

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

24th March, 1975.

CLUB ACTIVITIES IN APRIL

- Saturday 5th April - An exhibition and workshop at Bishop Anstey High School, 9.00 a.m. - 12.00 noon. This will be an informal affair with the theme 'What is this thing called Conservation?'. It is specifically for Junior Members but other visitors will be welcome too. Refreshments available.
- Thursday 10th April - Monthly Meeting at St. Mary's College Library at 5.30 p.m.
LECTURE "Perspectives in Pollution Abatement"
by Dr. Emru D. Millette.
- Saturday 12th April - A field trip for Junior Members to the Arena Forest, Cumuto. Observation of various aspects of Forest Management, Re-forestation, Cultivation of Pinus caribbea, Natural Regeneration of native species etc. The tour is being led by a Forest Officer. Bring along your lunch.
Dep. St. Mary's College, Pembroke St., at 8.00 a.m.
Short stop Curepe Junction, C.R. Highway, 8.20 a.m.
- Please notify the President, Mr. G. E. L. Laforest or the Hon. Secretary, Mr Ian Lambie if you want to come so that transport can be arranged if necessary.
- Saturday 26th/
Sunday 27th April - Annual turtle watching and tagging excursion to the North Coast beaches, east of Blanchisseuse.
Meet at the "Saddle" i.e. the junction of the roads from Maraval and Santa Cruz on the way to the North Coast at 7.30 a.m. prompt, as we have a long drive and a long hike.

The Club is not making arrangements for a boat from Blanchisseuse, so expect to walk unless you want to make your own arrangements with a boatman. You should bring food, water, sleeping bag or blanket, torch, waterproof? and other necessities, but try not to be overloaded.

There will be leaders for groups at Paria, Murphy and Grand Tacarib beaches; in choosing where to stay, please bear in mind what has happened in the past two years. The vast majority of members have pressed on to Tacarib, leaving inadequate numbers at Paria and Murphy to patrol the beaches right through the night, then exhausted from the hike most have fallen asleep at nightfall and even with 40 Field Naturalists out "the turtle got away" - without a tag. Let's use our resources to better effect this year! There is a beautiful river pool for bathing mid-way between Paria and Murphy beaches.

EL TUCUCHE EXCURSION CANCELLED

The March excursion had to be cancelled due to the shortage of petroleum gas, but Dr. Brian Cooper will lead any members who wish to climb Tucuche on a day to be arranged later in April or in early May. An announcement will be made at the Club's Meeting on April 10th or phone Brian Cooper at 656.2251 for details.

N.B. If you are ever unsure whether a meeting is taking place or not get in touch with the Hon. Secretary or any other Committee member.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

If this item is marked by an 'X' your subscription for 1975 is OVERDUE. Please pay up now or let the Treasurer know that you do not wish to remain a member and save us the time and money of chasing you. Subs. Members \$5, J.M's \$2.50

ANNUAL REPORT 1974 and PROGRAMME 1975

Both these items have been distributed to members at meetings, and if you are unable to collect yours at a meeting or directly from the Hon. Secretary please get in touch with him, (62.23694) and ask to have them posted to you.

NO-ONE FOR BIRDS

There was a very disappointing audience of only about 50 people at the Port of Spain Town Hall on Thursday 27th February to see Mr. Derrick England's magnificent coloured slides of birds and animals. The Committee would be interested to learn whether it was the time, place or subject that deterred members from coming, so that we can avoid the embarrassment of inviting an eminent speaker to a large hall, to give a "popular" lecture and find it three-quarters empty.

Those of us present were delighted when Mr England began showing us our own birds, only larger and clearer than we ever see them! We then travelled round the world via Australia, India, E. Africa and S. Europe. Mr England introduced each new continent with a typical view to set the scene and then showed us some of its birds describing courtship behaviour, migration or feeding habits for different birds as he went along. The sequence of pictures illustrating the peck order among hyenas and different kinds of vultures after a pride of lions has finished with a kill was particularly memorable. I hope that the Junior Members can give their Easter vacation events better support.

