

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

MEETINGS - 2nd Quarter 1983

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 Thursday 14th April, 12th May and June 9th 1983 at 5.30 p.m.

Agenda

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

LECTURES AND FIELD TRIPS FOR THE QUARTER

- April 14th
Lecture: "Energy as required for Marine Technology and its impact on the environment" by Dr. O. Headley - Senior Lecturer in Chemistry
- April 23-24th
Trip: Tacarib (Camp) - Leave Port of Spain at 7.00 a.m.
- May 12th
Lecture: "A Novice's approach to Agriculture" by Professor E. Ward - Retired Professor of Human Physiology
- May 29th
Trip: Caltoo Trace - Leave Port of Spain at 6.00 a.m.
- June 9th
Lecture: "Wildlife Protection in Trinidad & Tobago - by Mr. R. French
- June 18-19th
Trip: Tobago by boat

ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE 1983 NATURAL HISTORY SEMINAR PROGRAMME

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| June 9-23rd | ENTOMOLOGY - Leaders: Ray Mendez, Betty Faber |
| June 23-July 7th | ORNITHOLOGY - Leaders: John Yrizzary, David Simon |
| July 7-23rd | TROPICAL ECOLOGY - Leaders: John Mogle, Jo-Ann Worthington |
| July 21-Aug 4th | DRAWING AND PAINTING FROM NATURE - Leader: Steve Quinn |
| Aug 4-18th | NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY - Leaders: Herman Kitchen, Paul Jeheber |

Participation Fee is \$800.00

Junior Members of the Club are invited to apply to the Management Committee of the Club for one of the four (4) Scholarships offered in each category. Applications should be addressed to:-

THE PRESIDENT
ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE
64 ROBERTS STREET
WOODBROOK

FIELD TRIP TO POINT RADIX ON 30th OCTOBER 1982 (V. QUESNEL)

This overnight camp at the estate of Mr. AVP. Scott attracted only nine people possibly because the day was overcast and rainy. We had the use of the spacious verandah at the house and after settling in the botanists explored the area. There was not a great deal of interest apart from borache, Tabernaemontana psychotrifolia, which was in flower and made a pretty display. Randia aculeata the spiny plant so common on the periphery of the ~~estate~~ Moruga Bouffe and Solanum seaforthianum, a vine of the tomato family. The biggest find however, was sexual plants of an unidentified Duggena (Gonzalagenia) which is also common at Moruga but whose flowers are about half the size of those of Duggena hirsuta a common plant in northern Trinidad. One of the forest types described by Marshall, the Acurel-Moussara type, is said to be found at Point Radix. However, the botanists could find neither an Acurel nor a Moussara. This is probably due to the fact that the region is highly cultivated and most of the natural forest has been destroyed.

I also made a partial list of birds seen as follows: barred antshrike, Jacamar, Peppershrike, Kiskadee, Boat-billed kiskadee, tropical kingbird blue tanager, blue and yellow tanager, yellow oriole, great antshrike, frigate birds and corbeaux. There was also one unidentified bird which did not resemble anything in French's book but in colour and pattern came closest to a pine warbler, (Audubon Bird guide) a species not known to visit Trinidad.

In the late evening Indira Omah-Maharaj set up her light trap for collecting blood-sucking bugs but caught instead only wasps and moths which were of no immediate interest.

After a restful night in relative comfort we joined the others coming from Port-of-Spain for the trip to Bush-Bush.

BUSH-BUSH (David Rooks + Frankie Farrell)

As on a previous occasion access to Bush-Bush was only possible by boat. A family of East Indian ancestry provided a flat-bottomed swamp boat which was powered by an outboard motor. This family lives in a house at the 46th milepost on the road running down Trinidad's east coast and which is adjacent to the canal which leads from the point where it meets the main road into the swamp right up to Bush-Bush. The fare per person was \$5.00 as asked for by a son of the family in the morning. This was changed to a higher rate by the mother on the return of the party resulting in a certain amount of bickering between myself (David) and herself. I won the day however by pointing out that most of the party had already left, adding the more forceful argument that I had no more money. The limited capacity of the boat made it necessary for a few trips to be made, but one enterprising member of the party brought his own means of transportation - a kavak. The journey in is about one kilometre in length.

