

SEPTEMBER 1979

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Dear Member,

The Management Committee is very pleased with the continued growth of the Club. However, for some time now, the Secretariat of the Club has been experiencing some difficulties in servicing its more than 400 members.

This matter continues to be of great concern to the Management Committee and at its September meeting it was decided, as a short-term relief measure to terminate the monthly issue of the Club's Newsletter. Until further notice, only the Quarterly Bulletin will be issued which will contain information about the Club's activities for the following three months. Although this decision was conveyed to members attending the September Monthly Meeting, we nevertheless apologise to those members who were not at this meeting, and to our new members for this belated announcement.

The re-organisation of the Club's Secretariat is receiving the active attention of the Management Committee.

FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

- October 11 th - Monthly Meeting at the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College at 5.30 p.m.
Lecture "Evolution of Early Man"
by Dr. Victor Quesnel
- October 28th - Field Trip to Mt. Catharine, Chaguaramas.
Leaving St. Mary's College, Pembroke St. at 7.30 a.m. and Chagville Car Park at 8.00 a.m.
- November 8th - Monthly Meeting at Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College at 5.30 p.m.
Lecture "Some Trinidad Birds"
by Richard French
- November 25th - Field Trip to Ass Wright Nature Centre.
Leaving St. Mary's College, Pembroke Street at 7.30 a.m. and Europe Round-about at 8 a.m.

Members are reminded that Monthly Meetings are held at the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College on the second Thursday of every Month (except December) at 5.30 p.m. Field Excursions are held on the last Sunday of every month except December when no Excursion is held.

1980 Programme of Activities

Members are invited to submit to the Honorary Secretary suggestions for Lectures and Field Excursions for the consideration of the Management Committee and possible inclusion in the 1980 Programme of Activities, as soon as possible.

Field trip to Moruga Bouffe on 29th July 1979 --(V.C. Quesnel)

To some the trip to the Moruga Bouffe must have been a failure; to others it was an enjoyable experience even though we did not find the bouffe. None of us had been there before and we had no guide, but we did have a large-scale map of the area. After crossing the second bridge on Edwards Tracc we consulted the map and picked a spot for our trek through the forest. Having parked our cars we proceeded on foot about half a mile and came to another bridge where we found a faded sign with directions to the bouffe. We tried to follow these directions but without success. On our last attempt we came to the edge of a large opening in the forest but were prevented from exploring it by lack of time and tangled vines and dense stands of roseau palms on the periphery.

The real prize was the largest tree any of us had ever seen. It was a silk cotton (Ceiba pentandra) and as far as we could judge must have been a least 150 ft tall. Enormous buttresses rose from the ground to a height of about 30 ft and the huge bole continued on above, unbranched, for scores of feet - a truly impressive sight. Another surprise was the presence of Mora trees in considerable numbers. The Mora forests of Guayaguayare are well known but I did not realise that these forests penetrated as far westwards as Moruga.

However, there is no doubt that the trip lost something of interest in our failure to find the bouffe. The open area of mud is reputed to be about two hectares in extent and the cones to number nearly 100. This must be a sight worth seeing and we will have to return some time.

Field trip to Monos Island, 31 Aug - 2 Sept. 1979 (V.C. Quesnel)

In 1964 the club visited Monos twice and did much good work in recording the vegetation, the reptiles, the mosquitoes and the birds. The results were published in the 1965 journal. On this occasion we hoped to continue the search for reptiles, to look for the oilbird cave reported on Huevos and to record the presence of such plants and birds as we were able to identify.

I missed the first day of the camp but Hans Boos was kind enough to pick me up at the Island Home Owners base on Sat. 1st Sept. By that time he and his group had already collected several lizards. I joined the others at Grand Fond at about 9.30 A.M. The tents were pitched among the crab holes on a narrow strip of flat land in the shade of seashore plants, the mangrove Laguncularia racemosa and the seaside mahoe (Thecspesia populnea). Common Emerald hummingbirds (Amazilia tobaci) were swirling around the flowers of a large Peltophorum ferrugineum tree where they tried to stake out territorial rights and there were sounds of other bird life too. The previous evening a large and beautiful moth had been seen hanging from an empty cocoon from which it had apparently recently emerged. This morning two of them were clinging to another cocoon in a copulatory embrace. They remained together until dusk. A search of the camp site revealed about a dozen more cocoons, all empty, and two large, spiny caterpillars that we assumed were they larval form of the same moth.

