

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Dear Member,

You are invited to attend the Monthly Meeting of the Club to be held at the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College on Thursday 12th July, 1979 at 5.30 p.m.

AGENDA

1. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES.
2. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF MINUTES.
3. ANNOUNCEMENTS.
4. LECTURE " NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY"
by Mr. Raymond Mendes.
5. EXHIBITS AND MISCELLANEOUS NOTES.
6. OTHER BUSINESS.

Mr. Raymond Mendes is a Chief Exhibit Preparator at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

FIELD EXCURSION

On Sunday July 29th, the Club will be visiting the Moruga Bouff, a mud volcano in Moruga. We will be leaving St. Mary's College at 8.00 a.m. and after a brief stop on the Princess Margaret Highway, outside the National Brewery at 8.20 a.m, and will proceed to Moruga via the Naparima-Mayaro Road at the beginning of which (N.M. Rd.) another brief stop will be made at 9.00 a.m.

PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

The Town and Country Planning Division is preparing an inventory of Historic Sites and Buildings worthy of preservation and has invited members of the Club to assist it in this exercise.

BUSH FIRES

It is a popular belief in Trinidad and Tobago that some bush fires are started by the action of "fire-stones." The Management Committee of the Club is offering a reward of \$1,000 to any person who can demonstrate how bush fires are started by this method.

ARREARS OF SUBSCRIPTIONS

Annual Subscriptions become payable on the 1st of January each year. However, the Club requests that subscriptions be paid before 31st March.

An unusually high number of members are still in arrears and these persons are asked to forward their subscriptions (\$10.00 annually) to the Honorary Treasurer, Mr. John Hilton at # 4 The Straight, Cascade, without further delay.

Originally we had planned to go to Bois Neuf on this date but reports indicating that the area was too muddy for a successful trip prompted a visit to Shark River instead. Advertisements in the press had led us to believe that this wonderfully scenic spot might soon be despoiled by quarrying and we wanted to have a look. The North Coast Road crosses Shark River near its mouth and as we arrived it was immediately obvious why it should attract quarryers. The river, resembling those of Grenada much more than it does the other rivers of Trinidad, flowed beautifully clear and sparkling over a boulder-strewn bed and emptied into a large tidal pool before proceeding to the sea. Those who explored the river upstream from the bridge reported that the boulders were present up to a point at least 2 km up. They seem to be of igneous rock but the only outcrop of igneous rock in Trinidad is several kilometres to the east between Grande Riviere and Sans Souci so appearances might be deceiving. It is a pity the party did not include a geologist who would have been able to identify the type of rock.

While others swam and fished in the river, I took a group of about 15 persons into the nearby forest where we collected plants and had a look at the vegetation. The outstanding finds were two large cannonball trees (Couroupita guianensis) and the first angelin (Andira inermis) I had seen in the wild. As we were returning to the cars, we noticed a large tree decorated like a Christmas tree with what appeared to be translucent light bulbs. We managed to retrieve some of these bulbs and found them to be peculiar, berry-like, black fruit enclosed within a yellowish, translucent, expanded calyx which glowed in the sunlight. The tree was later identified as Toporito (Hernandia sonora).

FIELD TRIP TO TACARIB - 28th - 29th April 1979

(V.C. QUESNEL)

As usual on these trips to Tacarib, there was a party of energetic hikers proceeding on foot from Blanchisseuse to Tacarib in addition to the 4 boat-loads of less energetic members. The seafarers arrived first and set up camp near the outcrop of rock at the western end of the beach which had changed considerably since my last visit in 1976. Our camp site of that year, well above high in water mark, had been washed away by the tide and we now had to camp among the almond trees higher up.

With the settling/chores completed, a small group hiked to Madamas Bay. As usual, I collected plants along the way but there was nothing new except a pretty little Euphorb, (Phyllanthus pulcher), near Byron's house. This is an introduced plant native of Malay. On the way to Madamas, I had noticed a wet patch near the trail and presumed that a spring had caused it. On the way back, at the same spot, I heard the sound of small objects falling and presumed that these were flowers falling off a tree. The others in our group who were ahead of me had, however, stopped to investigate and found that the sound was caused by drops of water falling from a tree. Their report to me later made me wish I had stopped to investigate too. I might have been able to identify the tree but it was now too late to go back. Another lost opportunity, or so it seemed.

Only two turtles came up that night. The first was already tagged; the second was not, but owing to the temporary misplacement of the tagging tool it could not be tagged. However, records were made of their behaviour and the numbers of eggs laid. By 2 a.m. everyone was off the beach and sleeping or trying to. A check in the morning showed that no other turtles came up afterwards.

