

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

26th Dec. 1980

MEETINGS - 1st Quarter 1981

You are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the club to be held in the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College on Thursday 8th January 1981 at 5.30 p.m.

Agenda

1. Confirmation of minutes
2. Business arising out of the minutes
3. Honorary Secretary's report for 1980
4. Honorary Treasurer's report for 1980
5. Election of Officers for 1981
6. Other business

Mr T.F. Farrell will also deliver a short talk entitled "The largest living things"

You are also invited to attend the monthly meetings to be held on 12th February and 12th March 1981 at the same time and place. At these meetings the agenda will be:

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

At the time of writing there is still some uncertainty in the sequence of lectures for the year. For February and March the lectures will probably be two of the following three: Birds as musicians by Richard French
Studying the Trinidad butterflies by Matthew Cock
The National Park System of Trinidad and Tobago by Sherrif Faizool

FIELD TRIPS

25th Jan 1981 - El Tucuche. Leave St Mary's College 6.00 a.m. Rendez vous at George Earl Park at 6.30 a.m.

22nd Feb. 1981 - Trinity Hills (Lagon Bouffe?). Departure 6.00 a.m. Rendez vous Curepe Roundabout 6.30 a.m.

21st - 22nd March - Fig Walk. Leave 7.00 a.m. Saturday 21st. Rendez vous Curepe Roundabout 6.30 a.m. Camp overnight at Fig Walk.

Proposal to be voted on at the AGM: That the existing rule "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" be altered to the following: "A member who resigns from the club shall not be required to pay an entrance fee if rejoining the club within a period of four years".

Special Interest Groups

At the beginning of the new year I take the opportunity to inform new members and remind old members of our special interest groups. The Conservation Committee, rather different from the others, identifies issues on which the club should take action and develops policy. Those interested in its work should contact Prof. Julian Kenny or Mr. David Rooks. The Botany Group is engaged in a study of the orchid Curtopodium broadwayi in the Aripo Savannas to which visits are made usually on the Sunday after the monthly meeting. A report will be presented at the Annual General Meeting. Those interested should contact Frankie Farrell or Victor Quesnel. The Photography Group meets regularly and those interested in nature photography should contact Philip Bellamy or Hans Boos. The Butterfly Group has lost two members since Edward Rooks and Julius Boos have left the country but other members may still be active. The Leatherback Turtle Project continues. It is a club project not attached to a special interest group.

Last Year I suggested that other groups be formed. I can now inform members that Dr Doon Ramsaroop has agreed to lead a Marine Life Group and possibly a Sea-shore Group if sufficient members are interested in marine studies. The project chosen would not necessarily require the use of SCUBA gear by everyone though persons participating should be prepared to snorkel. If interested, leave your name with the secretary at the AGM.

Other groups should be formed. Anyone prepared to lead one should see the secretary.

School Teachers' Interests

In the last two or three years several school teachers have joined the club. This is a development I welcome since the club should be able to help them make their teaching more interesting and effective. Would all biology teachers see me at the AGM so that we can arrange a time to meet for discussions.

Subscriptions for 1981

Annual subscriptions are payable on 1st January 1981. Members who have not paid by 31st March will not be sent any communications from the club's secretariat so please pay up early. Payment should be made to the club's Hon. Treasurer, Mr John Hilton, not to the club's Hon. Secretary.

Field trip to Cerro del Aripo on 28th Sept. 1980

Although we did not leave St Mary's College precisely at 5.30 a.m. as planned we left early enough to be at the La Laja Rd by 7.30 and on the ridge by about 8.30 a.m. This part of the trip was easy. The rest of the way lay along the ridge to the summit of Aripo. The route was overgrown with dense thickets of a native, small-stemmed bamboo (Arthrosyidium sp.) which seems to have sprung up in open patches left by falling trees.