As I had no tent to pitch I was soon off with Hans Boos and a party of five or six others to see if we could find the oilbird cave on Huevos. We cruised fairly slowly along the coast but none of the caves we saw seemed large enough to house an oilbird colony. However, we were rewarded with the sight of frigate birds (Fregata magnificens), pelicans (Pelecanus occidentalis), an osprey (Pandion haliaetus) and a brown noddy (Anous stolidus) sitting on the water. We passed within an ear's length of the noddy and it flew towards the boat as though attempting to alight on the gunwale but but flopped into the water. We thought it might be injured and circled around in an attempt to catch it but it tired of its game with us and flew off quite strongly and seemingly not at all injured.

After lunch most of us explored the valley behind Grand Fond. There was water in the ravine but not much of it and there was no animal life in it. This little stream must dry up completely in the dry season but is probably responsible for the elements in the vegetation that are more typical of lowland forests than of the deciduous forests of these offshore islands. Thus, there was plenty of roseau (Bactris spp.) and the spiny palm Desmoncus and also the Mountain Rose (Brownea latifolia), White Olivier (Terminalia obovata), the two heliconias, bihai and psittacorum, the chaconia and bois tatou (Rudgea freemani) but there was also Tobago sandbox (Apeiba schomburgii) and Naked Indian (Bursera simaruba) which prefer relatively dry areas. The Tobago sandbox is the plant with fruit like sea urchins.

Our planned search for frogs in the ravine after dark was abandoned. Everyone seems to lack the energy and occasional drizzles warned of rain in the night

so we stayed in camp to organize adequate shelter for those without tents. I slept very little and in the morning was awakened with a start by a fiddler crab mistaking one of my fingers for something he should have for breakfast. Birds were already active and, since there was no point in trying to go back to sleep, I took a stroll nearby to see what there was. I was rewarded with a sighting of the gorgeous tropical Parula (Parula pitiayumi) and a female ruby-topaz humming bird. This species leaves Trinidad after breeding here in the dry season and the latest date in French's book for a sighting is 20th August. The date was 2nd Sept. which now becomes the latest date.

I spent most of the morning exploring the dry hillside to the west with a few others. Most of the trees were unidentifiable but we did see plenty of saltfish-wood Nachacrium ~~55~~binifolium and some pouis (Tatebuia spp). Meanwhile, the reptile hunters had been busy again and had come up with new species. In all, they found 10 species of lizard and one snake, the Boa constrictor. For the record the lizards were: Gonatodes vittatus, G. humeralis, G. cocillae, Thecadactylus rapicauda, Hemidactylus br oki, Iguana iguana, Plica plica, Ameiva ameiva (the zandelia), Bachia sp. and Mabuya mabouya. A very good effort indeed.

Missing Umbrella (V. Quesnel)

On the Platamal trip Richard French lost an umbrella. Some-one recovered this umbrella and told me about it but I cannot remember who it is. Will the finder return the umbrella to me, Richard or Ian Lambie please,?

Interesting Notes from Aripo

On the Botany Group's last outing to the Aripo Savanna on 16th Sept. we found several items of interest to zoologists: a sighting of a white-tailed golden-throat hummingbird (Polytmus guainumbi), a white-necked Jacobin (Florisuga mellivora) feeding at the flowers of the yellow mangue (Symphonia globulifera), a savanna hawk, two Bufo granulosus, one at the entrance to a burrow and the only Cnemidophorus lemniscatus (lizard) that I have seen that was not on or near a sandy beach. Also a bird that looked like a snipe flew off in circumstances suggesting nesting but we found no egg.

29th September, 1979

Ian Lambie
Honorary Secretary

Honorary Secretary
64 Roberts Street,
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Telephone - 62 /23694

Dear Member,

You are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Club to be held at the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College on Thursday 10th January, 1980 at 5.30 p.m.

A G E N D A

1. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES.
2. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF MINUTES.
3. HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT - 1979
4. HONORARY TREASURER'S REPORT -1979
5. ELECTION OF OFFICER FOR 1980
6. OTHER BUSINESS.

THE CLUB'S SECRETARIAT

As you may recall, that in 1977 the Honorary Secretary stated that he will not be seeking re-election to the post at the 1980 A.G.M. He thus gave the Club three years to find a new Honorary Secretary. At a recent meeting of the Management Committee of the Club certain proposals were accepted for the re-organisation of the Secretariat to involve more members and thus take some of the pressure off the Honorary Secretary.

These proposals included an Assistant Secretary to prepare minutes and a panel of members to assist in the preparation and mailing of the more than 400 circulars. In addition the Committee had previously taken a decision to issue only the Quarterly Bulletin and to suspend the monthly notices to members.

