

# THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

## MEETINGS - 4TH QUARTER 1982

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 October 14th and November 11th 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

LECTURE FOR NOVEMBER 14, 1982 - This lecture will now be on "Game Animals" by Mr. Beesham Ramdial and Anne Hilton's "The Botany Group at Aripo" will be carded for early next year.

CHRISTMAS PARTY - Our Christmas party will take place on Saturday 4th December 1982. Do you have any suggestions?

EQUIPMENT - The President is again requesting members holding any of the club's tents and turtle-tagging equipment to return same to him immediately.

### TOBAGO FIELD TRIP - 9th-13th JUNE 1982 (by David Rooks)

Thirty excited members of the club met at the Tobago wharf on a rainy Wednesday afternoon. Neville Acham and I arrived first and were quite worried because Ian Lambie could not be found and he had the tickets; nevertheless he soon turned up much to our relief.

The trip over in the "Gelting" was uneventful but pleasant. We arrived at Charlotteville at 10.30p.m. and found Charles and Pat Turpin, our hosts, waiting for us. They had everything beautifully prepared and with their usual hospitality a couple of bottles of 'good cheer' thrown in to revive us from our arduous trek. The Turpins' bungalows are right on the beach and so with the soothing sound of lapping waves we sat and solved the problems of the world until 3.00a.m. when the 'good cheer' was empty. We all got up bright and early that morning. Some swam in the azure blue sea, others snorkelled on the reef in front of the house, a few went exploring and bird watching, while others assisted the fishermen in pulling the seine. From this seine 'jumping fresh' jacks were caught and made our gourmet breakfast of stuffed jacks prepared by Joanne Williams. That day, Thursday, we explored Charlotteville and its surroundings, Pirates' Bay, Fort James and the Lookout Hill. A few of us did some quite extensive birdwatching, a delight in an environment where the birds are generally undisturbed and quite tame, the ramier (*Colomba cayenensis*) can be seen in the trees around the bungalows like so many domestic pigeons. We also noted a small migration of White Tailed Page (*Urania leilus*) throughout the area: they appeared to be flying in all directions but with South East being the most prevalent.

At night we ate a communal meal. After dinner some played cards while others read, the rest sat in the porch and with Charles' entertaining company, once more talked until very late.

On Friday morning we journeyed to Little Tobago (Bird of Paradise Island) - the charge for the boat was \$15.00 per head. We were joined by Hilton Clarke and Noel Vaucrosson. Hilton Clarke is one of the persons trying to get a similar club, "Club Crusoe", going in Tobago, and Noel Vaucrosson came along to paint (being one of our nation's leading artists). While waiting for the boat three Palm Tanagers (*Thraupis palmarum*) were seen in a coconut tree at the back of the beach at Speyside and were carefully observed by several of us. This bird appears to be only a recent arrival in Tobago.

Little Tobago continued

The island is a nature reserve and is kept by the Forestry Department who appear to be doing an excellent job. The tracks are well kept and marked and by following them one can visit all important points in one day. Along the tracks they maintain water founts for the birds (the island having no natural fresh water sources). The only one disturbing point is that they no longer have a permanent caretaker living on the island. This island is an important nesting site for numerous sea birds and there being no watchman, poaching by fishermen of young birds and eggs is so extensive we are told, that some years no young reach maturity. Of course the same is true of the "Giles" which are nearby - something must be done with urgency.

We visited one of the rookeries and saw nesting Laughing Gulls and Brown Boobys. There were many other sea birds present, the most unusual being the Red-billed Tropic bird (Phaethon aethereus). This bird is lovely to watch as it soars and spins up and down the faces of the cliffs. It has two very long and thin tail feathers which seem to bear no relationship to practicability or aerodynamics but make it very beautiful. Other unusual sights were (1) the prevalence of wild fowls - many gorgeous roosters were seen and crowing is a very common sound in the bushes. Apparently some early caretaker left their ancestors behind and they reverted to nature. (2) A white tailed night-jar had made its nest on the track and fluttered around while we took pictures of the eggs. (3) We found a huge hermit crab in a conch shell. (4) Noel Vaucrosson saw three birds together on Mot Mot Hill and from his description to us they could possibly have been Birds of Paradise.

The vegetation is surprisingly lush despite the lack of water. The dominant plants are the fan palm and wild anthurium. There is an old garden with many different fruit plants to provide food for the birds.

At about 1.30 p.m. we once more met at the beach, most of us went for a swim, some snorkelled. At 3.00 p.m. the boats came for us and we returned home completely satisfied after a most engaging day with nature.

On Saturday a hike along the North Coast from Charlotteville to Bloody Bay was made. Neville, a couple others and I did it the lazy way by driving there to provide return transport. We spent the rest of the day swimming and fishing. A disturbing point to note here was the presence of many huge land crabs dead or dying in the lagoon. On enquiry we were told by the resident gardener, who has a large kitchen garden on the banks of the river, that he poisons them since they eat his dasheen. The lagoon is full of young ocean fish and is obviously an important breeding factor in the ecology of the bay; the repercussions could be serious. Once more a lovely day was enjoyed by all and we only left when a downpour told us it was time to go.

