chac chacs played by members of the group as well as recorded music. Old and young alike displayed considerable agility as they danced to the music which was entirely suited to the casual and congenial atmosphere. Some of the members also sang typical local parang songs, suited to Christmas.

The party was a swinging success and at eleven thirty there were still quite a few people enjoying themselves.

NEW BIRD BOOK - preview by Geoff Gibbs

Richard French's book 'A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago' should be on sale early in the New Year. I have seen several sample plates and can confirm that not only are these of a very high standard, they even show the whole bird right up to the tip of its tail!! Although the price will be somewhat higher than existing inadequate texts, the new book represents better value because of its accurate and comprehensive text coupled with the excellent plates by Eckleberry and O'Neill. It will be available at Club meetings as soon as supplies reach Trinidad.

SHORT NOTES (with apologies for changed type)

SHELL LATEST

During November 1973 Dr. E. Towle of the Island Resources Foundation in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, was in Trinidad at the invitation of the Government to make a report on the "Shell barge issue". Dr. Towle had many hours of discussions with the Staff of various Ministries, Shell Trinidad Ltd., and the organisations represented by the Blue River Action Committee, and also visited the swamp and possible alternative sites including Sealots. Dr. Towle reported to the Government in December and copies of his report have been made available to the Blue River Action Committee. As yet there has been no Government statement on the issue.

THE NEXT BULLETIN

Longer editions of the Bulletin are due to appear in April, July and October; the deadline for the April Bulletin is March 15th. Contributions, especially interesting observations and records welcomed, and should be sent to: Mrs. K. Gibbs, 2 Los Codos Avenue, Santa Margarita Circular Rd., St. Augustine.

MANATEES

Two records of manatees, Trichechus manatus or "Lamantin" have recently been reported to Club members. One was caught in the Ortoire River and sold on the Cocal Estate, the second was caught in Nariva swamp and sold at Sangre Grande market. There are few, if any, authoritative records of this animal known to the Club since the late 1950's, so it is good to learn that a small breeding population still exists in Trinidad. One of the animals was a young one.

BUCCOO REEF

In September 1973 Buccoo Reef and Bon Accord Lagoon, Tobago were declared nature reserve areas under the Marine Areas (Preservation and Enhancement) Act of 1970 in order to protect their natural beauty and plant and animal life. Professor J.S. Kenny comments that he thinks no major changes have occurred on the reef since he took part in a survey in the mid 1950's apart from local damage to coral by the anchors of boats and the souvenir hunters, and the disappearance of large fish, but the scarcity of large fish around our coasts is not confined to Buccoo. He welcomes the new status given to the area and stresses that we must continue to be vigilant as new threats to the reef are constantly arising.