

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

25th September, 1975

ACTIVITIES · OCTOBER 1975

THURSDAY OCTOBER 9 - Monthly Meeting at 5:30 p.m. to be held at the St. Mary's College Audio-Visual Room. Guest speaker Mr. William Searl will lecture on land capability surveys - how they are made, what they are used for. As you might know, Trinidad and Tobago's survey was at last completed last year. This is a good chance to find out more about it.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 26 - Excursion to Navet Dam · Navet, the largest dam in the island, supplies about 12 million gallons of water per day. The lake there has a shoreline of 23 miles and the scenery is well worth the visit. Departing St. Mary's College, Pembroke Street at 8:00 a.m. with a brief stop at the National Brewery, Princess Margaret Highway at 8:30 a.m. Members without cars are once again reminded that they should make the appropriate arrangements for transportation before the day of the trip, either by contacting another member who lives close by, or by notifying the Club's secretary. That way, everyone is assured of a ride and there should be no delays caused by excursion leaders attempting to pack extra passengers into cars.

A TRIBUTE TO KATE GIBBS by Ian Lambie

This edition of the Club's Quarterly Bulletin is dedicated to Kate Gibbs in recognition of her invaluable services to the Club.

Kate joined the Field Naturalists in 1972 and soon made her presence felt. She was elected Honorary Assistant Secretary in 1973 and was re-elected in 1974. Through her initiative, the first Quarterly Bulletin was produced in June 1973. Thereafter, with prompt regularity, eight more Quarterly Bulletins were prepared and mailed by her, the last being in June 1975.

Space prevents me from enumerating here all the credits which she deserves but mention must be made of her interest in, and work among, our Junior Membership. She was instrumental in organising the Summer Programme for Junior Members in 1974 and also in preparing exhibits and posters for use in schools. Her "Coup de Grace" is her paper on Nature Conservation in Trinidad and Tobago which was completed on the eve of her departure and which should be available to members in the near future.

Kate, her husband Geoff and Trinidadian-born son Jonathan have recently returned to England. The time and effort which she has contributed to the improvement of our Club are greatly appreciated and will long be remembered.

EL TUCUCHE NATURE TRAIL by Brian Cooper

Members will be pleased to hear that after much anxious waiting on the Club's part, the Trinidad and Tobago Tourist Board recently came through on its promise of financial support for the printing of the Trail Guide. We have received a cheque for \$3,500 and hope to start printing the booklet before the end of the year. A second draft of the text has been drawn up and is awaiting completion of illustrations.

The cooperation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry Division, is now being sought for the making and erection of signs along the trail. Also for clearing the trail of the many trees that have fallen across the path since Hurricane Alma.

We should like to express our appreciation to the Tourist Board, now that the long awaited cheque has come, and we hope that much quicker progress will be made towards the publication of the guide. Hopefully, early 1976 should see the completed guide available for members to use.

REPORT ON RECENT FIELD TRIP TO TACARIB AND MADAMAS BAYS by Ian Lambie

At 12:30 p.m. on Friday 19th August, three hours after leaving Port of Spain, my party of nine arrived on Tacarib Beach. The boat ride from Blanchisseuse was relatively calm. Two turtles were seen at sea during the trip and Ruben Mulligan, our boatman, bought two 7 lb kingfish from a Venezuelan fisherman anchored at Paria Bay.

An inspection of the beach before sundown showed that at least four nests of hatchlings had emerged during the previous night. At 8:00 p.m., after a dinner of fish broth, we began our patrol of the beach starting on the western end. We soon came upon a number of Leatherback hatchlings enmeshed in Ipomea vines that had apparently overgrown the nest site after the eggs had been buried. Having freed the hatchlings, we patrolled without any further success and decided to turn in early.

On Saturday morning we were joined by the main party of 19 who on Ruben's advice had decided to land at Tacarib rather than at Madamas because of heavy ground swells. The two hikers, Catherine Field and Debbie Bates, arrived at 1:25 p.m. after a 5-hour walk from Blanchisseuse. Iqbal, Rahzia and Amin Mohammed arrived late in the afternoon by boat.