TURTLES TURTLES TURTLES TURTLES TURTLES TURTLES TURTLES TURTLES TURTLES

Since the disastrous nesting season for Leatherback turtles in 1974 the Club has been making renewed efforts to have the existing inadequate legislation for the protection of turtles changed and the law amended to include the recommendations contained in the report "The Status and Management of the Sea Turtle Resources of Trinidad and Tobago" by Peter Bacon, which was first submitted to the Minister of Agriculture in 1973.

In July 1974 Mr Lambie presented our case to the Minister of Agriculture, and the Minister instructed the Acting Fisheries Officer to take steps to have the law amended to extend the close season by two months so that it commenced on April 1st instead of June 1st as at present; other changes were to be made at the same time. In December Mr Lambie again saw the Minister, at the request of the Chamber of Commerce, and found that no progress had been made.

In January 1975 Mr Lambie contacted the Senior Fisheries Officer who claimed that he did not know anything about the proposed changes, and the person who had been acting for him, and who received the Minister's instruction in July 1974, admitted that he had done nothing. This is very disappointing as all the promises made and assurances given have after six months resulted in no progress at all and here we are at the start of another Leatherback nesting season.

However, Mr Lambie and the President of the Club, Mr G. E. L. Laforest have taken it upon themselves to write an amendment to the existing law incorporating changes which are essential for the survival of Leatherback turtles as a breeding species in Trinidad and Tobago. The proposed amendment is close to the Regulation of 1951, which was superseded by the existing Regulation of 1952.

The main changes proposed are:-

- 1) Full protection for turtle eggs throughout the year, i.e. it would be illegal to remove eggs at any time.
- 2) It would be illegal to have, buy or sell turtle eggs at any time.
- 3) It would be illegal to catch or kill a turtle, sell or buy turtle meat between March 1st and September 30th.
- 4) Fine increased to 1,000 dollars, Imprisonment increased to 6 months.

This proposed amendment has been sent to the Ministry of Agriculture and the legal department, and we await their response. Meanwhile, please take every opportunity you can to promote the cause of turtle conservation, and if every one of our 250 plus members makes at least one turtle patrol we can hope to make some impact.

TURTLE TAGGING PATROLS 1975

Regular patrols are made at Las Cuevas and Matura beaches throughout April, May and June to collect biological information and to stop the slaughter of nesting females on the beaches. Patrols at Las Cuevas are co-ordinated by Mr Eric Laforest (62.21745) and those at Matura by Geoff Gibbs (662.3597). If you haven't been on a patrol before get in touch with one of them, but if you are familiar with the general routine try to organise a patrol yourself. N.B. Check with Eric or Geoff before setting out to avoid several groups patrolling the same beach on the same night.

Turtle Tagging Patrols Cont'd...

Take with you on a patrol:- Torch, oldest sandshoes, pencil, paper and measuring tape.

If you see a turtle:-

- (a) Try not to disturb it.
- (b) Only go near it if it is nesting - i.e. don't interfere if it is crawling up the beach.
- (c) Look for a tag on the front flipper. Read and WRITE DOWN the number.
- (d) Note the time of night, weather conditions, any scars or injuries, and any other information you find of interest.
- (e) Try to identify the type of turtle. There is a key to the turtles in the 1971 Journal, but if you don't have this draw a sketch of the turtle's back, count the plates and estimate how long the back is.
- (f) Give your records to the Club Secretary. Note it is just as important to report dates when patrols were made and no turtles seen, as dates when they were.
- (g) If there are hunters on the beach advise them about turtle conservation laws, but do not attempt to stop them physically.

Patrols at Matura Beach

Geoff and Kate Gibbs will lead patrols to Matura every week from Easter weekend onwards on a Monday or Tuesday night leaving St Augustine by 8.00 p.m. and returning around midnight. We would like to have at least two patrols a week to Matura during April and May. Will anyone volunteer to take one or more patrols on Wednesday or Thursday during this period? Some things which may be seen, apart from turtles on these excursions are:- ghost crabs, bats catching fish, storm blown Great Shearwaters (that breed only on Tristan de Cunha), phosphorescence, manioc crossing the road and nightjars hunting - and of course its jolly good exercise at a cool time of day.

