

# THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

## 4TH QUARTER 1986

You are invited to attend the monthly meetings of the club to be held on Thursdays October 9th and November 13th 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

- Oct. 9th - Up-date On National Parks of Trinidad and Tobago  
by Mr. Ronald Bickram
- Nov. 13th - Around Trinidad by Kayak by Mr. Glenn Wilkes

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

- Oct. 26th - Rincon Trace - A walk of moderate length and medium gradients partly through estate lands.
- Nov. 29/30th - Camp at Forestry Quarry Road Rest House (if available) and Erin Savannah.
- December - Our only activity is the Christmas Party - You are also invited to assist with the planning of same and attending.

### CAMP at Matura and field trip to Rio Seco - 26/27th April 1986 - (V. Quesnel)

I was unable to participate in the camp on 26th April so joined the party on 27th April at about 9a.m. I was shown some cigales on the coconut palms that had been singing previously but they were silent now and I could get no account of the sound nor a specimen so the identity of the beast remains unknown. I am trying to relate cigale songs to their owners but progress has been remarkably slow owing to the difficulty of obtaining singing specimens. However, I welcome dead specimens, however obtained, from any member of the club.

We then proceeded to Matura Trace where we found the forest alongside the trace being cut and burnt preparatory to planting with vegetable crops. For me this was a disaster as this is one of only two locations where I have seen *Posoqueria trinitatis*, a beautiful rube with extraordinarily long tubular, white, fragrant flowers. I could see none and they may have been entirely extirpated. The track we followed after leaving the cars had suffered from logging operations being wider than before and gouged out so that it was not nearly as interesting or pleasant as it was previously. It was a relief to leave it finally and get into untouched Mora forest. However, there was nothing new and I collected no specimens.

### TRIP to Charlotteville, Tobago - 24/25th May 1986 - (L. Zuniaga & L. Ahwai)

All in all 26 members made the trip to Tobago. Although we had been told that we would have had 19 beds and a number of mattresses it ended up that the beds and mattresses included double beds and double mattresses and we had no couples so that again we had accommodation problems as some members objected to sleeping in company. After trying to sort things out on arrival (at midnight) it was very disappointing to find out the following morning that our eldest member who incidentally had been one of the first to book and pay, had ended up sleeping on the ground. However, thanks to Mr. Critchlow for being the real naturalist he is and accepting things without complaint - made life easier.

In the company of Mrs. Turpin and a guide we set out on Saturday morning for our planned hike to the Louis & O. River valley. Unfortunately our guide seemed to be more interested in learning from us and did not keep pace with our hikers who never got to the falls as the way was not easily accessible and the guide has stayed back with Mr. Critchlow and Mrs. Turpin. A small group led by Linda Ahwai tried to be botanists and birdwatchers and among what was identified were lots of rubber trees in fruit (*CASHEA ELASTICA*), deer meat, (*CEMPEROPHON SURINAMENSIS*), very large healthy looking cocoa trees which appeared to be more vegetative than productive, *Cristina* spp., *Cactus* spp., Bois caou (*CECROPIA PECTATA*), Balisier spp. members of the Malvaceae and Piperaceae, Bois flot in fruit (*OCRODIA LAGOPUS*). Of special interest to the group was a huge bromeliad on a bamboo - we could not recall seeing a bromeliad on a bamboo before.

On the Sunday, accompanied by David Beck we went to the Goldsborough River valley and waterfall which everyone thoroughly enjoyed - not only because of the bathing but in seeing how many cliff climbers we had in the group. The roads leading to Goldsborough were quite bad in some places and at a treacherous point one of the cars stalled and those behind were already getting ready to park and walk when it was discovered that it was not because of the road but that the fuel filter had given way. Luckily for us all, Neville Achan, the perfect scout and camper that he is, had a filter which fitted and that saved the day. Having David with us we forgot to make notes, but Neville Achan reported having seen a very swift moving snake which looked like a machete, and of course lots of birds. The birds identified on the Saturday were - a Rufous-tailed Jacamar nesting on a cocoa tree, male and female Barred antshrike, the crested oropendola and the occasional motmots.

