QUARTERLY BULLETIN - JUNE 1976

June 28, 1976

Dear Member,

You are invited to attend the monthly meeting of the Club to be held in the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College on Thursday July 8, 1976 at 5:30 p.m.

AGENDA

(1) Reading and Confirmation of Minutes
(2) Business arising out of the Minutes
(3) LECTURE - BREEDING BIOLOGY OF SOME TOBAGO SEA BIRDS
by Dr. Ralph Morris
(4) Exhibits and Miscellaneous Notes
(5) Other Business

Details of the Field Excursion for the month of July are set out on the last page of this bulletin.

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TURTLE TAGGING PROJECT 1976

The Club's Turtle Tagging Project now in its twelfth year continues with regular patrols on the Matura, Las Cuevas and Tacarib Beaches. Members wishing to join a patrol are advised to contact the President, Mr. G.E. La Forest at 62-21745 or the Hon. Secretary, Mr. Ian Lamble at 62-23694.

1977 JOURNAL

The club intends to publish its Journal for 1977 early in the year. Please submit articles to the Hon. Secretary or to Dr. V.C. Quesnel as soon as possible and by no later than September 30, 1976.

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REPORT ON THE TRIP TO EL TUCUCHE ON MARCH 28, 1976 *by Brian Cooper*

Some 50 people assembled in St. Joseph's Square at 7:00 a.m. on the last Sunday in March for the Club's annual assault on El Tucuche. After driving up to the end of the Ortinola Valley, the cars were left behind and the party started the long trek up the trail to the 3,075 foot peak.

At first progress was easy along the flat valley floor amongst cocoa and citrus, but soon the path began to climb and the once densely bunched group of hikers began to spread out along the trail as each began to find his own pace. The weather remained fine and fairly cool which was just as well because we soon found that we were in for plenty of exercise. Besides the climb up to 3,000 feet we had to negotiate numerous fallen trees blocking the path, obliterating it completely in some places. This meant many time and energy consuming detours over, around and often, under, these obstacles.

The first part of the climb up to the saddle has always been fairly hard, the path being steep and uneven. However, after that the path was good and the gradient easy - it was just a matter of time before one reached the top. Now it is far from easy, especially on El Tucuche itself where the fallen trees are most numerous. The second saddle, just before the start of the zig-zags has been devastated with perhaps 20-30 trees lying in a jumbled confusion across the path.

The cause of all these fallen trees was, of course, tropical storm "Alma" which hit Trinidad in August of 1974 perhaps with especial force in the Northern Range. Most of these trees fell then. A few more were evidently victims of the very heavy rains of November and December 1975.

As a consequence of all these changes to the trail, it is now considerably different than it was two years ago, when the El Tucuche Trail Guide was being drafted. It has become principally, no doubt through lack of use and also perhaps because of the very wet rainy season last year, very much more overgrown. There has been especially at the higher levels on El Tucuche itself, a big increase in one of the coarse sedges and also of the wild tannias that are now found abundantly on the banks of the trail. In the numerous places where fallen trees have let in to the forest floor more of that precious commodity - sunlight - there has been a rapid growth of many light demanding species - mostly grasses and shrubs, making the going even more difficult.

To compensate somewhat for the inconvenience caused by the fallen trees, there are many new views especially looking south into Maracas Valley and beyond, which were not possible before. However, nothing prepares one for the grand panorama that is one's reward for persevering to the summit. Those who made the summit on this trip - and almost everyone did - were rewarded by a superb view to all points of the compass-even Tobago could be seen and the Atlantic off the east coast of Trinidad.

In its present condition the trail does not encourage anyone - local or visitor - to use it. Representations have been made by the club to the Division of Forestry and to the County Council to do their respective jobs of keeping the trail open and clear. Until it is cleared there is little point in progressing any further with the Trail Guide even though the text and all the illustrations have now been prepared. It is a pity to have reached this stage and be brought to a halt. However we are hoping that something will be done soon. In the meantime it is at least interesting to have been able to see the way change comes about in the midst of the overall stability of the tropical forest ecosystem and the fierce competition for space which occurs once a disturbance has been created.