WANTED - EDITOR FOR QUARTERLY BULLETIN

A new editor is needed from August, this year, to prepare the final long Bulletin of the year, due out at the beginning of October, and then those for 1976. The person does not need to be a member of the Committee provided they keep in close contact with what is going on at its meetings through liason with the Hon. Secretary. It is an advantage to have a telephone and to be able to type (even very badly just to know how much to fit into the $3\frac{1}{2}$ pages). Typing the stencils and duplicating can be arranged, also a team of helpers to cope with the volume of stapling, addressing and stamping.

Much more important is the conviction that the Quarterly Bulletin perform a useful function in keeping members informed about "current events" in natural history and the ability to keep oneself and others to deadlines! Anyone interested should contact Ian Lambie or Kate Gibbs.

FIELD TRIP TO THE ARIPO CAVE - February 23rd - by Geoff Gibbs and Victor Queanuel

The party visiting the cave numbered about 50 persons. The trek there was accomplished without mishap although not without some difficulty as the track was steep and slippery where it crossed a ravine. Some were satisfied to have reached the entrance and to have seen the oilbirds, their nests and eggs. About 25 of us entered the cave and a group of four made some crude measurements with the simple instruments at our disposal, viz. a 100 ft steel tape and a compass. The mouth of the cave faced slightly E. of N. and the entrance chamber ran almost due S. for 250 ft with a slight bulge to the W. The width was not measured but was estimated to be not more than 60 ft at the widest part. The first 100ft dipped downward at an angle of about 30° and the next 100 ft at about 45° , but the remainder of the chamber sloped more gently. The chamber turned and ran ESE for 100ft then S. again for 90 ft getting progressively narrower and the floor up to this point was covered in guano. Here a water-worn chute began and continued S. for 100 ft. It sloped rather gently, was free from guano, was much narrower than the main chamber (about 8 ft) and had a lower ceiling. It ended in a precipitous drop of 27 ft which was negotiated by ladder and rope, but beyond which no measurements were made through lack of time. All measurements will have to be corrected for slope before a floor plan is drawn.

David Snow estimated a population of 400 oilbirds in the Aripo main cave pre 1962. During the Club's visit there was only time to make a minimum estimate of birds present (because many are hidden etc.) Three main groups of birds were counted totalling 232 individuals. This suggests that there may be about the same number of birds as in 1962, and certainly that there hasn't been a drastic decline. Good views were obtained down onto 9 nests at the entrance; 5 with 2 eggs, 2 with 1 egg and 1 small chick, and 2 with 1 egg. A return visit is obviously on the cards for both the map makers and the oilbird counters.

NEW MEMBERS

Mrs Joan Knight

Miss Irma Lynch

Miss Monica Olivier

Mrs Maria Lopez

Dr. Julien Kenny

* Mr Collin Park

Dr. George Warner

* Mr Steve Headley

8.

- * denotes a Junior Member -

CHAGUARAMAS NATIONAL PARK - A Report by Brian Cooper

In response to a request from the Joint Venture Group now drawing up detailed proposals for the development of the Chaguaramas Peninsular, the Club submitted some comments and proposals pertaining to the development of the Chaguaramas N.P. These comments fell under the headings outlined below:-

- a) Specific features of Chaguaramas that make it worthy of setting aside as a N.P. (E.g. scenic quality, wildness, wildlife, accessibility).
- b) Preferred Park Boundaries (To include Scotland Bay area).
- c) The Objectives of the Park should be :-
 - i) To preserve for the enjoyment of the people of Trinidad and Tobago the outstanding scenic features of the area.
 - ii) to preserve the exceptional richness of plant and animal life, both terrestrial and marine, present in this area.
 - iii) to provide controlled and planned use of the Park's resources for the purpose of encouraging and facilitating appropriate recreational activities, scientific study, education and wilderness-type experiences.

- d) Activities envisaged in the Park (E.g. hiking, swimming, snorkli

Comments were also made respecting preservation of wildlife, staffing of the Park and training of wardens and the administrative responsibilities of the Park Authority within the Chaguaramas Development Authority.

Dr Cooper will give a fuller report at a meeting, to which all interested Members are invited, to discuss these comments and any further representations which the Club may wish to make, Date, time and place to be announced at the Club meeting April 10th or from the Hon.Sec. 62.23694 or Brian Cooper 656.2251.