#### Field Trip to Caltoo Trace on 29th June 1986 (V. Quesnel)

This was the Sunday of the World Cup final and everyone was eager to return in time to see the match on TV so we made the outing a short one. On arriving at the canal that separates Sand Hill from the northwest part of the Nariva Swamp we were ferried over by the sole occupant of the hill. He had some captive song birds and claimed to have captured the two-twa only a day or two before. The area had changed considerably from our previous visit. The northern part of the hill had been cleared of forest and had a scrub and grass vegetation struggling to occupy the space between casava and melons in the obviously infertile sand. Yellow Allamanda, a cultivated plant, had run wild and provided a touch of bright colour. There were a lot of small finches around as well as other common birds and in spite of the clearing the area seemed attractive to birds. We saw, too, several lizards; Cnemidophorus lemniscatus, the zandolie Ameiva ameiva, Anolis chrysolepis, Plica plica and many Iguana eggs that had either hatched or been dug up by dogs. All in all it seemed a good place for an overnight camp in the dry season. In the wet season mosquitoes would eat us alive.

#### Attempted trip to Pt. Tablas on 24th August 1986 (V. Quesnel)

Originally we had hoped to visit Pt. Tablas by boat. As this could not be arranged we tried to get there by walking through the forest and along the beach. The forest is poor in species because of the sandy soil with many Sabal palms and some cabbage palms. Two large yellow three-lobed fruit about the size of a grapefruit were tentatively identified as the fruit of Omphalea diandra or Omphalea magacarpa (Hunterman's Nut), probably the latter. These plants are the food plants of the White-tailed Page, Urania leilus, a day flying moth that is always found in small numbers but occasionally migrates in huge swarms numbering millions. From the top of a sheer cliff we looked down on the beach we were trying to reach. Perched in a Clusia (?) tree was a bird I had never seen before but one I tentatively identified as the Brown-crested flycatcher, Myiarchus tyrannulus, of which French says "a fairly common but local resident in Tobago; much less common in Trinidad".

Having got to the beach we proceeded to a headland to the west but could not get around it without being thoroughly soaked so returned to the eastern end and had lunch. A column of army ants appeared, scouring the beach for prey and rock-dwelling crustaceans began scurrying out of hiding, cascading down the beach in an attempt to escape the ants. It was a scene of amazing activity and destruction. Nothing seemed to be too big for the ants to tackle. They attacked and immobilized crabs as easily as the smaller crustaceans. In a few minutes towards the end of the onslaught I counted 30 victims so the total haul would have been much greater.

I append some notes on army ants taken from an article by T.C. Schneirla and Gerard Piel that appeared in Scientific American in the 1950s and was republished in Twentieth Century Bestiary, Simon & Schuster in 1955.

The army ant never builds a permanent nest. It lives in temporary bivouacs and goes on periodic raids from the bivouac. *Eciton hamatum* (which may or may not be our species) spends 17 days in a nomadic phase in which the location of the bivouac is changed every night and 19 or 20 days in a fixed bivouac. It goes into fixed bivouac when the larvae from the previous egg laying begin to spin their cocoons before pupating. At the end of the first week in permanent camp the queen begins her stupendous labour of laying 20,000 to 30,000 eggs over a 7 or 8 day period. As the eggs hatch into a squirming mass of larvae their activity stimulates the workers to expand their raids which had diminished to a minimum. Then, on about the 20th day the cocoons burst open to yield a new battalion of callow workers and the whole army moves out of permanent bivouac to begin the nomadic phase once more. The whole army may number 100,000 to 150,000 individuals and the callow workers emerge just at the time they are required to help transport the new larvae during the lengthy marches of the nomadic phase.

While we watched all this ant activity Glenn Wilkes and Dave Samarine had gone off on their own and reported later that they arrived at Pt. Tablas and that if a future trip were properly timed to coincide with a low tide it would be possible to walk along the beach almost the whole way so we will try to arrange another next year.