The canal is spectacular. At the beginning trees (unidentified) with aerial roots form an arch over the canal. These are followed by a grove of red mangroves (Phizophora mangle) and then this canal bursts out into an open, treeless area. Here can be seen an amaryllis (Crinum erubescens), a weed (Ludwigia spp.), a giant sedge (Cyperus giganteus), a giant aroid (Montrichardia arborescens) and a wild ^{one} white roseau (Cyperium sagittatum). In the distance the two great palms, (Roystonea oleracea and Mauritia setigera), can be seen. The water was alive with guppies and birds were everywhere. Among the birds seen were marsh tyrants, callinules, yellow headed marshbirds, turkey vultures and up in the moriche (Mauritia) and palmiste (Roystonea) palms red-belly nacksaws, with flocks of them flying in every direction. This was the largest number of nacksaws seen by any member of the club within recent years. The final approach to Bush-Bush Island is again canopied over by trees with stilt roots growing out of the water.

Near to the landing on the North side of Bush-Bush is the caretaker's house. Surrounding a considerable area around the house is a barbed wire fence within which are corralled a herd of some 40 to 50 cows. Apparently the original caretaker when the Regional Virus Laboratory began its research on the island was allowed to keep a cow to supply him with milk. The son of the original caretaker, who now seems to consider the island to be his own farm, has escalated the original permission to mean permission to keep a herd. As a result this part of the island, which is an official Nature Reserve, is being despoiled of its vegetation, as the cows are eating everything except the poisonous aroids and the thorny roseau (Bactris spp). Even the trees are being stripped of their bark and are dying. Fortunately Victor Quesnel, our representative on the Wild Life Protection Committee, has brought the matter up to the Committee and the decision was to have the Solicitor General write the man instructing him to remove his cows.

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FIELD TRIP TO MOUNT CHAGUARAMAL ON 30th JANUARY, 1983 (David Rooks and Frankie Farrell)

Mount Chaguaramal is on a spur running south from the main east-west ridge of the Northern Range. It is some 846 metres high and rivals in height and is near to Cerro del Aripo, Trinidad's highest peak.

There were about sixty seven (67) persons in the party among whom was a family with four small children who were not members of the club.

After the cars were parked and before the climb was started I (Frankie) addressed the party warning them against straying from the group, and advising them to look out for snakes especially when stepping over logs and asking them to carry back their own non-biodegradable litter. As there were some seven or eight children in the group I advised their parents that the club could undertake no responsibility for them. I also informed them that we were using as our guide the description of this trail given in the book, *Nature Trails of Trinidad*, written by Richard French and Peter Bacon. As Richard French was one of the party he gave a short description of what we would see on the trail.

Starting about 9.00 a.m. we found evidence of heavy logging on the mountain as the trail was deeply rutted. The first few hundred metres were through obviously semi-abandoned agricultural land. The transition into the forest was abrupt and we soon got into what appeared to be untouched forest with a good canopy and an abundance of epiphytes. This of course was not surprising because we were in an area with nearly the highest rainfall in the island.

Animals are not easily seen on a hike such as this one as many of them are nocturnal and if they happen to be out during the day they are frightened off by the noise made by such a large party and possibly the smell of human beings. We did however see a hunter's sentry post high up on a tree, built from forest saplings tied between two trees with vines used for rope.

Richard French led the way at first and everything went according to the description in the book. He had to leave us, however, at 10.30 a.m. as he had another engagement. About an hour later we came up against a sheer rock face which it would have been foolhardy to attempt to climb. The marks indicating the trail, which were said to be surveyor's marks in the book and which had been made some years ago, had petered out and we did not know where to turn.

Exploration was started in two directions on either side of a ravine. The group on the right side were successful in finding a way to go, and they called on the rest of the party who were waiting to come over to them. Unfortunately there was a break in the group and only some went over making up a party of twenty three (23). Then because of garbled or unheard messages this advance group became separated from the rest of the party including the exploratory group on the left side of the ravine. Those left behind after waiting in boredom for well over an hour eventually turned back and went down to the parked cars, arriving there about 2.30 p.m.

The advance party continued up the mountain following what appeared to be a path which eventually faded into the forest. The guide book was of no use at this stage as marks on neither trees nor rocks could be seen. Using a compass to keep in a definite direction progress was made through the forest undergrowth. Eventually the ridge of the spur was reached and it was decided to travel upwards along the ridge. Unfortunately this part of the ridge was nearly devoid of trees and was covered by thick bush locally called "lastro".