On Sunday we relaxed, each man doing his own thing. After lunch we said our farewells and gave many thanks to the generous and hospitable Turpins. We then drove off to visit Mrs. Alefounder at Grafton. The drive from Charlotteville to Grafton in the heat of the afternoon was torturous and it was all the drivers could do to stay awake - the atmosphere was so stifling. We stopped at the Fairfield Complex for a short rest and several of us were able to observe four Palm tanagers, apparently living in the palms of the car park at close range.

Mrs. Alefounder was very happy to see us and gave us a cordial welcome. Some strolled around the estate and birdwatched while others fed the birds on the verandah, having the Mot Mot eat cheese from their hands. At 8.30 p.m. we said farewell and met the "Gelting" for an uneventful trip back to Trinidad.

A list of the birds seen in Tobago is given at the end of the bulletin.

FIELD TRIP TO THE ARENA DAM ON 25TH JULY 1982 (V. C. Quesnel)

The club had visited the site of the Arena Dam some years ago when work on the project had just begun. Then, the view was mainly of soil from which vegetation had been removed. On this visit the scenery was different: the dam was complete, the lake was filling, though not yet at its maximum level, vegetation had begun to grow back near the lake and the vista to Mt. Tamana in the south was superb. Picnic sites had been laid out near the dam and in one of the shelters the party gathered to listen to an account of the construction and functioning of the dam from Mr. Core, one of the engineers on the project. Basically, the dam will store water in the wet season and release it in the dry season. This water will flow into the Tumpuna River and eventually into the Caroni from which it will be removed for treatment at the treatment plant at Piarco. One of the surprising items of information was that the perimeter of the lake when full would be 53 miles so that a hike around the lake that followed every indentation would take a long time.

Arena Dam continued

After the "lecture" we walked over to the dam itself for a look at the engineering works. But some of us were more interested in the life around. In no time at all David Rooks spotted an alligator close to the reedy bank and some water-loving birds like the little blue heron and the yellow-headed marsh bird. In time the area should become a major attraction for migrant birds. David and his small group of bird-watchers then wandered off, peering through their binoculars into the trees while the Botany Group strolled along one of the nearby roads to have a look at the vegetation. David did not mention to me if he saw anything of interest to botanists but we saw a pair of beautiful hawks (probably the grey hawk, Buteo nitidus) which would certainly have been interesting to him.

The forest contained many common trees like bois mulatre (Pentaclethra macroloba), blackheart (Clathropis brachypetala) which was in fruit, serrette (Byrsonima spicata), crappo (Carapa guianensis), kiskidee (Vismea falcata and V. cayennensis) and chaconia (Warszewiczia coccinea) and quite a few vines. Among the latter were Mandevilla hirsuta, Arrabidaea inaequalis and Lundia corymbifera all in bloom. We took specimens of plants we did not know for later identification and these turned out to be as follows:-

1. Petastoma broadwayi, a purple flowered, bignoniaceous vine
2. Paullinia dasygonia, another vine with pretty four-angled fruit
3. Passiflora serrato-digitata, a gorgeous purple passion flower and
4. Crotalaria quinquifolia, one of the roadside weeds commonly called shack-shack.

All in all it was a pleasant trip to a lovely spot destined to become a major tourist attraction if original plans are implemented.

FIELD TRIP TO RINCON TRACE ON AUGUST 29, 1982 (T. F. Farrell)

The excursion along Rincon Trace on August 29th was a disappointment. The attendance was good. There were some eighteen cars and I estimate about sixty persons. What was lacking was the presence of most of our ardent observers and collectors. The excursion as a consequence was merely a hike to the pool and back.

What appears to have happened also was that somewhere along the line a different pathway from the one taken a few years ago was taken. As a result I am doubtful that the excursion ended at the same pool we had found before. Certainly the pathway, especially the approach to the pool, was quite unfamiliar to me, but I cannot definitely say that the pool was different as I did not scramble down the last steep descent taken by most of the excursionists.

No reports have come to me of birds seen or butterflies caught or of anything of interest to the naturalist. One member of the group was searching for PERIPATUS but I have had no report that the search was successful. In the early days of my membership in the club Peripatus used to be found on the slopes of Mt. El Tucuche. It was likely, therefore that it might have been found in the Rincon Trace area.

As regards plants I regret to say that I saw nothing unusual and as a consequence I did not collect a single specimen. I noted however, that in one or two spots along the path LYCOPODIUMS were quite plentiful.