#### Field Trip to Morne Catherine - 27th July 1986 (Frankie Farrell & Victor Quesnel)

A FEW YEARS AGO THE Road up Morne Catherine was open to motor traffic a considerable part of the way. Today, due to neglect of its maintenance, the road is overgrown with shrubs and herbs and in some places blocked by fallen trees. Even the road leading to the spot where the climb up the hill starts is badly maintained, but however the cars were able to drive through to the lower parking place. Attendance was quite good there being on a rather rough estimate about forty people. A bit of rain fell at the beginning of the trip but the weather improved later and although there was sunshine from time to time the sky was mainly cloudy and the light dull. This probably accounted for the fact that birds and butterflies were not numerous. An interesting sighting, however, was a Tropical Parula or Olive-backed Warbler (*PANULA PITIAYUMI*) which is most commonly seen on the islands of the Bocas. The head and upper parts are blue gray and the back olive-green. The wings are tipped with two white bars and the underparts are coloured orange-yellow to yellow.

The road up Morne Catherine is very convenient for the naturalist as the gradient is gentle. The forest in this region is described as Deciduous Seasonal Forest but its proper classification is marked by rather severe alterations caused by fire and other forms of degradation arising out of human interference. Without going into exact scientific nomenclature of this forest it can be said that naked indian (*BURSERIA* spp), conoré (*LONGOCARPUS* spp), incense (*PROTIIUM* spp) and poui (*TABEBUIA SERRATIFOLIA*) are the trees most likely to be found in this area. Naked indian and poui trees were actually seen. Conoré would not have been in flower and was not observed, and incense somehow escaped attention. Because of the interference secondary growth trees such as bois canon (*CECROPIA* spp), boisa (*OCHROMA* spp), keskidea bush (*VISMIA* spp) and bloodwood or bois sang (*CROTON* spp) were much in evidence. An interesting find was ti-fay or petite feuille (*MAPROUNIA GULANENSIS*) which was in fruit. This is also a secondary growth tree. Another tree observed was the obi (*TRICHILIA TRINITENSIS*) which is included in the forest trees found in this type of forest. It was also in fruit which is a small greenish yellow oval capsule (9.5mm) covered with soft prickles. Very plentiful was a vine (*BOMAREA EDULIS*), belonging to the family *AMARYLLIDACEAE*. The flower, commonly but incorrectly called a lily, is unusual in that the sepals of a bright pink colour are more conspicuous than the petals, which can be described as dark and variegated, being dark green with purplish-brown markings. Standing out amidst the green foliage was *DRYMONIA SERRULATA* a climbing plant, member of the *GESNERIACEAE*, with the undersides of its leaves of a conspicuous red colour. Very common among the low lying plants was *WULFIA BACCATA*, a member of the *COMPOSITAE*, with its yellow daisy like flowers. An inconspicuous herb (*ACALYPHA* spp) of the family *EUPHORBIACEAE*, mentioned in a previous report, was seen growing on the road. A vine (*LUNDIA* spp) belonging to the family *BIGNONIACEAE*, displayed its whitish flowers on the tops of some of the trees.

For the benefit of those who may be planning a holiday in Jamaica, we quote text of a letter received from JAMAICA VIEW Mountain Resort & Country Club Ltd. of Box 196 Red Hills P.O., St. Andrew, Jamaica:-

"We are still in the stage of construction, but would like to let you know that we will be catering particularly for people such as Naturalists, Hikers, Bird Watchers and for those interested in Natural History and Culture.

The Resort is set in an area of lush vegetation and boasts breathtaking view of six parishes, over twenty miles of coastline and of Jamaica's capital city.

We are within ten to twenty-five minutes of golf courses, tennis, horse racing, art galleries, shopping and the beach.

Special attractions at the Resort are a Bird Sanctuary, Horses and Donkeys for trail riding, a Herbal Garden and Cultural Dancers.

Transportation and guides are provided for field trips all over the island; also guides for hiking trips for which Jamaica is a paradise.

We plan to invite you down later this year, but in the meantime for our marketing intelligence, please advise in general terms what interest your membership would have in a Resort of this type; also the size of your membership."

As some of you may remember, this letter was read earlier this year at one of our monthly meetings.

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Luisa Zuniaga  
Honorary Secretary  
September 29, 1966.