

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

27th June 1980

MEETINGS - 3RD QUARTER

You are invited to attend the meetings of the club to be held on 10th July, 14th August and 11th September 1980. At each meeting the agenda will be:-

1. Confirmation of minutes
2. Business arising from the minutes
3. Announcements
4. Lecture
5. Exhibits and Miscellaneous Notes
6. Other business.

The lectures will be:-

- 10th July - Flowering behaviour of some Trinidad plants by Dr V.C. ...
14th Aug. - Members Evening. Details later.
11th Sept. - Herbal Medicines by Mr. Kelvin Best.

There will be an additional item before the lecture at the meeting of 10th July, viz. voting on amendments to the rules as listed overleaf.

FIELD TRIPS

- 27th July - Santa Cruz to Maracas Bay.
Departure 7.00 a.m. from St. Mary's College, Pembroke St.
- 30th/31st Aug.- Camp at Chacachacare Island.
Details later. Write them in this space for easy refer...
- 28th Sept. - El Cerro del Aripo.
Departure 5.30 a.m. from St. Mary's College, Pembroke St.
Short stop at Curepe Roundabout at 6.00 a.m. and then up the
Arima Valley. This is a long trip so punctuality is impor-
tant.

RULES

The Management Committee is making a determined effort to bring the rules up to date and to have a Rule Book printed and distributed to members. The following amendments will be voted on at the meeting of 10th July 1980.

RULE 20 - JUNIOR MEMBERS

A Junior Member shall be one under the age of 18 years and not less than 15 years or one under the age of 21 years who attends an educational institution. Junior members shall pay half the subscription paid by an ordinary member and shall have all the privileges of an ordinary member including the right to vote. A Junior Member may not hold any office except that of Hon. Assistant Secretary. (In the present rule, all persons under the age of 21, whether at an educational institute or not, are junior members but this has become inappropriate with the change in the age of majority to 18 years).

RULE 21

Every candidate for admission to the club shall apply on the prescribed form. Applications for membership must be forwarded to a member of the Management Committee for consideration at a meeting of the committee. The Management Committee shall have the right to refuse membership.

(In the current rule, application could be made only to the Hon. Secretary and requires the names of proposed new members to be stated on the notice convening the meeting. Meetings of the Management Committee are now held on the Monday before the General Meeting and no written notices are sent to convene them).

RULE 22

There shall be an entrance fee of such sum as proposed by the Management Committee and ratified by the Annual General Meeting. Junior Members shall not be required to pay an entrance fee.
(The current rules specifies the fee and thus requires a change of rule every time the fee is changed).

RULE 23

The annual subscription shall be proposed by the Management Committee and confirmed at the Annual General Meeting. All subscriptions shall be due and payable on 1st January of the current year. Members elected after 31st August shall pay half the annual subscription for the year.
(The current rule has the word "fixed" instead of "proposed").

RULE 28

All written communications purporting to be the views of the club shall be transmitted only through the President or the Honorary Secretary.
(The current rule restricts communications to the Hon. Secretary alone).

RULE 29

The lending of books, pamphlets and papers belonging to the club shall be subject to such regulations and decisions as the Management Committee may make from time to time.
(This proposal deletes the phrase "having reference to Natural History" after "papers").

RULE 36

Every proposal to alter or amend any of these rules shall be submitted in writing to the Management Committee who shall have it published in the notice convening the next monthly meeting and may be adopted by the affirmative vote of two thirds of the members present and voting. It shall then become part of the rules.
(The current rule is ambiguous).

Two additions to the rules are proposed:-

1. A member who resigns from the club by reason of the fact that he ceases to

reside in Trinidad or Tobago shall not be required to pay an entrance fee if returning to the country and rejoining the club within a period of four years.

2. In any situation not covered by these rules, the Management Committee is empowered to act as it thinks fit in the best interest of the club.

If these proposals are passed, they will be inserted in the appropriate places and the rules will be renumbered.

FIELD TRIP TO EL TUCUCHE - 30th March 1980 (V.C. Quesnel)

There was the usual large turnout for the trip to El Tucuche. On this occasion Frankie Farrell and I had decided not to collect any plants until we reached the saddle so for a long time, we were not at our accustomed place at the end of the procession but somewhere in the middle. However, we gradually drifted back as we tried to identify trees with the help of a forester who accompanied us. We had been reminiscing about the raspberry patch that used to grow at what we called the "half-way" house and Frankie pulled off an extraordinary feat of memory. We were near the saddle when he stopped and said that he thought the "half-way" house must have been about here. We decided to look for possible remnants of the raspberry patch and within a minute or two, I found instead the remains of the pillars on which the house had stood over 30 years ago. Of the raspberries, we found no trace.

