

THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

BULLETIN for 2nd QUARTER 1984

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 Thursdays April 12th, May 10th and June 14th 1984 at 5.30 p.m.

A G E N D A

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

LECTURES AND FIELD TRIPS FOR THE QUARTER

April 12th - Lecture "The Rubiaceae of Trinidad" by Dr. V. C. Quesnel

" 28/29th - Trip to TACARIB (Camp) (Leave POS 7.00a.m.)

May 10th - Lecture "Peripatus, the improbable animal" by Mr. Morley Read

" 27th - Trip to EL TUCUCHE (Leave POS 7.00 a.m.)

June 14th - Lecture "Twenty-five years of ornithology in Trinidad and Tobago" by Mr. Richard French.

" 23/24th - Trip to TOBAGO (Camp) (Leave Friday evening 22nd)

NEW MEMBERS

What to expect from the Club and what the Club expects of you

1. The Club has monthly lectures/meetings and outings which you are invited to attend. When on outings members are required to observe the objectives of the Club, especially in the conservation of Nature and natural resources which of course demands that the surroundings be left as intact and as clean as possible. All garbage should be taken back with you to be disposed of and not left for other members to have to collect. No musical instruments should be brought on field trips to the forests - on these trips we want to listen to the music of nature. Every member should bring along his or her basic requirements for the day i.e. water and food.
2. Quarterly bulletins are sent to all financial members. The annual subscription becomes payable in January so that your 1984 subs are due.
3. Biennially you will receive a copy of the Club's Journal "Living World".

HAVE YOU LOST AN UMBRELLA - A ladies' blue folding umbrella was found in the Audio-Visual Room after the January meeting. Should it belong to any member please contact the Secretary otherwise it would be handed to the authorities of the College.

** SPECIAL LECTURE ON APRIL 6th 1984 on REPRODUCTION, GENETICS AND ORIGIN OF ALL FEMALE SPECIES OF LIZARDS by Dr. Charles J. Cole, Curator of the American Museum of Natural History. (At Audio Visual Room of St. Mary's College at 5.30 p.m.)

From Lalaja to Brasso Seco - Field trip of January 30, 1984 (V.C. Quesnel)

Originally we had intended that the party would split into two, one half going to Brasso Seco to walk to Lalaja and the other half starting at Lalaja to walk to Brasso Seco. By switching cars at the end the distance would be done only once. However, this procedure proved to be too difficult to arrange so the whole party started at Lalaja and walked to Brasso Seco and back. Those who came primarily for the hike set off at a good pace reached Brasso Seco and were back at the ridge just about the time that the botanists and ornithologists reached there on the way to Brasso Seco. It was cold and blustery on the ridge with mists swirling around us and I wished I had a thermometer to record the temperature. I speculated that the temperature was in the low seventies (old style °F). David Rooks drawing on his experience in the air conditioning business, thought it was even lower - in the sixties.

We had lunch to try to stoke up the internal fires and those who had been to Brasso Seco proceeded back to the start. Others came with me to explore the ridge leading to Morne Bleu in the hope of finding a trail. There did, indeed, seem to be some faint signs of a trail but after about 100 - 200 metres the undergrowth became very thick and we turned back. However, I do believe that we could have got to Morne Bleu if we had been prepared to spend a little more time at it and use a cutlass where necessary. The venture was worthwhile: we found a flowering specimen of Macrolobium trinitense, a leguminous tree with pretty white flowers springing out of the trunk. I had found one specimen previously at Naranja on the Club's trip of January 25, 1981, also in flower. This tree is a relatively rare endemic that has not been collected very often. Possibly it is confined to higher elevations in the Northern Range and has a brief flowering season. Both my specimens were found in flower at the end of January.

Many plants flower in the dry season, but it came as something of a surprise to find so many fallen fruit which must have come from flowers produced in the preceding wet season. Or could it be that some trees flower in one dry season and take a whole year to mature fruit which then fall in the following dry season? It is time for some one to take an interest in this subject, to try to identify the fruit and to find out how long they take to mature. The pages of the Quarterly Bulletin and our journal are open to the results of such an investigation.

Trip to Rincon Trace on February 26, 1984 (Frankie Farrell)

When the Club went to Rincon Trace in August 1982, the wrong trace was chosen and although the group found a waterfall and pool it was not the same waterfall and pool that the Club had visited in a previous year. As a result I organized an exploratory trip to the trace a week before the scheduled trip. This was quite successful as we found both the trace leading to the waterfall and pool and the trace leading over the ridge into the Maracas Valley. Unfortunately the early part of the trace to the pool was heavily overgrown and we only found it by following a very indistinct path through a cocoa plantation which was pointed out to us by an old resident of the area. The day was almost continuously rainy and overcast and possibly on account of this Denise Lee and myself on the road up to the ridge apparently stepped over a metre long mapepire possibly sleeping in the uncertain light amongst the leaves and other vegetable detritus on the ground of the somewhat overgrown trace. Possibly aroused by our passage it moved and was seen by David Rooks following some distance behind us. Using a stick he managed to throw it into the bush down the mountain side.

