

# THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

## MEETINGS - 3RD QUARTER 1986

You are invited to attend the monthly meetings of the club to be held on Thursdays July 10th, August 14th and September 11th 1986 at 5.30p.m. at the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College.

## A G E N D A

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

## L E C T U R E S

- \* July 10th - Recent Developments in the study of the fungus grown by Bachacs by Dr. David Stradling
- Aug. 14th - Members Evening
- Sept. 11th - Feathered Jewels - by Mr. Ian Lambie

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

- July 27th - Morne Catharine - A walk of medium length and gentle gradients from Chaguaramas.
- Aug. 24th - Pt. Tablas - Can only be reached by boat and therefore subject to suitable arrangements being made.
- Sept. 28th - Covigne River - to be advised later.

## YOU ARE ALSO INVITED TO ATTEND A

Conservation "Seminar" at Asa Wright Nature Centre on July 6, 1986

There are so many conservation matters to discuss that the Management Committee has decided to have a special meeting to deal with them. This will be held at the Asa Wright Nature Centre on Sunday 6th July starting at about 9A.M. All members are urged to attend and help to take decisions on what the club should do. Bring with you whatever you intend to eat or drink and also a stool or a cushion to sit on if you have one, because there may not be enough chairs. Members in the Port of Spain area will leave St. Mary's College, Pembroke Street at 7.30A.M. A short stop will be made at the entrance to U.P.I. at about 7.55 A.M. for members coming from south or from the St. Augustine area. Let us all help to make this meeting a success.

## First record of the nest of the Short-tailed Pigmy-Tyrant in Trinidad (V. Quesnel)

I was unable to participate in the club's field trip of 26th Jan. 1986 (I cannot remember why) but to compensate for the loss I went up the hill behind my house in the afternoon. On the way home at about 4.15p.m. I got my first sight of a Short-tailed Pigmy-Tyrant. I had no doubt about its identity for it matched the illustration and description in French exactly. It is a tiny bird about the size of a sucrier (or bananaquit if you prefer) with so short a tail that it seems to have none. In flight it is more like a beetle than a bird for the wing beats are very rapid. The call is also insect-like being a very high-pitched "srreee, srreee, srreee. I soon realized that there were two birds and that they were building a nest which was still in the early stages of construction. I visited the site on several subsequent days and found that the birds built in the afternoon from about 3 p.m. My one morning visit showed no activity. The nest, about 5m up in a Brownea latifolia tree overhanging Leotaud Trace was purse-shaped, slung from overhead leaves, had a round opening near the top and took about a week to construct. It was too far out of reach for me to see inside even with a ladder so I could not follow the subsequent course of events but now we know that Myiornis ecaudatus does indeed nest in Trinidad.

Field Trip to Toco/Matelot on 26th January 1986 (Frankie Farrell)

This trip as originally planned was to be a two day trip, travelling to Toco on the Saturday and spending the night there and then having ample time on the Sunday to travel to Matelot and spend several hours in the surrounding forest. Perhaps because of the Christmas season this was not arranged and instead the plan was to explore the Grande Riviere Sangre Grande Road with the alternative for those who did not wish to explore an unknown road to go to Shark River. It was not known to the organizers of the trip whether the Grande Riviere Sangre Grande Road was in good order or whether it was still possible to go right through to Sangre Grande.

As arranged the party divided into two, an unknown number going to Shark River and 28 exploring the Grande Riviere Sangre Grande Road. Lead by Glenn Wilkes and Dave Ramnarine the party started off. The road was well defined and of easy gradient. After a while a fork in the road was reached and the left branch was taken. For a while the road was in good condition but unfortunately it was found out eventually that the wrong branch was taken as the road petered out into the bush of an abandoned cocoa plantation. On the return to the fork the other branch was taken. Glenn and Dave went ahead at their usual rapid pace leaving the others far behind. The road led through a well forested area and was reasonably good although at some points somewhat muddy. Glenn and Dave, who travelled further than any other members of the party, reported on their return that they had reached a bridge at the furthest point, that the road was in reasonably good condition and that they had not reached an end point as the road appeared to be continuing further into the forest.

Unfortunately not much collecting was done. Paul and Yasmin Comeau were collecting for the Herbarium but I have not got a list of their findings. Nor have I got a list of the birds seen or butterflies caught. I collected at the side of the road the ground orchid *Spiranthes* but the species has not been determined.

What has emerged from this exploratory trip is that at least along part of the way there is virgin forest and it would be well worth organizing another trip to collect and observe properly the flora and fauna.

Field trip to the Aripo Savanna on 23rd February 1986. (V. Quesnel)

This trip attracted only 23 people but it proved to be a very interesting one with the savanna at its radiant best. We visited the study plot established by the Botany Group for the study of the flowering behaviour of the savanna plants. No grasses or sedges were flowering in the plot but outside of it a few *Lagenocarpus* and *Rhynchospora* (sedges) had begun to flower. Within the plot several species of *Utricularia* (bladderworts) were still flowering with small numbers of *Perama*, *Sauvagesia* (2 species) and *Polygala*. Of the common orchids, one *Cyrtopodium* *broadwayi* and several *Otostylis* *brachystalyx* and *Epistephium* *parviflorum* were in flower.