Having got to the saddle, we began our collecting in earnest. I also made note of plants in bloom, among which, were Calliandra guildingii our Trinidad cousin of the popular ornamental C. surinamensis. At about 11.30 a.m. while examining the fruit of a guatacare tree near the saddle between Naranja and Tucuche proper we were surprised to see people already returning from the summit. The day was overcast and there was no view from the top and hence no incentive to remain long there. In the advance party were Clive Urich and Scott Alston Smith who had had a very poor day with their butterfly collecting, also as a result of the weather. Frankie and I did not reach the top till 2.00 p.m. and on the last short cut, we were entertained by a nightingale thrush hopping about on the ground in search of food only a couple of metres in front of us. It was there, too, that I collected a plant new to me that later proved to be Psychotria berteriana, one of my "rubes".

We remained at the top half an hour and had hardly begun our descent when a startled cry from Luisa announced that she had seen a Fer-de-Lance. It was coiled up and seemingly asleep just at the edge of the track and had presumably remained unnoticed and unruffled by 80 to 90 people passing right beside it not once but twice. Back in the cultivation, we saw a sooty black mouse, very pretty, and unlike the house mouse, who seemed quite oblivious of our presence and came within a metre of my feet. These were the highlights of our trip which produced much else of interest. It really is much better to walk slowly.

FIELD TRIPS OF 27TH APRIL - (V.C. Quesnel)

The field trip to Fig Walk carded for the 27th April was cancelled on advice from the police. Two field trips replaced it: one to Matura in the evening of 26th April to observe the nesting of leatherback turtles and one to the Aripo Savannah Area. The rather small party on the latter trip first explored an area of forest south of the Aripo Savannahs. The forest proved to be evergreen forest of the type that once covered much of the Caroni basin, not the palm marsh forest that we are accustomed to walk through to get to Savannah iv. After a pleasant walk through this, we explored the nearby Savannah iii for Cyrtopodium broadwayi and found several, most of which were labelled so that they could be easily found on future occasions.

Report on the St. Lucia Conference on
Parrots - April 17 - 19, 1980

by T. F. Farrell

Many species of the World population of parrots, macaws and parakeets (the Psittacine birds) have within fairly recent times been lost or are seriously endangered. A very high percentage of these are found in the islands of the Caribbean whereas in large continental areas the dangers of extinction appear to be more remote. This has prompted the International Council for Bird Preservation (I.C.B.P.) to set up a conference on parrot conservation.

The organization of the conference was assigned to a section of the I.C.B.P.: the World Working Group on Parrots (W.W.G.P.). The group worked in co-operation with four hosts: the St. Lucia Government, the St. Lucia National Trust, the St. Lucia Naturalists Society, and the Caribbean Conservation Association.

The actual conference took place on three days, April 17th - 19th, but excursions to points of interest in St. Lucia were arranged before the meeting on the 14th to the 16th.

Representatives from the Caribbean Islands were the most numerous, but there were also representatives from the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Guyana, United Kingdom (Channel Islands), West Germany, New Zealand, Australia, etc., etc.

The conference was opened by Mr. Josie, the Minister of Agriculture of St. Lucia, followed by welcoming speeches from the other host bodies. The Minister pointed out that St. Lucia had a long history of parrot conservation starting in the last century and at the present time was revising its bird conservation laws to improve protection. He emphasized that the St. Lucian parrot, *AMAZONA VERSICOLOR*, was extremely endangered and the country was making every effort to preserve the species. In order to emphasize the importance of the bird to the country the parrot had been chosen as the national bird.

A vast amount of information on the Psittacine birds, the adverse conditions under which many of them live and the measures for conservation being employed was presented at the meeting. A comprehensive report will be prepared by the W.W.G.P. and sent to the representatives at the conference.

The salient points that emerged were:-

A very high percentage of lost and endangered species are found on islands such as those of the Caribbean. By contrast in Guyana there is no observable decrease in the bird population, some control of the export of parrots and macaws is however exercised.