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REPORT ON THE TWO TRIPS TO TACARIB BAY ON APRIL 24 AND MAY 29, 1976 - *by David Rooks*

An advance party consisting of myself, my wife, Kathryn and all our children, Eric La Forest, Eddy Baptiste, Hans and Martha Boos went by boat to Tacarib on April 23 and set up a tent on the beach as our base of operations. Eddy, Eric and I, assisted by the children, patrolled all night at one-hour intervals. At 2:00 a.m. as soon as I started up the beach I saw the first turtle - a leatherback - coming up the beach near the mouth of the first stream. It just climbed up and started to dig about 10 feet from the high water mark. Eddy Baptiste assisted me while I tagged and recorded it. Another came up a short distance away and Eric tagged that one. While we were tagging the first, a third one came up at the same position and literally ran into it. This seemed to disturb her and she returned to the sea without laying. After tagging was over we walked up the beach and found a fourth already covering its nest and we were unable to tag it.

We noted at dawn that a different species of turtle had laid at the far eastern end of the bay, probably the previous night. The track was 30 inches across from edge to edge with no tail marking in the centre. This turtle walked an amazingly long distance which included crossing a rocky stream and making two attempts at digging before finally nesting in the farthest corner of the beach. I estimate that these eggs should hatch at the end of June or in early July and we should keep a close check on the nest, making special trips to do so. A similar turtle nested at Petit Tacarib while we were tagging at Grand Tacarib.

That afternoon at about 3:00 p.m. the other club members who had hiked from Blanchisseuse started to arrive and still others arrived by boat. That night was another gorgeous one. As on the first night the first turtle did not come up until 2:00 a.m. at the height of the high tide. This turtle had a grand audience but did not give a virtuoso performance. Its left rear flipper was either deformed or had suffered earlier damage and had healed badly. It experienced great difficulty in digging. It took about two hours to get halfway and at this time seemed unable to get any more sand out of the hole. While Kathryn held on to my feet so I wouldn't fall in, I completed the digging for it. It immediately started to lay and completed this very quickly. While covering the nest the defective flipper tore at the weak point. It returned to sea at 5:20 a.m. Another turtle came up further up the beach but Eric was unable to tag it. We went back to the house at 6:00 a.m. and decamped at 8:00 a.m.

On the second trip I went with an advance party on Friday May 28 arriving at Tacarib after a very rough and wet passage. As soon as we pitched tent the rain came down. We began patrolling at about 8:30 p.m. and I checked the streams for crayfish. In one tiny pool I saw the largest crayfish since my teenage days in Valencia. That night we tagged two turtles T 1117 and T1122. Both were small, 59" along the carapace, but both laid rather than average clutches.

Saturday was dry and hot. Two more boatloads arrived from Blanchisseuse and Derek Simon walked from Blanchisseuse to see Tacarib and tag turtles for the last time as he is shortly to return to England. That afternoon Victor Quesnel and I walked to Madamas which is smaller than Tacarib. A river lagoon which is very pretty and seems full of fish dominates the bay. As we walked down the beach we saw several large iguanas digging and apparently mating in the sand. On our approach they ran off and dived into the lagoon. One remained behind with its head stuck in the sand. Byron, a resident of Madamas Bay who had come with us to the beach, showed me the technique for getting out the iguana which was rapidly digging into the sand. After we got her out she stayed quite still and Victor was able to take several photographs of her. While we were doing this another iguana exploded out of the very hole we thought we had just emptied and charged off into the lagoon. We counted nine turtle nests on the beach.