The Club is now inviting nominees for the posts of Honorary Secretary, Honorary Assistant Secretary and volunteers to assist in the secretarial functions mentioned. Can you assist?

FIELD EXCURSION - JANUARY, 1980

The Club through its representative on the Save our Savannah committee has been agitating for the adequate management and maintenance of the Queen's Park Savannah and the Botanical Gardens.

On Sunday, 27th January, we will be visiting the Botanical Gardens not only to view the botanical specimens therein but also to "inspect" the area. A visit will also be made to the Emperor Valley Zoo where the group will be conducted on tour by the Curator, Mr. Hans Boos. Meeting 8.00 a.m. at the western entrance to Gardens.

Field trip to North Oropouche on 30th Sept. 1979 (V.C. Quesnel)

The purpose of this trip was to see the WASA installations on the Oropouche River and to learn something of the project. Mr Lester Ford, engineer in charge of major projects at WASA, was on hand to tell us about it. One of the surprises of his address was the revelation that the scheme is not a WASA scheme though WASA will have to operate it when commissioned. It arose out of a demonstration of the Cascade residents in front of Whitehall some two years ago and is the Prime Minister's response to their demand for water (which just shows what a little demonstration can achieve). There is no dam. A weir about a metre high was built to raise the water level and a "bay" dug out of the bank a few metres upstream. The intakes of five pumps dip into the water in the bay and water will be pumped from the river to treatment and storage tanks on a nearby hill for distribution. Each pump can deliver 5 million gallons of water a day but they will never all be in operation at the same time. Starting with two the number in operation will be increased with time to a maximum of four. Minimum dry season flow in the stream is 25 to 30 million gallons a day so the operation of this plant will greatly alter the amount of water flowing downstream from this point. The project should have become operative by the end of 1979.

Our tour of the area was over by about mid-day. From there a small group went off to visit the Aripo savannas.

Field trip to Morne Catherine on 28th October 1979 (V.C. Quesnel)

Our trip to Morne Catherine in January 1977 made a deep impression on me because of the spectacular flowering of so many species of the family Convolvulaceae (the sweet potato family). On this trip in October 1979 the mountain displayed a more sombre mood. There were far fewer plants in bloom and the weather was not as bright and invigorating as on that memorable trip two years ago. Nevertheless, there was still much to see. Here I stick to the more scientific aspects; a chattier account has been written for Trinidad Naturalist.

The following plants were in flower: Bloodwood (Croton gossypifolium), Centropogon surinamensis, Duguetia hirsuta, Cnidioscolus urens (a very poisonous member of the family Euphorbiaceae), Heliconia hirsuta, Dioclea guianensis, Maranta gibba, Stromanthe tonckat, Solanum lanceifolium, Mandevilla subsagittata, Palicourea crocea, Psychotria uliginosa, Monotagma spicata, Kholaria sp. and various weeds and other unidentified plants.

Apparently most members took the left hand branch at the second fork in the road and got to the peak with a steel mast and a disused hut. This is not Morne Catherine. To get to Morne Catherine you must take the right hand branch at the second fork. When we eventually got there Frankie Farrell and myself also took the left hand branch knowing full well where we were going. There I found a plant of the family Rubiaceae which I could not recognize. It is apparently a new record for Trinidad and is still unidentified. Frankie pointed out to me another plant he thought might be a "Rube" which we collected. It turned out later to be Quiina guianensis (not a "rube") and is important because it has not been collected in Trinidad for over 100 years.

Julius Boos made a collection of butterflies and turned in a report to me. His collection included the Echo (Taygetis echo), the rare large white night (Euptychia calpurnia), the lady slipper (Pierella hyalinus), the rare blue transparent (Aeria curimedia), the rare tiger (Heliconius othillus), the rare bamboo page (Philaethria dido), the Grecian shoemaker (Catonephile numilia), the banded shoemaker (Prepona meander), the rusty tipped page (Metamorpha cpaphus) which up to four or five years ago was quite rare though it is now common (why?), Adelpha lara, the Emperor, the purple mort bleu (Eryphanis polyxena) and the blue backed blue (Mithras hemon). There were others that are not recorded here and others seen but not caught. It is quite a list and shows what dedication can do.

Although we heard re howler monkeys early in the trip we never got close enough to see any.

