

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

MEETINGS - 3rd 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 July 14th, August 11th and September 8th 1983 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

LECTURES AND FIELD TRIPS FOR THE QUARTER

July 14th - Lecture 'Coastal Environment' by Mr. C. Deane

31st - Trip to Erin Savanna (Leave POS at 6.00 a.m.)

Aug. 11th - Lecture - 'Protected Areas: Preservation or Conservation?' by Miss M. Alkins

28th - Trip to Galeota Point (Leave POS at 6.00 a.m.)

Sept. 8th - Lecture - 'Soil, a Natural Resource' by Dr. F. Gumbs

25th - Trip to Alcindor Trace (Leave POS at 6.00 a.m.)

FIELD TRIP TO THE MORUGA BOUFFE ON 27th FEBRUARY 1983 (V. Quesnel)

On a couple of occasions before we have failed to find the bouffe so this time a small party scouted the area two weeks before the trip and found that most of the paths in the area seem to avoid the bouffe and that the best way in was to follow a compass bearing of north-west from the path that enters the forest just north of the iron bridge about 2 km from the parking place.

The day of the field trip saw the usual large crowd of hikers assemble. The walk to the iron bridge was notable for the thousands of grasshoppers that we saw denuding the wayside shrubs of their leaves. The grasshoppers, all of only a single species, were so numerous that their droppings sounded like falling rain.

On entering the forest we followed a north-west compass bearing ignoring any paths and though we sometimes had an uncomfortable time cutting a way through the innumerable clumps of pic-moe (*Bactris* sp.) we eventually reached the bouffe at the very same point by which we had entered two weeks before.

The open area (or tassik) of the bouffe is much smaller than it was two or three years ago. Trees have appeared on what was formerly open mud-flat and there was also much more low vegetation such as sedges, vines, herbs and bromeliads. The Botany Group made a rough survey of the main relatively open area so that the situation now could be compared with the situation encountered on any subsequent visit. The Botany Group also collected many plants and attempted to note all the species growing on the tassik. These plants have not previously been listed in a Quarterly Bulletin but, Frankie Farrell, in the special issue of the Naturalist published to celebrate the club's 90th birthday, described and listed the 17 plants he had found there. To this list we can now add the following (identified by Yasmin Baksh): the orchids *Epidendrum fragans* and *Epidendrum rigidum*, the bromeliad *Hohenbergia stellata*, the tree *Clusia minor* (Guttiferae), the composite *Mikania micrautha*, the shrub *Eauwolfia ligustrina* (Apocynaceae), the sedge *Eleocharis geniculata* and the fern *Polypodium ?repens*. At the edge of the tassik in among the *Randia aculeata* we had found previously there were several specimens of *Randia formosa* which is similar to *Randia aculeata* but without thorns and with larger fruit. The calabash that grows near the bouffe remains unidentified.

I received no reports of zoological collections or observations. However I observed 2 nests apparently of the Tropical kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*), one with 2

FIELD TRIP TO MORUGA BOUFFE Continued

eggs and the other with 2 young ones. Both nests were only about 2¹/₂ m, up in Pluchea shrubs.

After leaving the bouffe David Rooks and a small party tried to find the large silk cotton tree to the north of the bouffe but without success. This is the largest tree (in girth) any of us has seen. However I believe that Peter Dickson did find the tree.

FIELD TRIP TO TACARIB AND MADAMAS BAYS ON APRIL 23rd-24th 1983 (David Rooks and Frankie Farrell)

Tacarib Bay on the Northern coast of Trinidad and to the East of it Madamas Bay are remote areas and probably as a result of this they are frequented by leatherback turtles (*Dermodelphys*) in the laying season, March to July. The Club for some considerable time has been making yearly trips to this area to observe and tag the turtles.

On the trip in question the journey to Blanchisseuse was made by car along the North Coast Road. At Blanchisseuse the Police obligingly gave permission for the cars to be parked in their compound. Arrangements had been made for some members of the party to travel by boat while the others walked. The walkers were assisted along the early part of their trail by cars as far as it was possible to do so. Driven by members of the group who were travelling by boat, the cars were returned to Blanchisseuse. Thirteen persons travelled by boat, and approximately twenty-five walked.

The trip by boat was moderately rough as is usual at this time of the year. From time to time the bows of the boats would rise high in the air on a wave and then would come crashing down on the next wave. At times spray would come flying into the boat. This type of sea was nothing that the two pirogues could not handle. The journeys to and from were uneventful, but what was very noticeable was a surprising number of poui trees (*Tabebuia serratifolia*) in full flower on the mountain side. The type of forest in this area is described by Marshall as the foothill type or by Beard as deciduous, seasonal forest and the poui is one of its components but I (Frankie) had not realized that they were so plentiful until I saw this brilliant display.

On arrival at Tacarib it immediately became evident that there was considerable laying activity on the beach as could be seen from the characteristic disturbed areas in the sand above high watermark. This augured well for the success of the expedition. We also found that Glen Wilkes and a companion had arrived before us and had set up their tent. This intrepid member had come over from Blanchisseuse in his Kayak. We wondered how he had weathered the heavy seas and he replied that he had hugged the coast. To me (Frankie) it did not seem to matter whether he was close in or far out as the waves seemed just as big near the coast as they were outside.

After camp had been set up and lunch eaten a small party took the approximately one hour hike to Madamas Bay. The Madamas River, before entering the sea, forms a small lagoon, the surface of which was covered partly by a floating alga (unidentified). Here the party saw an otter fishing. Probably because of the remoteness of the area it did not appear to be at all disturbed by the presence of human beings. In colour it was a rich mahogany brown with white under the throat and grey under the rest of the underside. In length it measured approximately one metre. Moving gracefully and smoothly in the water and diving from time to time it eventually caught a fish about half its length. Using its mouth and forepaws to carry the fish it eventually went up a tributary channel of the lagoon and disappeared.

