

# THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

## MEETINGS - 2nd QUARTER

You are invited to attend the monthly meetings of the Club to be held in the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College on April 8th, May 13th and June 3rd 1982 at 5.30 p.m.

### A G E N D A

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

### L E C T U R E S

- April 8th - MARINE RESOURCES by Dr. R. Linsky  
 May 13th - FERNS by Dr. Julian Duncan  
 June 3rd - AQUACULTURE/The answer to our food problem  
 by Dr. Avril Siung Chang

### F I E L D T R I P S

- 24th-25th April - TACARIB by boat (We need to know by April meeting whether you will be attending so that arrangements could be finalized)  
 22nd-23rd May - TOCO/MATELOT - North Coast  
 10th-13th June - TOBAGO by boat - Accommodation is being offered for 30 persons only at Turpin's Cottages, Charlotteville. Please contact the Hon. Sec. as soon as possible and deposit \$10.00 to cover cost of linen etc.

(It has been decided that those going should book their own passages and cars with the Port Authority)

27th June - MORUGA BOUFFE

### A N N U A L S U B S C R I P T I O N S

The annual subscription of \$20.00 for adults and \$10.00 for juniors is now due and non-financial members at the end of March 1982 will no longer receive bulletins. Subscriptions are payable to the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. John Hilton, at meetings or 4 The Straight, Knightsbridge, Cascade.

### TENTS AND TAGGING EQUIPMENT

Members having any of the Club's equipment are urgently requested to inform the President immediately.

P.S. Field Trips subject to change.



Field trip to the Lopinot Valley on 31st Jan 1982 (V. Quesnel)

The trip to Lopinot was rather hurriedly arranged as a substitute for the trip to Verdant Vale and this, perhaps, accounts in part for the misadventures that befell us. The plan was to turn off the main road leading up the valley and proceed up Andrew's Trace to the ridge. There we would turn round and return the way we came. However, events did not turn out that way. After a very enjoyable visit to the Lopinot museum and tourist site the leaders of the procession up the valley missed the turn off to the right and we followed the main road right up to the point where it joined Las Lapas Trace. Turning right there we eventually came out on the main Arima-Blanchisseuse road. We had no difficulty in finding Andrew's Trace or in walking along it even though it was overgrown in places until it left the ridge and dipped down into the Arima valley. One party followed this track to a T-junction, turned left there and eventually came out on to the main road way down the Arima valley. They seem to have got on to the Verdant Vale trail and followed it down. Most turned right at the T-junction and made their way to Lopinot without trouble. The last group of eleven, which included myself, went part way into the Arima valley but turned back before reaching the T-junction. This was done on my misplaced advice given because I recalled the sentence in French and Bacon's book: "Avoid trails which return to the Arima Valley". By now it was getting late and the party having reassembled on the ridge I announced my intention of cutting my way straight down the hillside into Lopinot. Emmanuel Yee Mon volunteered to come with me and the others turned back to return by the way they came. There were traces of an old path as we set off but we did not attempt to follow it. We cut our way through a vast balisier patch going down a ravine, then on to the side of a ridge, then back to the ravine, then on to a more distinct path to a cristophene patch. I expected to find a path out of this but we didn't find any so we cut our way through the wild tannias in another ravine and eventually came out on to a well marked trail which led to Andrew's Trace. We were back by the river by 5.30 p.m. more than an hour earlier than the majority of those who turned back.

I suppose that several morals could be drawn from this tale. What amazed me, however, was that no one complained, at least not to me. Everyone seems to have regarded the uncertainties as a challenge or, at worst, a minor inconvenience.

The butterfly collectors among us were not too lucky. The botanists found more to collect and for me the trip was particularly rewarding because I found an inconspicuous little weed that had been eluding me for the past four years, Borreria eryngioides, and Yasmin Baksh pointed out to me another "rube" I might have missed, the beautiful, scarlet-flowered Manettia coccinea. I now have only ten or twelve more of the recorded Rubiaceae to find.

Field trip to North Manzanilla fossil beds on 28th Feb. 1982 (V. Quesnel)

We approached the North Manzanilla beach from the Government field station at Fishing Pond. After a short talk from Bob Kennedy we walked in single file south between the rice fields, then turned left between the fields and the forest. The trip was arranged for February in the hope of having dry weather. We had: but there had been so much rain during the preceding days that from here on our path lay through reed beds and mangrove swamp that had not had a chance to dry out. Gingerly picking our way through seeking the higher spots we still couldn't prevent our feet being soaked in the smelly water with an occasional plunge up to the calf or knee in an unsuspected hole. Then, suddenly, we were through the narrow belt of mangroves and out on the beach to witness the fantastic landscape of dead tree trunks, standing, fallen, leaning, devoid of bark, bleached by the sun, stark against the sea and sky - a landscape seemingly out of the prehistoric past we had come to study and expected to find only in fossilized form.