Field trip to the Asa Wright Nature Centre on 25th Nov. 1979 (V.C. Quesnel)

This trip took place on a very wet day. While we waited for the weather to clear Ian Lambie gave an illustrated lecture on oilbirds with particular reference to those at the centre. The colony there has increased remarkably over the past fifteen years owing to efficient protection and the provision of artificial nesting sites. When the rain abated somewhat we visited the gorge where the oilbirds nest. These birds are now so accustomed to visitors that they no longer fly about with ear-splitting shrieks and squawks when people arrive. Because of this and the relatively bright conditions of this site we were able to obtain a good view of these large and truly magnificent birds.

We were back at the house by mid-day and as many people had been soaked by the rain they returned home soon after lunch. Some stayed on a while longer but as the weather did not improve much they too were soon gone.

The Quarterly Bulletin (V.C. Quesnel)

Hi folks. This quarterly bulletin is only supposed to be edited by me not to be completely written by me. How about turning in short notes of your observation on field trips or on any items of interest to us that you may come upon in your reading. Don't press your luck; I might go on strike too.

The journal (V.C. Quesnel)

Our journal for 1979 - 1980 has at last been printed and one copy will be given to each member. Unfortunately, by error, the date 1978- 1979 appears on the cover instead of 1979 - 1980. What we will do about this I don't know yet but assuming we try to publish the next one on schedule I will need to start getting papers by July 1980. Scientific papers sometimes take a long time to write so those who intend writing something should start writing now. I have already received assurances of the following: A key to the sharks of Trinidad by J.S. Kenny, The biology of the guava by J. Duncan, (both of these are aimed at the needs of students at O and A level), a report on the turtle project (by Ian Lambic?), butterfly life histories by J. Boos, historical notes on water resources by David Rooks, the flowering behaviour of some Trinidad plants by V. Quesnel. I would like to have a lot more short notes from members on interesting observations that they may have made and which are worth recording even if not part of a larger study. For instance, David Rooks and a small party were recently shown a cave near Paria which houses a large and previously unreported colony of oilbirds. I would like to have a description of the cave, its location and an estimate of the number of birds in the colony. If people feel that their observations are not important enough to write up at least they should inform me so that I have the option of writing a note for the Quarterly Bulletin. Later on, the more important of these could be brought together for the journal. So pitch in and help make the journal a true expression of members' work and interests. Can I persuade anyone to study any of the types used in biology teaching at O or A level? Can't someone or a group study our local crapaud (Bufo marinus) or the large local snail (whose name I don't know) and write up the results in three or four years time? Anyone interested please see me.

Special Interest Groups (V.C. Quesnel)

At the beginning of a new year and a new decade I take this opportunity of reminding everyone of the special interest groups within the club. The Conservation Committee which is the oldest of them is rather different from the others since it is concerned with identifying issues on which the club should take action and with developing policy. Those interested in its work should contact Dr Julian Kenny or Mr David Rooks. Two other groups are alive and well and hold regular meetings. These are the Botany Group and the Photography Group. The Botany Group visits the Aripo Savanna every month where its members are studying the orchid, Cyrtopodium broadwayi. It is developing other projects too - a study of bladderworts and a plant geography project. Those interested in these projects should meet with me half an hour before the start of the AGM ie 5 pm on 10th Jan. 1980, at St Mary's College of course. Those interested in nature photography should contact Philip Bellamy. A Butterfly Group was formed and began work but the departure of Edward Rooks to study abroad has removed one of its enthusiastic members. Julius Boos is still actively at work on butterflies and anyone interested in this should contact him.

I am not sure whether a Herpetology Group is functioning. If not, I suggest that one be constituted and take over the turtle project. The turtle project has been running for about fifteen years and it was the success of this project that led to the formation of the special interest groups.

I would like to see other groups formed: a Mammal Group, a Bird Group, a Marine Life Group, a Freshwater fish Group, an Ecology Group and possibly even a Sea-shore group. The possibilities for study are endless; other people envy our opportunities. Let us make use of them.

COMING EVENTS

27th JANUARY- Field Trip to Botanical Gardens and Emperor Valley Zoo. Meet at 8.00 a.m. at the Western Entrance to Gardens.

14th FEBRUARY- "Some Trinidad Butterflies" - Julius Boos
St. Mary's College - 5.30 p.m.

24th FEBRUARY- Visit to Moruga Bouff. Leaving St. Mary's College, Pembroke Street at 7.00 a.m.

7th MARCH - "Life in the world of bromeliads" - Professor J.S. Kenny

18th MARCH - "EL TUCUCHE" Leaving St. Mary's College Pembroke Street at 6.00 a.m., stopping briefly at George Earl Park, St. Joseph at 6.30 a.m.

Ian Lambie

Honorary Secretary.

1st December, 1979.