Soon after nightfall the moon came up and it was not long before the first turtle was seen. The fact that it came up on a falling tide, close to low, dispelled the theory that turtles only come up to lay on a rising tide. In all eleven turtles were seen and five were tagged, the last actually returning to the sea in daylight at 6.15 a.m.

While walking to Madamas Bay and along the beach at Tacarib I (Frankie) could not help but notice a remarkable uniformity and simplicity of the littoral vegetation. It was made up mainly of Scotch Attorney (*Clusia* spp., mainly *Rosea*), Almond (*Terminalia catappa*), Seaside Grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*), Coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) with the occasional Seaside Mahoe (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*) and *Dalbergia* spp. Along Tacarib the coconuts were of course quite numerous and on the sand just above the high water line was the inevitable creeper (*Pomaea pes-caprae*) and a grass I have not yet

FIELD TRIP TO TACARIB continued

identified. Where it was rocky there was an undergrowth of the bromeliad (*Pitcairnia integrifolia*). On the walk to Madamas I collected a plant which I think was a *Phyllanthus*, but, because of a delay in pressing and drying it, it was not in a condition for easy identification.

We broke camp on the Sunday at 10.00 a.m. the boats coming for us about 12 noon. The return boat journey was uneventful. As we were travelling downwind the waves coming from behind would pick us up carrying us at a faster rate for a time and slowing us down after passing over the crest with the boat wavering from side to side all the time. On arriving at Blanchisseuse some of the cars went back as far as they could along the road to help the group of walkers along the last part of the route.

FIELD TRIP TO CALTOO TRACE ON 29th MAY 1983 (V. Quesnel)

One of the objectives of this trip was to see whether the directions given in French and Bacon's Nature Trails of Trinidad are reliable and I am happy to say that we had no difficulty either getting to Caltoo Trace or following the trail to Sand Hill. This locality is on the north-eastern edge of the Nariva Swamp and is used for the cultivation of rice. There was little of botanical interest on the walk to Sand Hill but birds were fairly numerous. The following were sighted: the washerwoman (*Fluvicola pica*), the jacana (*Jacana jacana*), the Azure gallinule, a rare and recently reported species not listed in French's book, a grey hawk (*Buteo nitidus*), Amazon parrots (*Amazona amazonica*), the Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*), the Golden Oriole (*Icterus nigrogularis*) and the ruddy-breasted seedeater (*Sporophila minuta*). We did not see the twa-twa (*Oryzoborus crassirostris*) in the wild but there was one in a cage at the home of the only inhabitant of Sand Hill. This bird was said to have been caught in the area.

The trail from Caltoo Trace ends at a river which in reality is a drainage canal. We were ferried across in a boat belonging to the only inhabitant after Glen Wilkes swam across the river to inform him of our need. Sand Hill itself is a small low hill, probably not more than a few hectares in extent and only a few metres above water level. It has a rather depleted forest. The trees I recognized were hog plum (*Spondias mombin*) bois mulatre (*Pentaclethra macroloba*), cajuca (*Myristica surinamensis*), incense (*Protium guianenses*) and *Amocloua corymbosa*. There were also some vines and low herbs such as *Monotagma*.

We saw no iguanas but several of their nests had been dug up by dogs so we know they were present. There were sightings of five other lizards: the skink (*Mabuya mabouya*) the zandolie (*Ameiva ameiva*) the 24-hours (*Thecadactylus rapicaudus*) the matte (*Tupinambis nigropunctatus* and *Plica plica*). There were two other reptiles, the snakes *Liophis cobella* and *Leptophis ahaetulla* and the Paradox frog was very plentiful in the swamp.

I was delayed in leaving by attempts to catch some cicadas and to find my binocular case (which Glen Wilkes retrieved for me for the second time) and this allowed me and my two companions to hear and see a small group of Howler monkeys which began calling as a shower of rain descended.

A COLLECTING TRIP IN THE TRINITY HILLS AREA (V. Quesnel)

By arrangement with the Parish Priest, Yasmin Baksh, Paul Comeau and I spent 3 days at the Catholic Presbytery in Mayaro (26-28 April 1983) from which we explored the Trinity Hills area. The first afternoon was spent south of the Trinity Hills in a rather dry forest with few species. The most notable find was the tree *Apeiba schomburgi* which has fruit like sea urchins and which I had seen before only at Monos and Lady Chancellor Road. The second day was spent at Lagon Bouffe and in walking up a ravine south of the bouffe. This bouffe differs from the Moruga Bouffe in several ways. The tassik or open area is under water and there are no cones like those at Moruga. Only one vent on the south was above the water level by a few centimetres, so the 'Cone' was practically flat. Gas bubbled up from below the surface of the water. The vegetation near the bouffe is a little different from that of Moruga and deserves some study. For example there are no *Randia* plants or Calabash. In the ravine the most notable find was *Calathea altissima*, an uncommon Marantaceous plant. Notable birds: a white hawk and a flock of about 30 Plumbeous kites (*Ictinia plumbea*).

A COLLECTING TRIP Continued

The third day was spent in Mora forest north of Trinity Hills. Botanically this was very like the Mora forests in Matura. We saw many common birds including green Hermit hummingbirds and toucans and heard bell birds and red howler monkeys. The most exciting discovery was a male Scarlet-tanager, a spectacular bird not listed in French's book but seen three or four times before in Trinidad. On the way back to Mayaro we saw a small flock of Fork-tailed kites (Elanoides forficatus). Many thanks to Fr. Cyril Ward C. S. Sp. for making possible this very useful collecting trip.

L. Zuniaga
Hon. Secretary