

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

MEETINGS - 1st Quarter 1982

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 14th Jan. at 5.30 p.m.

1982
~~1981~~

Agenda

1. Confirmation of minutes
2. Business arising out of the minutes
3. Hon. Secretary's report for 1981
4. Hon. Treasurer's report for 1981
5. Election of officers for 1982
6. Other business

You are also invited to attend the monthly meetings to be held on 11th Feb and 11th March 1982 at the same time and place.

Agenda

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

The lecture in February will be Interpreting Trinidad's Geological Past by Mr Robert Kennedy. The lecture for March has not yet been finalised.

FIELD TRIPS

31st Jan. 1982 - Verdant Vale Trace. Leave P.O.S. at 6 a.m. Rendezvous at Curepe junction at 6.20 a.m.

28th Feb. 1982 - Still to be finalised. Probably Bush Bush

28th March 1982 - Not finalised. Probably North Manzanilla fossil beds.

Annual subscriptions

The annual subscription becomes due on 1st Jan. Ordinary members pay \$20 and junior members pay \$10. Members who have not paid by 31st March will receive no further communications from the Hon. Sec. - at least so our rules say though we usually "ease up" defaulters. However, life will be a lot easier for the Hon. Sec. and the Hon. Treasurer if all members pay up by 31st March.

HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE

INFORMATIC. FOR NEW MEMBERS

Beside giving members the opportunity to hear a lecture every month and go on a field trip every month the club encourages members to organize their own field studies in Special Interest Groups. The most active of these is the Botany Group which has just completed four years of study of the orchid Cyrtopodium Broadwayi. Persons wishing to join this group can see Mr T.F Farrell or Dr. V. Quesnel. The Conservation Committee has not been very active recently but persons wishin to take part in its activities should contact Prof. Julian Kenny at U.W.I., Zoology Dept. Those interested in the activities of the Photography Group should contact Mr Hans Boos or Mr Philip Bellamy or Miss Muriel Pierre. The Butterfly Group has lost two members, who have left Trinidad, but budding lepidopterists should contact Mr. Scott Alston-Smith, 15 Pine Ave. Bayshore. The turtle-tagging programme continues in cooperation with the Institute of Marine Affairs. Those interested should see Mr Ian Lambie.

Other groups need to be established eg. a Bird Group and a Marine Group. Those interested in inaugerating a new group shoud see the Hon. Sec. who is prepared to suggest topics of study in any field.

New members should know that all members are entitled to a copy of the club's journal Living World. See the Hon. Sec. if you need a copy.

HELP REQUIRED

The president, Mr Lambie, is trying to locate the club's turtle-tagging equipment and the club's tents and camping equipment. Anyone temporarily in possession of such items please report to the president.

Field trip to El Tucuche on 27th Sept 1981

This trip was organised when it was thought that the Tobago trip would take place on this same day and was meant to cater to those not going to Tobago. About forty persons made the trip and a Maximum and Minimum thermometer was attached to a tree at the summit. This, it is hoped, will allow us to get some idea of temperatures on Tucuche.

Field trip to Tobago on 2nd - 4th Oct. 1982 (V. Quesnel)

I did not go to Tobago but David Rooks did and he has written a long account of the trip which he is to submit to the Naturalist Magazine for publication. I present a brief summary of David article.

Thirty three persons made the trip. As always, Mrs Alefounder provided accommodation at Grafton Estate. Right at the entrance to Grafton David caught a mapipire corde violon or fiddlestring snake (Eumantodes cenchoa) as it was crossing the road. He released at the other side. On Saturday morning everyone was up early to see the birds of Grafton that have become so tame because of the food provided by Mrs Alefounder. The ones present then included cocrico, motmots, red-crowned woodpeckers, bare-eyed thrushes, ground doves, bananaquits, mocking bids, glossy cowbirds, barred ant-shrikes, copper-rumped hummingbirds, blue-grey tanagers and palm tanagers. The motmots have developed a taste for cheese and will take pieces from one's hand.

A trip was made to Charlotteville with stops on the way at the fort in Scarborough and the waterfall at King's Bay. At Charlotteville Mr Charles Turpin acted as a guide and invited the club to stay at his place there on its next visit to Tobago.