Without informing the leaders of the group the family with four children and two other members of the group decided to turn back and did so making it impossible for them to be dissuaded.

Cutting through the "lastro" took nearly one hour but eventually the top of the peak was reached and this was verified when the surveyor's mark was found.

Among the interesting plants seen was one locally known as Mammoo. This interesting plant was very plentiful. It starts growth on the ground but very soon climbs up the trees by means of its aerial roots. Some people think it is a palm because its leaves resemble those of a germinating palm but it is a member of the Cyclanthaceae. Until the section of the Trinidad Flora containing the descriptions of this family's members is completed, I (Frankie) will not know its scientific name. Another interesting plant seen was one looking like a Calathea of the family Marantaceae but different from any Calathea we have so far seen. Victor Quesnel collected a flowering specimen but found it was unrepresented in the herbarium and is apparently a new record for Trinidad. Among the "lastro" on the way up to the peak growing on the limestone rock Victor also found a bromeliad (*Vriesia glutinosa*). Apparently this rather large bromeliad is endemic in areas such as El Tucuche, Cerro del Aripo and Chaguaramal. It has also been found bathed in spray by the Maracas Falls. Also found on the ridge by Victor were several

examples of a Rubaceous plant with large stipules. Specimens were collected and later identified as *Guettarda crispiflora*, an uncommon plant in Trinidad.

The advance group got back to the parked cars at about 4.00 p.m. It was soon discovered that the small group that had separated themselves from the others had not returned. They had obviously lost their way. A conference was held and maps consulted as to possible routes by which the group might come down. Four groups were set up and three of them sent in different directions to bracket the base of the mountain. The fourth group stayed by the cars. By 5.30 p.m. the missing group had still not been sighted. Darkness would soon be setting in and fears for the safety of the group increased.

It was decided to make a further attempt and two groups were formed. One went along the trail to Chaguaramal and another along a trail which we thought led to the Aripo cave. An electric torchlight was borrowed from a family living on a small plantation near the beginning of the trail. The group that thought it was going towards the Aripo cave soon found themselves in a ravine which led them to the trail leading up to Chaguaramal. The other group fortunately was led by Colin Agostini. Colin travels faster than practically everybody else in the Club and he left the members of his group behind. We had decided that the search parties would turn back at 6.00 p.m. and Colin had not yet contacted the missing group at this time. He was about to turn back but decided to make a last call. He heard a faint cry in reply and going further up met the very relieved lost party. The Club is grateful to Colin for his contribution to the search.

On coming down to the plantation we found that a group of villagers, armed with cutlasses and torches, had been organized to carry on the search. I (Frankie) spoke to them and thanked them.

It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good and we hope that this incident will emphasize to members the necessity of keeping together on a trail especially when it is not a clear trail or is not well known.

CONTINUATION OF BUSH-BUSH (D. Rooks + F. Farrell)

The zoological group, including Ed and Flo Kroeker and myself (David) looked for birds and monkeys and saw little of either. The sounds of red howler monkeys were followed for hours by some of this group but none were seen. Another section saw one red howler. Other animals seen were a group of about six *Tityras* in a match-wood tree (Jereton) and two or three *mattes* (Tegu).

The botany group comprising among others, Victor Quesnel, Yasmine Baksh, Paul Comeau and myself (Frankie), had a wonderful time identifying plants including some of the forest trees. The forest shows obvious signs of having been exploited. Permission to take out timber was given by the Forest Department some years ago and the effects of this can be seen: the canopy is by no means complete and secondary growth can be seen from time to time. Among the trees recognised were: figuier (*Ficus amazonica*), crappo (*Carapa guianensis*), olivier (*Terminalia dichotoma*), five leaf fiddlewood (*Vitex capitata*) and mahoe (*Sterculia caribaea*). Other plants found were: *Vittaria lineata*, a fern, *Aschnosiphon arouma*, the tirite or basket making plant; *Phaseolus pilosus*, a legume; *Hirtella racemosa*, a member of the Rose Family; *Dioscorea cayennensis*, the yellow yam; and *Sarcostemma clausum*, a member of the Asclepiadaceae.

Enquiries about manatees confirmed that they are still to be found in the swamp. One informant claimed they were not found around Bush-Bush but were plentiful in the Mitán River. Here then is another motive to visit the Nariva Swamp: to find the manatee.

Luisa Zuniaga
Honorary Secretary