LIST OF BIRDS SEEN IN TOBAGO - JUNE 1982

- 1 Blue Gray Tanager (Thraupis episcopus) - Nesting
- 2 Palm Tanager (Thraupis palmarum)
- 3 Tropical Mocking Bird (Mimus gilvus) - Nesting
- 4 Bareeyed Thrush (Turdus nudigenis)
- 5 Ruby Topaz Humming Bird (Chrysolampis mosquitus)
- 6 Copper Rump Humming Bird (Amazilia tobaci)
- 7 Magnificent Frigate Bird (Fregata magnificens)
- 8 Brown-crested Flycatcher (Myiarchus venezuelensis)
- 9 Laughing Gull (Larus atricilla)
- 10 Yellow-bellied Eleania (Eleania flavogaster)
- 11 Pale vented pigeon (Colomba cayennensis)
- 12 Bananaquit (Coccyba flaveola) - Nesting
- 13 Roseate Tern (Sterna dougallii)
- 14 Crested Oropendola (Psarocolius decumanus)
- 15 Olivaceous Woodcreeper (Sittasomus griseicapillus)
- 16 Short-tailed Swift (Chaetura biachyura)
- 17 Caribbean Martin (Progne dominicensis)

cont'd.

List of Birds seen in Tobago June cont'd

- 18 Gray King Bird (*Tyrannus dominicensis*)
- 19 Blackfaced Grassquit (*Tiaris bicolor*)
- 20 Blue-chinned Sapphire (*Chlorestes notatus*)
- 21 Blue crowned Mot Mot (*Motmotus motmota*)
- 22 Rufous Tailed Jacamar (*Galbula ruficauda*)
- 23 Ruddy Ground Dove (*Colombina talpacoti*)
- 24 Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*)
- 25 Least Tern (*Sterna albifrons*)
- 26 Red crowned Woodpecker (*Melanerpis rubricapillus*)
- 27 Great Blue Heron (*Ardea perodias*)
- 28 Smooth billed Ani (*Crotophaga ani*)
- 29 Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)
- 30 Giant Cowbird (*Scaphidura oryzivora*)
- 31 Blue Black Grassquit (*Volatinia jacarina*)
- 32 Cocoa Thrush (*Turdus nudigenis*)
- 33 Rufous-vented Chacalaca (*Ortalis ruficauda*)
- 34 Brown Pelican (*Pelicanus occidentalis*)
- 35 Blue and Yellow Macaw (*Ara ararauna*)
- 36 Eared Dove (*Zenaida auriculata*)
- 37 White Tipped Dove (*Leptotila verreauxi*)
- 38 Orange Winged Parrot (*Amazona amazonica*)
- 39 Tricoloured Heron (*Hydranassa tricolor*)
- 40 Black Throated Mango (*Anthracothorax nigricollis*)
- 41 Barred Ant Shrike (*Thamnophilus doliatus*)
- 42 Carib Crackle (*Quiscalus lugubris*)
- 43 Red Legged Honey Creeper (*Cyanerpis vyaneris*)
- 44 Green Heron (*Butorides verescens*)
- 45 Gray Hawk (*Buteo nitidus*)
- 46 White lined Tanager (*Tachyphonus rufus*)
- 47 Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa Violacea*)

BIRDS SEEN IN LITTLE TOBAGO (BIRD OF PARADISE ISLAND)

- 1 Brown Noddy (*Anoris stolidus*)
- 2 Brown Booby (*Sula leucogasta*) - Nesting
- 3 Blue Gray Tanager (*Thraupis episcopus*) - Nesting
- 4 Bareeyed Thrush (*Turdus nudigenis*)
- 5 Short tail Swift (*Chaetura cayennensis*)
- 6 Yellow bellied Elaenia (*Elaenia flavogastu*)
- 7 Bananaquit (*Coccyzus flaveola*)
- 8 Pale Vented Pigeon (*Columba cayennensis*)
- 9 Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) - Nesting
- 10 Blue chinned Sapphire (*Chlorestes notatus*)
- 11 Crested Oropendola (*Psarocotius decumanus*)
- 12 Wild Roosters
- 13 Magnificent Frigate Bird (*Fregata magnificens*)
14. White Tipped Dove (*Leptotila verreauxi*)
- 15 Blue crowned Mot Mot (*Motmotus motmota*)
- 16 Ruby Topaz Humming Bird (*Chrysolampis mosquitus*)
- 17 Red billed Tropic Bird (*Phaethon aethereus*)
- 18 Tropical Mocking Bird (*Mimus gilvus*)
- 19 Caribbean Martin (*Progne dominicensis*)
- 20 White Tailed Night jar (*Caprimulgus cayennensis*) - Nesting
- 21 Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus*)
- 22 Brown crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus venezuelensis*)
- 23 Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*)
- 24 Rufous-breasted Hermit (*Glaucis hirsuta*)
- 25 Gray Rumped Swift

P.S. Spelling of scientific names not checked.

Luisa Zuniaga  
Hon. Secretary