After a short clean-up period we reorganized and walked south along the beach to the cliff face to examine the exposed strata and the fossils within them. Bob Kennedy proved to be an expert guide with interesting commentaries on the formation of the rocks. Most interesting to me were the beds of lignite, a type of coal, and the fossilized bivalve shells. We eventually came to a place where further progress down the beach would have entailed wading in thigh deep water so we turned back a kilometre or two from our starting point. We tried to find an alternative route back to Fishing Pond but found nothing better than the one we came by. The vegetation on the cliffs was a scrubby, tangled mass Heliconia psittacorum, roseau (Bactris spp.) and wait-a-while (Desmoncus spp.) which was virtually impenetrable and the low areas were mangrove swamp no different from the one we had come through. We reluctantly retraced our steps.

We saw some reptile life: a matte (Tupinambis nigropunctatus) and a couple



of Cnemidophorus lemniscatus and fishermen on the beach assured us that turtles come up to lay there. To my knowledge, the club has never organized a turtle patrol on this beach and it may be worth while to do so. Butterflies were almost non-existent and birds scarce near the beach but birds were plentiful in the rice fields. The botanists, as usual, found things of interest and I added one more species to my "bag of rubes" - Oldenlandia herbacea. A tiny sedge collected from the floor of a drain alongside a rice field has not so far been identified and may turn out to be a new record for Trinidad. We'll have to wait and see.

Missing person. HELP HELP (V. Quesnel)

Almost a year has gone by since a member gave me \$20 to give the Hon. Treas. for his year's subscription just at the start of the trip to Fig Walk. I have forgotten who he is and have put a notice like this in every bulletin since then appealing for the member to come forward and claim his money. If he doesn't he'll end up paying twice because the Hon. Treasurer is on the hunt for members in arrears. Anyway, I give fair notice: this is the last time I'll write about this.

1983-1984 Journal

Members are reminded of the 1983-1984 edition of our journal which I will have to start editing by mid-September at the latest. Prospective authors should get their papers in to me early. Now is not too early to start writing if you have something to say. Short notes on isolated observations will be as welcome as longer articles. Please help to make the new issue even better than the last one.

On the larval food plant of Ascia menciae janeta Dixey (Pieridae) (Matthew Cock)

In the 1980-1 volume of Living World I recorded the occurrence of Ascia menciae janeta Dixey as a common butterfly on Chacachacare island. On that occasion (15.1.80) specimens were seen near the doctor's house on Rust's Bay and along the track to the lighthouse. On 9.1.81 I accompanied the U.W.I. Dept. of Zoology marine biology field course to the salt pond area on the south coast of Chacachacare. Again I saw A. m. janeta quite commonly. Last year Julius Boos saw oviposition by this butterfly but we lost the sample of the food plant. This year I saw oviposition on the same plant and have had it identified by Dr. Dennis Adams as Capparis odoratissima Jacq. of the Capparidaceae. In Trinidad this plant is so far known only from Chacachacare but in view of Clive Ulrich's capture of A. m. janeta on Gaspar Grande it may well occur there too. In the flora of Trinidad and Tobago R.O. Williams gives the distribution of C. odoratissima as St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Panama, Grenada, Venezuela and Colombia. This includes Venezuela, the known distribution of A. m. janeta. A. m. menciae Ramsden on the other hand is known from Cuba where C. odoratissima does not occur. There, doubtless, the food plant is some other species of Capparis. Butterflies of the species Ascia have larval food plants in the Cruciferae and Capparidaceae - an example of insects following botanists in regarding these families as closely related.

The homeward flight of the cattle egret (V. Quesnel)

Every day as I drive back from Talparo I see the cattle egrets flying back to their roost in the Caroni Swamp. I am fascinated by them. They seem to follow well-defined flight paths though I have noticed slight alterations from time to time. The major path from the most easterly points is almost due west from the Tumpuna Road to the Caroni Swamp north of Piarcó airport. Birds flying home from nearer more northerly points do not fly directly there but first fly more or less south first to join the major flights. There is another major path more or less parallel to the first but south of Piarcó. The birds fly at speeds of 35 to 38 m.p.h. (estimated from my car's speedometer readings) and they fly in roughly V-shaped groups of from 2 or 3 up to thirty or more. Their height above ground varies too, sometimes high sometimes low.

So many questions arise: Do they navigate by the sun or do they use landmarks? Are the leaders always the same from day to day? When two groups join who becomes leader and why? What determines the height at which they fly? the weather? the time of day? the height of the vegetation? Is there a preferred group size? Is the shape of the group randomly arrived at? Do the same birds feed in the same area every day? What starts the homeward movement? fading light? full bellies? And so on and so on.

Here is a project for the newly-formed ornithology study group. Whenever David decides to start this project I'll be part of it.