After observing the evidence of the previous night's activities (several hatchling tracks), the main party pitched camp only to discover that despite our careful preparations, many of the pegs and two uprights of one tent were missing. The valve for our Progas stove had also been left behind. Fortunately, the three other tents were adequate and Tom Prada saved the day with a good wood fire.

To everyone's surprise and delight, at 6:10 p.m. before sunset, about 70 very active Leatherback hatchlings decided to emerge just a few feet west of our campsite. This was indeed very good fortune for the several "first-timers" in the group. There were no more successful sightings that night except for one solitary hatchling in the centre section of the beach. In the morning, however, there was evidence that two other hatches had emerged.

On Sunday morning the majority of campers set off for Madamas Bay. Four others went off to Paria Waterfall while the rest stayed at Tacarib. After a not too strenuous 1½ hour walk we arrived at Madamas Bay. This beautiful sandy bay has a sand bar running for about 300 yards across the mouth of the Madamas River. There were depressions on the beach (indicating old nest sites) and the distinct tracks of a Hawksbill or Green turtle that had nested the night before. The "lagoon" sheltered by the sand bar was enjoyed by swimmers and non-swimmers alike and after a dip in its cool, refreshing water it was time to head back to Tacarib. Time did not permit close observation of the lagoon but we did see a school of Crevalle close to shore.

Arrangements had been made for a boat to come at 4:00 p.m. on Sunday but on arrival at 1:00 p.m. we found Ruben awaiting us. Eventually, 10 members of the party left at 3:00 p.m. for Blanchisseuse while the remainder of the group was accommodated in two boats on Monday morning (Independence day).

It was a very enjoyable and rewarding week-end.

JULY EXCURSION TO S.W. PENINSULA by Hannah Pavlik

About 17 car-loads of people showed up for this trip, making it the best attended excursion so far for the year. We had a few problems trying to fit everyone into cars because quite a few members arrived at the National Brewery meeting place without having previously arranged for transportation (see editor's comment about this as regards the next excursion).

The group did not in fact go all the way to Cedros, as was previously advertised. From the Cap-de-Ville Road junction, southwest of Point Fortin, we continued about 3½ miles along the Southern Main Road before turning off on Bowen Trace which heads south in the general direction of Los Blanquizales Lagoon. Shortly after the turn-off we entered the Cedros Forest Reserve on foot with a Forestry Department guide present to help interested members identify unknown plant and tree species. Unfortunately, as soon as we began walking it started to rain and most people rushed for shelter or used Balisier leaves as "umbrellas" before retreating quite quickly to the cars. Those of us who lingered in the forest a bit longer saw a logger using his harnessed bull to haul out a felled tree, unusual because tractors are generally used nowadays.

The forester pointed out that we were in the southernmost portion of mixed Crappo-Guatecare forest where Wild Chataigne, Crappo, Guatecare and Blackheart are the predominant tree species. The understory vegetation consisting principally of Cocorite and Timite palms reflects the relatively poor soils in the area. Other species of interest seen were Wild Coffee, Bois Lay Lay (wood used to make popsicle and swizzle sticks in days gone by),

Tirite (stem fibres used for basket and mat-making) and Green Tea Bush (the leaves of which I later brewed).

We then returned along the Southern Main Road and turned south towards Chatham Beach where we had heard from villagers that the rock formation on White Cliff was smouldering. A few enthusiasts scaled the cliff to inspect the steam and other sulphurous gases escaping from two vent holes in the surface mudstone.

Afterwards we rested on the beach, picking up pebbles (see following note) before starting on the long trip home.

A SHORT NOTE ON PORCELLANITE by Hannah Pavlik

The multi-coloured pebbles above high tide mark on Chatham Beach are a type of naturally roasted clay known as porcellanite which is extensive in the Erin and Morne L'Enfer Formations in the southwest of Trinidad. There has been much discussion about the formation of these rocks, the predominant theory being that they are naturally burned clays and silts which were originally deposited in a mangrove/mud lagoon together with much organic material and an iron sulphide mineral called pyrites. The burning resulted from the oxidation and natural decomposition of the pyrites, processes which generated quite a lot of heat and ignited lignites (low grade coal) underground. The types of clay minerals present in some porcellanite deposits indicate that temperatures may have reached as high as 930°C.