A pair of bat falcons occupied a dead moriche palm to the east of our entrance point and was probably the same pair observed to the west of the same point on an overnight camp last year by members of a joint Botany Group and Bird Group excursion. One Peregrine Falcon was sighted but there was no sign of the Southern Lapwings we had seen on several visits last year. Scott Alston Smith collected caterpillars on a *Unica* feeding on the flowers of *Mabea* *taquari* (a Euphorb) and two or three members photographed tree islands as the start of a programme of annual or biennial photography to determine changes caused by fire.

Field trip to Fishing Pond on 23rd March 1986 (V. Quesnel)

After several wrong turns on the way we arrived at Fishing Pond to find that the Ministry of Agriculture Station was abandoned. We hoped to make our way to the beach by a different way from the one we had taken on our last visit but this proved to be impossible. So we waded through the swampy areas as we had done before but along the way we saw many birds including a large flock of the Giant Cowbird, the Yellow-hooded Blackbird, the Barred Antshrike, the Black-crested Antshrike, a Squirrel Cuckoo, and a Grey-headed Kite among many other more common birds. Heard but not seen was the Eared Dove. There were many swamp-loving birds such as herons and sandpipers but I am not very familiar with these so I hesitate to name them.

On the beach, one party went south to the smoking cliff and another went north to the river mouth. The conclusion on the smoking cliff is that one seam of lignite of several known in the area may have been ignited by a forest fire and that it is still burning slowly providing the smoke that is easily visible from out at sea.

Not far from the point at which we got to the beach there was a patch of mangrove which includes some species of Rhizophora that is not mangle and is either racemosa or Harrisonii. The trip to the river mouth produced nothing of any particular interest. There were no signs of turtle nests and no sea tatoo (Emerita portoricensis)

A leguminous tree growing in some numbers along the bank of a stream was covered in purple flowers and had, as well, curious flattened pods curved around to form almost a complete circle. I collected specimens and ran them through the key in the flora the identification coming out as Drepanocarpus lunatus. However, Yasmin Comeau thinks it may not have been that so more specimens on another occasion could be useful. The only other uncommon plant we saw was a palm we believe to be Scheelea but there is no way to be sure unless the photos Frankie took allow a certain identification later on, and this is unlikely.

BIRDING Notes from Sylvia Kacal

(1) Common Stilt (Himantopus himantopus)

A Stilt was observed nesting in the Laventille Swamp in the first week in June. Eggs were seen. (Detta Buch, Sylvia Kacal, Ramesh Buch)

(2) Pigmy Owl (Glaucidium brasilianum)

In Mid May I witnessed a Pigmy Owl being mobbed by Mockingbirds. The Mockingbirds assisted by some Kiskadees continuously divebombed and struck the owl long after it was dead. Whether they killed it I do not know. We do see Pigmy Owls being mobbed in the forest by smaller birds, but harmlessly. Has anyone seen one being killed? or read about it? Any suggestions why? The only reason I can think of is that it might have been interfering with a Mockingbird nest.

(3) Mucurapo Foreshore - River mouth

Detta Buch spotted a Rufous Necked Wood-Rail and I saw it with her two days later on May 6th. According to French these birds are more common on the offshore islands and are very shy.

A subsequent survey done by Detta Buch, Graham White, Paul Christopher and myself on May 10th in the early morning at low tide listed 30 birds and a mongoose. No really comprehensive survey of the area has been done yet, but the list from the river mouth to the lookout has lengthened to 35. Amongst these were the 3 usual types of Egret, 4 Herons including the Yellow Crowned Night Heron, other wading and shore birds including a number of Ruddy Turnstones, Willets, Cormorants and an Osprey. Forktailed Flycatchers began to appear from early May, and of course the list includes some of the more ubiquitous birds such as the Ruddy Ground Dove.

The wading birds probably feed on the Fiddler Crabs. Fish have been seen in the river and a number of mollusc shells (still to be identified) have been picked up on the shore, and even a dead porcupine fish.

This apparently abandoned wasteland is very rich in wildlife, particularly at low tide. It is the last remnants of miles of mangrove swamp. Let us hope it will not be destroyed.

N.B. A stray Flamingo was recorded there last year.

Especially for those who do not attend meetings: Your Management Committee have agreed to form a group called the CIA (Conservation in Action) whose job would be to look for and cut out articles in the newspapers dealing with the flora and Fauna of Trinidad and Tobago including any legislation passed or to be passed and the filing of same. Volunteers are required. Those who can assist please contact The Secretary or Assistant Secretary, or any member of the Management Committee.

Especially for those who attended the trip to Fishing Pond in March 1986

A pair of sneakers was found by your President after everyone else had left the scene and was entrusted to me. I have it in the trunk of my car. Can the owner please contact me or collect it at our next meeting. Or, could it belong to a friend who came along. Thanks for your assistance.

\*The 10th of July is our 95th Anniversary and since it is our meeting day we are wondering whether we could celebrate with a little sharing after the meeting. This will involve everyone bringing something to eat or drink OR getting together and bringing accordingly. How about it. However, NO Hard Drinks Please.

Luisa Zuniaga  
Honorary Secretary  
June 18, 1986.