The boats were not due to return for us until 10 a.m. so there was plenty of time for a stroll along the beach in the early morning sunlight. I found a humming bird's nest with two eggs on the twig of an almond tree overhanging the beach but the parent bird did not return while I watched so the species remains unidentified. However, the only humming birds I saw nearby were Common Emeralds (Amazilia tobaci). In examining the vegetation behind the beach, I was struck by the large number of cabbage palms (Roystonea oleracea) and I found 5 trees of bois tatio (Rudgea Freemani) all in full bloom, a fact which accounted nicely for the sweet scents wafting over the beach at the same places the night before. And then, lo and behold, there were two more dripping trees both in flower and I had no difficulty in identifying them as savonette jaune (Longocarpus latifolius) a plant I had first seen and had identified only a few weeks previously. I was lucky to have been given a second chance.

We waited a long time for the boats to come. Perhaps, we should have walked back instead for there was a heavy swell, the heat was oppressive and the journey back thoroughly unpleasant. I could not enjoy the sight of the poui trees in bloom as I had the previous day. I was glad to arrive back at Blanchisseuse.

One more observation is worthy of record. The hikers reported seeing two cannonball trees (Couroupita guianensis) on the trail between Blanchisseuse and Paria.

FIELD TRIP TO PLATANAL AND THE MATURA RIVER - 19 - 20 May 1979 (V.C. QUESNEL)

In February last year the club visited Fig Walk for the first time (see Trinidad Naturalist Vol 2 No 2). The spot is deep in virgin forest in the Salibea Matura area and though we did not know its exact location our guide had told us it was on the Matura River. I had picked out a likely spot on the map and it seemed slightly nearer to Platanal than to Matura. We decided to go this year from the Platanal side, walking along the well-kept trace to the ridge and then down a ravine on the other side to the Matura River. It looked easy and straightforward on the map and a preliminary trip by David Rooks and myself in which we had gone half a mile or so beyond the ridge had shown it to be entirely feasible if not the short cut it had seemed to be from the map. There were to be two parties, one leaving on Saturday 19th May and the other the following day. We had arranged for a guide to meet us at Platanal.

David Rooks led the first party. When they called for the guide he was ill and they had to proceed without a guide. En route to the ridge they saw jacamars (Galbula ruficauda) Mot-mots (momotus momota) yellow-tails (Psarocolius decumanus) Manler (Colomba speciosa) and a Fork-tailed Kite (Elanoides forficatus). The calls of Bell Birds (Procnias averano) filled the air. After a 2 hour hike they met a man who lived on an estate nearby who invited them to spend the night at his place so they went there to set up camp. The party then split into two, one which stayed the night there and one, led by Neville Acham and Richard French, which went off to find Fig Walk. This party entered the Matura River through one of its tributaries as planned and explored the river downstream until it was time to set up camp for the night. The next morning they explored further downstream to the junction with another large river. This was probably the Quebrada Grande. There was no sign of Fig Walk so they retraced their steps upstream.

I led the second party which began the hike on Sunday morning. We met David's group on their way home and continued over the ridge into the Matura side to meet Richard, Neville and other members of the Fig Walk search party. We followed the same tributary and just at the point where this tributary joins another from the North and turns South to form the Matura river the two groups met. This was where I expected Fig Walk to be but the area was unfamiliar and Neville assured us that Fig Walk was not downstream so together we explored upstream a short way. This area too was unfamiliar and the stream soon got far too small for it to be the one flowing past the Fig Walk camp site. We concluded that Fig Walk is not on the Matura River but probably on the Salibea River. We returned home planning another trip.

During their spell on the Matura River, Richard saw no Pawi (which he was hoping to see) but he did see Bright-rumped Atillas (Atilia spadiceus), Green Kingfishers (Chloroceryle americana) and a Northern Waterthrush (Seiurus novaboracensis) which should have left Trinidad long ago on its migration north. There were also Band-rumped Swifts (Chaetura spinicauda) bathing and drinking in the river and at about 7 p.m. on the 19th a few oil birds (Steatornis caripensis) circled the camp site.

During his wait for us on Sunday morning, David saw a short-tailed Pygmy Tyrant (Myiornis ecaudatus) a cocoa thrush (Turdus fumigatus) and many squirrels (Sciurus aestuans) and the pug marks of Ocelot (Leopardus pardalis) and Armadillo (Tatusia novemcincta). Red Howler monkeys (Alouatta insulanus) were up on the ridges in abundance howling their lungs out. I found several plants new to me and at least one is a new record for the Island so the evidence shows this part of the country to be an area of abundant wild life and outstanding interests to the naturalists. It is safe to predict that this visit will not be our last to Platanal even though the route is not a short cut to Fig Walk.

Tailpiece: On the Sunday following this trip, Frankie Farrell and I walked up the Rio Seco and over the ridge into a tributary of the Salibea River. Time did not permit us an exploration of the Salibea but we now know how to get there and we can explore upstream if we want to continue the search for Fig Walk.

Jan Lambie

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