We had taken one hour to walk to Madamas but we made the return trip in 45 minutes and had an early dinner. The children decided on an early patrol and I pontificated on how this was a waste of time since the tide was still falling and it was too early and that we wouldn't see any turtles until 11:00 p.m. when the tide started to rise. But they went off and soon gave the turtle signal. I was about halfway to them when I looked back and saw the adults flashing the turtle signal so I ran back to find a turtle very near where we had been sitting around the camp fire. From then on it was turtle after turtle. I tagged six but two or three didn't settle down to lay and so didn't get tagged and one was already tagged - T 284. The turtles that night had no regard for conditions of time or tide and the last one was spotted covering up the nest at 5:30 a.m. Victor tried to tag it but was unable to do so, however he did manage to photograph it in the early morning sunlight. The one the children had seen early ran into difficulties when she struck rock and she covered up the hole without laying exactly as shouwould have laid. However, as it moved nearer to the water's edge it suddenly decided to try again and this time it was successful.

On the beach with me the entire night, besides Victor Quesnel, was Mike Nathan of the Virus Lab who is doing research into sandflies (he had plenty of material to work with). He trapped some sandflies on a turtle and believes that in spite of the apparently thick skin of the turtle the sandflies might feed on it. He intends to follow up this idea.

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HUMAN PHEROMONES - *by Victor Quesnel*

Members will remember that in my lecture last November on chemical communication in animals I dealt at the end with the situation in humans. Another paper on this topic has just appeared in Nature (Vol. 260, p.520, 1976) entitled "Human Olfactory Communication" which I will summarize for the benefit of those who cannot get the original article.

The author, Michael J. Russell, showed that his volunteers, all university freshmen, could distinguish their own odours from that of others and could determine the sex of an individual from the odour of his clothing. All participants were asked to refrain from using perfumed toilet articles, including soap, for 24 hours before the beginning of the experiment and during the experiment. Each then wore a plain white T-shirt as an under-garment for 24 hours. When the shirts were removed each was stored in a polythene bag. For the experiment each shirt was placed in a plastic ice-bucket covered with a lid in which a ¾-inch triangular hole had been cut. The shirts were arranged with the under-arm part uppermost and the subjects were asked to sniff the odour of the shirts through the hole in the lid.

In the first test each individual was asked to identify his/her shirt by sniffing the contents of three containers, one with his/her shirt and one each with that of a foreign male and a foreign female. In the second test, which followed the first for all subjects, the subject was asked to determine the sex of the wearer by sniffing two foreign shirts, one from a male and the other from a female. In both tests 13 out of 16 males and 9 out of 13 females answered correctly. (For the statisticians this result is highly significant at P = .001 (test 1) and P = .005 (test 2).) In discussion after the tests the subjects characterized the male odours as musky and the female odours as sweet.

In a more complicated test along the same lines Russell showed that by the age of six weeks a breast-fed infant could identify its own mother from the odour of her breast but allows the possibility that the infant may not be responding to the mother's odour but to its own odour placed on the mother by earlier contacts.

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TAYRA RECORD *by Mary Alkins*

In the early afternoon of Sunday Jaunary 25, 1976 a Tayra (*Eira barbara trinitatis*) was seen sitting in the middle of the paved road which joins the trail to Mt.Catherine with the Western Main Road. On approach of the car the animal ran into the undergrowth on the side of the road. It seemed to be a full grown animal.

The Tayra or 'high woods dog' or 'chien bois' as it is known locally, belongs to the weasel family - *Mustelidae* - and is carnivorous, feeding on small mammals, birds and some fruit also. Not much is known about the exact distribution of these animals locally as they are not seen very often and are supposed to be nocturnal. Two individuals can be seen at the Emperor Valley Zoo.

NOTES ON SMALL MAMMAL TRAPPING AT SIMLA

During the week March 24 - April 1, 1976 while the second year Zoology students from U.W.I. were attending the required residential field course at Simla, Arima Valley, I set a number of small mammal traps in the area out of interest. The traps were set at the points shown on the map and some were moved during the week e.g. trap #2 moved to #2', etc.