By 12.45 p.m. the whole party had arrived at the peak where we rested and had lunch. The search for the surveyors' mark proved fruitless for a while until it was discovered that someone was actually sitting on it. I made a list of the identifiable plants at the top. The commonest was Calathea trinitensis (Marantaceae) whose balisier-like leaves seemed to be everywhere. The tree ferns and dwarf palms that Beard records as abundant were not so common here as on a slightly lower peak just to the west of Aripo. However, tree ferns and the palms Euterpe sp, Prestoea rubigera and Bactris spp. were present. The main trees were Richeria grandis, one of the three called bois bande (recognisable by its soft reddish finely-fissured bark), the mountain jereton (Copanax capitatum), the mountain mangrove (Clusia intertexta) and Clethra broadwayana. The shrubs included Palicourea crocea, Cephaelis tomentosa and Cephaelis axillaris. Vines and epiphytes are abundant in montane forest and the profusion of vine across the trail made life difficult for us. Never have I been tripped up so often on any previous outing of the club. The worst culprit seems to have been Psammisia urichiana a vine with beautiful pink and white flowers that seem to be made of wax.

The list of all the plants on the ridge would be too long to record here but I want to mention at least the attractive little Anari palm (Geonoma vaga) and the only local conifer, Podocarpus coriaceus, of which we saw several. We saw or collected several animals too: the frog Phyllobates trinitatis and Phyllomedusa trinitatis, two scorpions, a black snake and several birds including the Cock of the Woods and Synallaxis cinnamomea. Ian Lambie, who was to have met us at La Laja, somehow contrived to miss the appointment but spent the morning bird-watching at La Laja. He turned in a list of twenty four birds seen. For those who climbed to the top it was a strenuous but enjoyable trip.

Field Trip to Tamana Cave on 26th Oct. 1980

Arriving at a disused quarry site we parked the cars and gathered for a short talk on the ecology of the Tamana Cave by Julian Kenny. This cave is the major roost for bats in the country and the numbers are so great that several hours are required for all the bats to leave the cave in the evening. Life in the cave is based on the guano from their droppings. Micro-organisms and small animals such as cockroaches feed on the guano and break it down and other animals in turn feed on them. Apart from the bats vertebrate life in the cave is restricted to a few reptiles and frogs and the odd monkey that wanders in.

After the talk we hiked the short distance to the cave. Twenty four members of the party elected to go into the cave by the walk-in chamber and squeeze through the crawl-hole into the main chamber. There we examined the guano for animal life and collected planarian worm in the little stream. Some then explored the deeper recesses where the air becomes extremely hot, humid and uncomfortable. Our return to the surface was a cool delight.

A small group of persons then explored the hill itself for a look at the vegetation which proved to be rather uninteresting. The commonest plant was the shrub Aphelandra incerta which was just coming into bloom. The main trees were silk cotton, toperite, Mountain Rose, and Inga spp. The main palms were Bactris spp and Sabal. Some epiphytes were present including the beautiful Columnnea scandens which is well worth cultivating as an ornamental. Its flowers are the most unusual shade of orange red. Right at the peak was a huge, sprawling chalice vine, Solandra guttata which is grown as an ornamental.

Field Trip to Erin Savanna on 39th Nov. 1980

On this trip we were led by officers of the Forestry Division. The savanna is immediately seen as being rather different from the Aripo Savannas and most like the savanna on the slopes of Mt Tabor at St. Joseph. Aripo is very flat; Erin is undulating. Grasses and sedges at Aripo are usually very short; those at Erin are usually chest high. At Aripo there is no Curatella americana; at Erin there is (as there is too at Mausica and O'Meara). At Erin we saw no fat pork, no wild Ixora and no Ilex martiniana all of which occur at Aripo fairly commonly. We found no Cyrtopodium Broadwayi at Erin though we looked for it. We did however find another Aripo orchid, Pogonia rosea. The pretty, pink-flowered "rube", Sipanea pratensis, which is widely scattered at Erin we have never found at Aripo though it occurs abundantly on the remains of the savanna at Piarco.

Under the guidance of the foresters we explored the forest briefly and learned to recognise some of the trees which are so difficult to identify. Flowers and fruit of a new Aristolochia were collected to amplify the material in the herbarium. This species was first brought to scientific notice by Julius Boos and word has just been received that the species has been named after him.

Our guides had stated that armadillo are common in the savanna but, as this is a nocturnal animal, we saw no sign of them. Hans Boos reported seeing or collecting a snake and some lizards but I failed to record the species at the time and now cannot remember what they were. Anyone interested ask Hans. All in all a fascinating trip well worth repeating.

Happy New Year everyone.

Victor C. Quesnel (Hon. Sec.)