On the 26th February a group of some 30 persons took part. There was some rain but not as bad as on the exploratory trip. The group was offered a choice of going to the pool or climbing up to the ridge. Nine of us chose the latter including myself.

As I did not go to the pool I cannot describe what happened. One of the exploratory group offered to guide them to the trace, but unfortunately, I am given to understand, they did not find the trace at first and had to walk for quite a while before they eventually found the pool. I apologise to the members of this party for the inconvenience and am sorry that after all my plans to ensure for correct guidance something should have gone wrong.

The other section of the party had no special difficulties except that the journey was much longer than the trip to the pool. Along the lower reaches of the trace it could be seen that quite an extensive cocoa plantation was once worked in this area as was evidenced by the many immortelles in flower, as is usual at this time of the year, and the occasional fruit tree - mango, breadfruit, etc. - usually found on such estates. The cocoa trees were of course in bad shape and were obviously being replaced by secondary growth - bois canon, balsa, vismia and also some of the forest trees of the area. Three trees were observed to be in full bloom: mahoe (STERCULIA CARIBAEA), with its masses of yellow flowers turning pink, HELIOCARPUS TRICHOPODUS with its masses of pale flowers changing to a reddish brown when the fruit develop, and a rather occasional poui (TABEBUIA SERRATEFOLIA). Higher up on the mountain we walked through practically untouched forest as evidenced, among other things, by the occasional large forest tree probably well above 30 metres in height. At the ridge we found the same religious woman living in a ramshackle hut mentioned in a previous bulletin report. Getting near to the top we crossed a few times a small mountain stream cascading over the rocks. The few specimens I collected, which have not yet been identified, will be listed in a subsequent report.

I recognised that this was the same trace I walked over as a boy. The distance from the head of the Maracas Valley to Las Cuevas Bay I was given to understand at the time was nine miles and the trace was well kept. Only a small fishing village was to be found at the bay in those days and the women of the village used to walk the trace with the catch of fish in large heavy baskets balanced on their heads. Needless to say their carriage was superb and graceful and at the ridge there was a wooden cross with the inscription, "Grace a Dieu", at which the women probably would stop and repeat a prayer of thanksgiving for having reached the top of that gruelling climb.

The Silk Cotton Tree near Moruga Bouffe (Frankie Farrell)

We are indebted to David Rooks for discovering a very large Silk Cotton Tree (CEIBA PENTANDRA) near Moruga Bouffe, which may possibly be the tallest tree in Trinidad and Tobago. Glen Wilkes, our surveyor member, volunteered to determine its height and on Sunday 22nd January 1984, accompanied by Lystra and Lorna Mohammed and Dave Rammarine went to the spot carrying a hodge-podge of surveying instruments and equipment. He encountered many difficulties such as getting a long enough base line from the bottom of the tree at the other end of which an elevation could be taken of the top, and of getting an accurate vertical line from the top of the tree to the base line. Glen was not certain either that the point he used as the top of the tree was actually the highest point and he feels that the tree might be still higher. However his measurements shew the tree to be 56 metres (184 ft) high. The height of the lowest branch (not determined but estimated by sight) was about 100 ft. The height of the buttresses was 14 metres (45½ feet) and the diameter of the trunk at that point 2.7 metres (nearly 9 feet). We are hoping to make a further and more accurate measurement but already it seems reasonably certain that this is the tallest tree in Trinidad and Tobago.

NOTE: Glen has put a mark on a tree on the opposite side of the trace to the point at which the path through the forest leads to the tree.

The Journal (V. C. Quesnel)

The issue of our journal, Living World, for 1983-84 was still not back from the printer up to a week after our last meeting. I have not checked since then but I do hope it will be ready for our next meeting. I do not know the reason for the delay but it may have something to do with Inprint becoming a division of Express Newspapers. The office has been moved from St. Vincent St. to Boundary Road, San Juan, and there has been a certain amount of reorganization of staff. This issue is very late owing to a number of circumstances and it is already time to think of the next issue. Would prospective authors please start work on their papers and let me have them by September. Please give me a proper typed copy, double spaced and please use only metric units.

Our Journal is appreciated by scientifically minded visitors to our islands. To give some idea of this I quote from two recent letters.

1. "Recently I had the opportunity of getting a copy of Living World for 1981 -82, a journal which I found of great excellence".... F. Fernandez Yopez, Prof. of Entemology, Universidad Central de Venezuela.
2. "Two years ago I had the great pleasure of visiting Trinidad and Tobago and was able to obtain a copy of your journal... I was astounded by the superb quality of your journal and the wealth of information"... Dr. D. Svenne, Mansfield and District General Hospital, United Kingdom.

Letters like these make me feel the effort is worthwhile. Le us keep up the high standard.