Most of the area trapped was cultivated with cocoa and a low underbrush but some areas such as that around #12 and #13 were mainly bamboo while that around #3' and #4' was a rocky slope shaded by bamboo and small trees.

The traps used were one large and twelve small Havahart mammal traps. These were baited mainly with peanut butter mixed with Quaker Oats but on some nights this was substituted by ripe bananas.

The only mammals trapped were five individuals of the species *Marmosa mitis chapmani* or the Greater Trinidadian Murine Opossum which is a small marsupial closely related to the manicou. The animal is coloured brown with paler undersides and the face has very large eyes with dark markings around them. They are nocturnal and mainly arboreal but do descend to the ground as all the traps in which they were caught were placed on the ground.

The first four *Marmosa* caught were kept in captivity for short periods from one to two days, photographed and released. They were kept in a large aluminium cage and a large wooden cage each about 100 cm^3 with no more than one individual per cage. They would remain in the box provided during the day until about 6:45 - 7:00 p.m. when they would emerge, feed and climb actively around the cage. Some even ventured to climb upside down on the roof of the cage for short distances. They were fed ripe bananas, guavas, bush crickets, moths and chunks of cheese. They ate all the bananas and bush crickets but only a small amount of cheese and ignored the guava and moths altogether. They were noted to feed by holding and manipulating the food with their fore limbs.

A female trapped at #2' had two young attached to its nipples, each young being about 12 mm long. Unfortunately it had been attacked by ants while still in the trap and died a day later. It was preserved in formalin and is now in the U.W.I. Museum.

Another *Marmosa* trapped at #4 seemed to be an immature individual being smaller by about five centimetres than the others caught. The facial markings were not well defined and its colour was a uniform dark brown over the whole body.

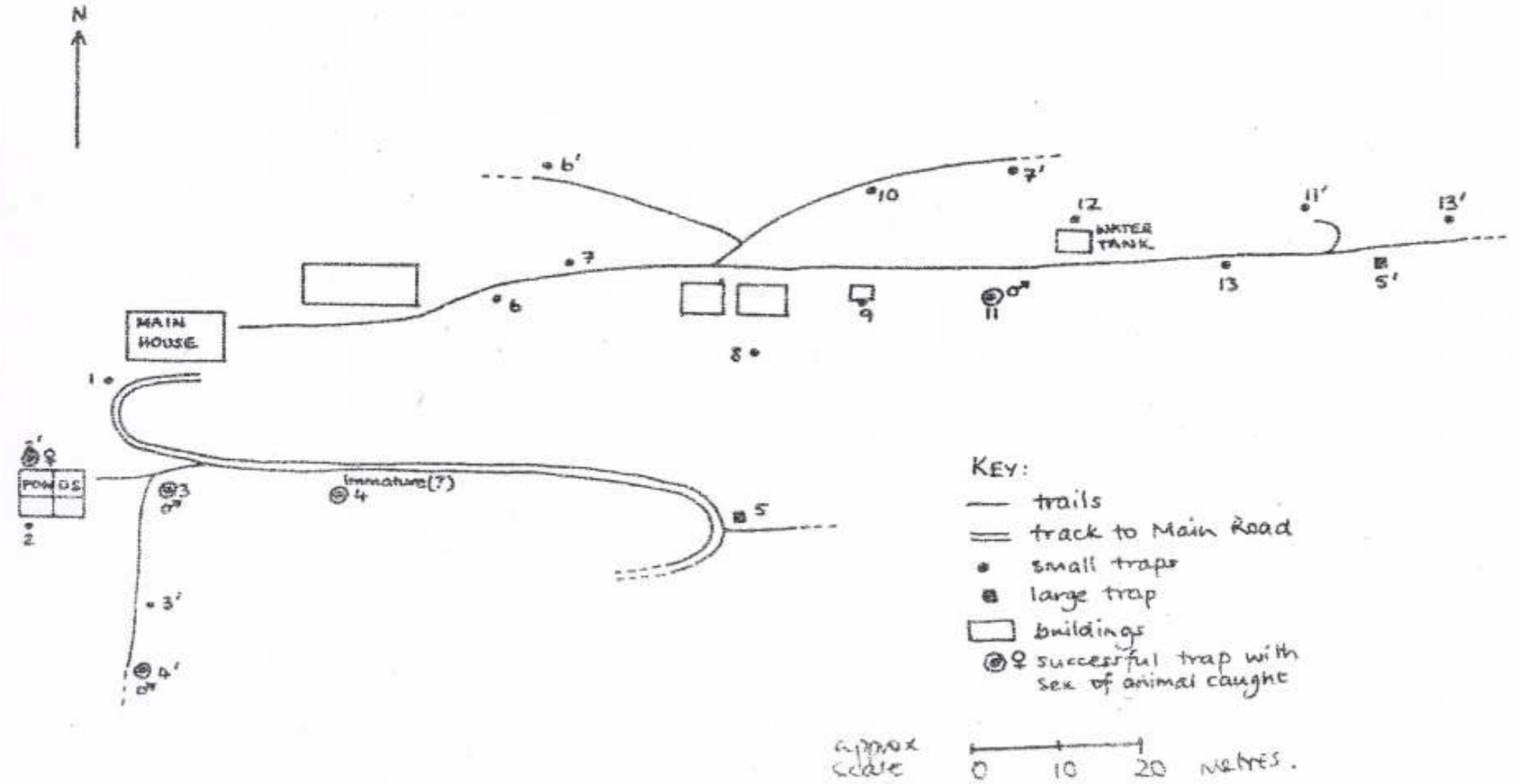
The results of the trapping are summarised in the table below. Unfortunately the animals were neither measured nor weighed but an indication of relative sizes is given.