Typical samples of porcellanite look like brittle pieces of clay similar to fragments of flower pots. They are generally various shades of red, brown and blue, and have quite a lot of cracks or fractures. Some contain well-preserved plant impressions. Gases given off during the burning are believed to have been confined to vents and are responsible for the blue staining of the rocks. Some pebbles contain veins of almost pure white China clay (kaolinite, halloysite). At White Cliff, Chatham, and further west at Godineau Bridge, the porcellanite is still in the process of formation and the lignitic material is still smouldering. The best time to see this is after a rain, like when we climbed up on the cliff and saw steam being given off from two vents.

The whole region has, in fact, much economic potential since finely ground porcellanite can be mixed with Portland cement to yield a fairly high resistance concrete that sets well underwater. A detailed survey carried out for the Government in 1968 found that about 300 million tons of porcellanite outcrop in southwest Trinidad and total reserves are estimated at 700 million tons.

NEW MEMBERS SINCE JUNE 1975 (* denotes a Junior Member)

Mary Alkins	Charles Knight*	Roger St. Rose*
George Biggs	Mrs. Madge Lawrence	Philip Smith
Mrs. Brenda Bissoon-Dath	John Meyers	Judith Solomon
Anne Borde*	Farouk Mohammed	Hugh Spencer-Clerk
Margarita Chan	Gale Mohammed	Professor J.A. Spence
Jasmine Chay*	Jennifer Mondesir*	John Spence*
Deborah Garcia*	Mr. & Mrs. T. Prada	Annette Wahid
Reynold Holder	Vashanti Ramcharan	Jennifer Williams*
Lenore Jennings	Dr. Rajendra Rastogi	Lydia Williams*
Injel Khan	Cheryl Ann Reid*	Gregory Yee-Mon*

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SHORT NEWS ITEMS

Angostura-Barcant Collection of Butterflies of Trinidad and Tobago will be displayed for public viewing at the Holiday Inn, Port of Spain beginning October 12th. The exhibition will run for two weeks.

Introducing the Trinidad and Tobago Naturalist Magazine, the first edition of which is due in November. At long last we welcome a magazine dealing exclusively with the flora and fauna of our islands plus issues and items of interest to all naturalists and conservationists. Editor Stephen Mohammed is very enthusiastic about the response so far and says that the magazine promises pages of glossy colour photographs.

Nature Books for Children. The following series of books available at Stephens for \$4.50 each might make good presents for children in the 7-10 age bracket. Younger children will enjoy the pictures even if they cannot read the text.

Beginner's World Series, Macdonald and Co. Publishers Limited (1974)
St. Giles House, 49-50 Poland Street, London W.1.

Suggested volumes are: (1) Our Earth, (2) Wild Animals, (5) Sea and River Animals, (7) Tame Animals, (3) Animals That Fly, and (9) Insects & Reptiles.

SHORT NEWS ITEMS (CONTINUED)

New Books from Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company

Tropical Marine Pollution -- Edited by E.J. Ferguson Wood and R.E. Johannes,
Department of Zoology, University of Georgia,
Athens, Georgia, U.S.A.
Elsevier Oceanography Series, 12, (1975).

This book deals with such interesting subjects as the pollution and degradation of coral reef communities and the response of mangroves to man-induced environmental stress. The accent is on the tropics, unlike most books on marine pollution.

Physical Aspects of Natural Catastrophes

.. by Adrian E. Scheidegger, Institute of Geophysics,
Technical University, Vienna, Austria.
Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, (1975).

The forces active in several natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides) are described in separate chapters. There are, in addition, discussions on the physical nature of thunderstorms, tornadoes and hurricanes.

These books are excellent reference material and are not particularly cheap, the average cost being US \$25-\$30. They should be of great interest, nevertheless, to science-inclined readers. More information about cost and order forms can be obtained from Hannah Pavlik.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *Offset Printing Courtesy PLANNING ASSOCIATES LIMITED, 52 JERNINGHAM AVENUE, PORT OF SPAIN*

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