Many species of the genus *Amazona* were in the lost or endangered categories. Severely endangered species were to be found in St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Puerto Rico.

Parrots are found mainly in tropical climates. An interesting exception is the New Zealand cockatoo which lives in a fairly cold climate.

Some of the reasons for either the loss or severe restriction in numbers of the various species of Psittacine birds are:-

1. Destruction of the habitat including destruction or removal of nesting places.
2. Attacks by predators such as rats, the opossum, the boa-constrictor, eagles and hawks, and doubtfully the Pearly-eyed Thrasher and the fer-de-lance.
3. Hunting or trapping by man for use either as food or for adoption as pets.
4. Extreme climatic conditions such as drought.
5. Killing as agricultural pests by farmers.

The measures for conservation include:-

1. Conservation laws.
2. Active and effective enforcement of the conservation laws.
3. Establishment of sanctuaries.
4. Education of the public in conservation and the reasons for conservation.
5. Protection of birds from predators, and other dangers.

6. Provision of specially designed artificial nests.
7. Agrarian reform
8. Control of exports.
- 9.1 Registration of captive parrots.
10. Captive breeding. This is considered not as a substitute for conservation but as a means of providing a reservoir of birds for release into the wild when necessary. A group is opposed to captive breeding on the ground, inter alia, that the purity of the breed would be destroyed.

Captive breeding is being tried in the United Kingdom, but it is too early to say how successful the results have been and the scheme is a very limited one. At Vogelpark Walsrode very successful breeding schemes for many species have been carried out. A captive breeding scheme for the St. Lucian parrot is being carried out at the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust.

The Conference on parrots has exposed a number of conservationists in the Western Hemisphere as well as in other parts of the World to the facts about the decreasing population of these birds and the methods of counteracting the decline. The representatives are now returning to their respective countries with ammunition to fight the battles of conservation in which they will surely be engaged.

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

The Botany Group's Cyrtopodium Project

INTERIM REPORT NO 1

In 1977 the Botany Group undertook a field study of the orchid Cyrtopodium Broadwayi in Aripo Savanna IV. The first visit was made on 1st May that year and a preliminary survey of a small "bay" in the savanna produced a total of 53 plants. On the second visit the following month a survey of a similarly sized area in the main savanna produced only 17 plants so the first area was chosen as the study area. For the rest of 1977 our efforts to reach this site were frustrated and it was only on 15th Jan. 1978 that an alternative route in was found. A visit has been made to the site every month since then. It took us seven months to find and mark 100 plants but others have since been found and some of these have been labelled and kept under observation. A map was prepared from measurements and compass bearings and all the plants entered on the map.

On every visit we counted the number of living leaves on each plant, the number of open flowers, buds and dead flowers and the number of fruit. These simple observations have revealed a great deal. The vast majority of plants have so far begun growth in January or February and have dried up by November leaving a swollen pseudobulb as a store of food for the next season's growth. Three or four plants had a different cycle, beginning growth in the period Sept. - Oct. and continuing until May or June of the following year. The maximum number of leaves produced on any plant has been fourteen; the average number has not been calculated.

In 1978 eighteen of the plants flowered in the period Feb. - March and ten set fruit but of these ten only six survived to maturity. Of the eighteen flowering stalks one had just completed flowering when found. The others gave a total of 464 flowers for an average of 27.3 flowers per inflorescence. Thus only six fruit survived from a total of 464 flowers giving a 1.5% success. In the period Jan. - June of 1979 19 plants flowered but only one fruit was produced and this survived to maturity. A total of 484 flowers was produced for an average of 25.5 per inflorescence and a success rate of 0.2%. Actually, our counts are almost certainly underestimates of the actual number of flowers so the success rate is probably even smaller than the figures given. Fruit take about six months to mature. The seeds are minute and are dispersed by wind.

We have no notion yet of the pollinator of the flowers nor of the length of time the flowers remain open and the stigmas receptive. To discover the first would require much longer periods of observation and a great deal of luck. The second would require daily visits and some hand pollinations.

Of the 100 marked plants nine seem to have died and decomposed beyond any possibility of a new shoot emerging. More than half of these nine are out in the open and not closely associated with any of the shrubs that grow in the savanna. A glance at the map reveals that the distribution of the orchis is far from uniform and in the field the majority seem to grow near the shrubs rather than out in the open. We hope to find ways of expressing this association quantitatively.

V.C. Quesnel

7/1/80