Other trapping attempts at Simla recently with the same traps yielded two *Marmosa mitis* and two *Heteromys anomalus* or pouched Rats. One pouched rat was pregnant and kept in captivity it produced two young. It was reported by Dr. Price who also trapped in the area, that the fruit bat, *Carollia*, has been caught in traps baited with bananas.

Summary of trapping

Date	Trap No.	Bait	Catch	Relative sizes
26/3/76	11	Peanut Butter	M. mitis male	large
28/3/76	2'	Peanut Butter	M. mitis female with 2 young	medium
30/3/76	3	Banana	M. mitis male	very large
30/3/76	4	Banana	M. mitis immature (?)	small
1/4/76	4'	Peanut Butter	M. mitis male	large

MAP SHOWING AREA TRAPPED



Yellow-headed Caracaras seen at Chaguaramas

During the past three months, Victor Quesnel and myself have been observing two Yellow-headed Caracaras in the Chaguaramas Bay area. Had I prepared this note yesterday, I would have said that they had not been seen since mid-May, but this morning (18.6.76) I saw one of these birds being chased first by a flycatcher and then by a swift but it did have enough time to recover a small fish (about 8") from the sea and to perch on a pole to eat it while being still under attack . For 10 minutes I had a very good look at it from about 120 ft.

Ian Lambie

FIELD TRIP TO HUEVOS ISLAND

There will be a week-end camp on Huevos Island on Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th July, 1976. We will be assembling at the Chaguville Car Park at 7.30 a.m. on Saturday 24th for the trip across the Bocas.

Further details may be obtained by calling the President at 62/21745 or the Honorary Secretary at 62/23694 but an announcement will be made at the monthly meeting.

BIRDS OF THE CARIBBEAN

A few copies of the beautiful book are still available from the Hon. Secretary for only $7.50. The List Price is $15.00 U.S.

Ian Lambie
Honorary Secretary