On Sunday a trip was made to Englishman's Bay. Snorkling there did not reveal much more than a large school of sardines so the party proceeded to Arnos Vale where the reef provided much more marine life: corals, angel fish, surgeons, slippery dicks, sardines, needlaffish, barracuda and many others. Neville Acham and Flo Krocker saw a hawksbill turtle.

As has been so often the case, those with confirmed return tickets to Trinidad found that there was no flight at the advertised time and everyone returned by the Gelting. The trip was pleasant and on time and it looks as though future field trips to Tobago would best be made by the Gelting.

Field trip to L'Anglais Point on 25th Oct. 1981 (V. Quesnel)

For this trip we were guests of the Geological Society of Trinidad and Tobago several of whose members acted as guides. In addition they had seen to the clearing of paths to the various mud volcanoes in the area so that the hike was easy. Mr Winston Ali explained the origen and operation of mud volcanoes and demonstrated that the gas emitted was inflamable and mainly composed of methane. At the first cone visited the nearby vegetation

was mainly the mangrove Conocarpus erectus, manchineel and various bromeliads. A walk through the forest brought us to a dried up mud flow leading to the beach. The mud flow itself was almost bare of vegetation but the vegetation at the edge was examined and the following species recorded: Pluchea symphytifolia, Baccharis trinerva, Brachiaria nutica, Myrcia arimensis, Capparis trinitensis. This is a markedly different set of species from that at the first cone and may be related to the fact that activity at the mudslide seems to have ceased long ago.

A short walk along the beach brought us back to Tesoro's beach camp and the welcome refreshments provided by Tesoro for which we were very grateful.

Field trip from Brasso Seco to Paria on 29th Nov. 1981 (David Rooks)

Thirty five intrepid naturalists and adventurers set out at 8.30 a.m. on that overcast and threatening morning from Brasso Seco in the heart of the Northern Range to make the journey to Paria Beach on the North Coast.

The distance is approximately eight miles each way or for easy reference the distance from P.O.S. to Arima for the round trip. The terrain is gently undulating and so is a relatively easy hike, just very long.

Rain started from "word say go" and continued non-stop until 1 p.m., each cloudburst just varying in intensity from saturating to mildly drowning, until our binoculars were fogged not from the outside but from the inside and so were useless.

That day we witnessed a striking example of the indispensability of forests for preventing floods and erosion for despite this heavy and continuous rainfall the forest never flooded and the streams remained clear, only their volume of flow increased.

The walk was pleasant and interesting. The first mile or so is through cocoa and coffee plantation, then mixed lower montane forest giving way to mora forest. This mora forest is unusual in that it is the only piece on the north slope of the range and appears to be quite extensive.

Mora forest is beautiful to walk through as the trees are huge, fairly widely spaced and with little underbrush, only lots of saplings. Every mora seed appears to germinate and there was no evidence of insects or mammals feeding on them. Consequently, even the path took on the appearance of the proverbial guru's bed of nails.

The Paria River was with all the way as the path follows its course. At times we could hear the sound of waterfalls below us but they remained hidden from our view.

Because of the incessant rain we were unable to view the birds but Norantea was in bloom and we regretted the problem of our fogged binoculars because we could see a wide variety swarming around these flowers.

On several occasions we saw yellow-headed manakins. At one spot we came to a clump of bamboo and saw bird activity. Ian Lambie imitated a pigmy owl's call and many of these rare and pretty little birds came quite close, flitting nervously through the bamboo.

The river though clear was slightly brown, like very weak tea. There was strangely no evidence of fish. This statement, however, must be qualified as the observation was made while we were on the move and was basically superficial. If there are fish there the numbers must be small.

Eventually after what felt like ages (it was actually four and a half hours) Ian, Frankie Farrell and I who were trailing the field having stopped many times to examine things of interest broke out of the mora forest and came to an abandoned plantation. We continued walking until we came to a spot just above the beach in a grove of tonca bean trees. We decided not to go down to the beach since it was almost time to turn back so as to reach Brasso Seco before dark. We lay down and rested and when the first of our group returned from the beach we got up and started the return journey. While lying there we were entertained by a flock of woodcreepers flitting from tree to tree in search of food.

The return was, as usual, not as long as the going and the last hiker trudged up the hill to the cars at 5.30 p.m. It had been a long day.

With interest we must note that Peter Dickson, Colin Agostini and Dave Ramnarine made the hike, each way, in two hours flat. Since these characters are definitely not human I do not advise any but Olympic hopefuls to try and follow them on future hikes.