THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

July - September 2008 **Issue No: 3/2008**

My Trip to La Guyane

Hans E. A. Boos

In this issue we begin the first part of an article by Hans Boos in which he documents his journey to French Guyana back in 2000. The series spans 11 days from the 19 to 29 May.

Day 1: Friday, 19th May 2000

I had always wanted to go to French Guyana, La Guyane, as it is now called, and I knew that my old friend Joep Moonen was there. He is the manager of a naturalist lodge/hotel/research - station, Emerald Jungle Village, at Carrefour du Gallion, 97356 Rte. Montsinery, (la Guyane) France. Here, after ten years of back-breaking labour, Joep, and his wife Maryka, have built up this business into a successful company where anyone who loves the bush and the rivers of French Guyana, can go to visit and have the most exciting time of their lives.

When my brother Julius, now domiciled in West Palm Beach, Florida, told me he was planning a trip there to collect plants for several Botanical Gardens and private green-houses, I made plans too, for I had not seen him in several years, and Joep even longer. Joep and I are old friends, being brother-curators, he of the Zoo in Paramaribo Suriname, me of the Emperor Valley Zoo in Trinidad, until events there forced him to seek his fortunes elsewhere.

To get to La Guyane, you have to fly by Suriname Airways, which flight, unfortunately, is quite expensive. But, nevertheless, I flew into Rochambeau, (named for some French General) Airport to be met by a smiling Joep, who drove me in his fairly new Toyota Hiace van to his home and facility, where I met for the first time his charming wife Maryka and his little son, a ball of fire in a boat or in the bush, Bernie, or "Doctor Burns" as he is affectionately called.

Emerald Jungle Village is a small complex constructed on the ruins of an old army officer's mess, and is in the form of a capital "T." Joep and Maryka have rebuilt it with their own two hands, and it is amazing what this couple have accomplished in only ten short years, to carve this unique place out of the swampy bush and jungle

.

And bush and jungle there sure is. Behind the long top of the T, there is a swamp, jungle and creek, where Joep has carved out a wild botanical garden with pathways and trees labelled with their local and scientific names. Here he has gathered an unique selection of the wild plants of the Guianas and nearby countries, Suriname, Brazil, and replanted them to grow and propagate. Frogs call, and lizards scuttle, and he told me that

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Editors Note

In this issue we conclude the report on the 2007 Club trip to Venezuela submitted by Kay Hinkson which spanned three issues of the QB. A full report on the 2008 return trip by Reginald Potter completes the Venezuela series. Just as I was running short of articles to print I spoke with Hans on one our recent trips and he, graciously provided an article on his trip to French Guiana. I know some of our readers may be becoming a bit weary of these running articles but I ask that you bear a while. Nicholas and Paula complete the articles with their report on the recent turtle watching trip to Manzanilla.

Members are reminded of the upcoming AGM and are asked to pay attention to the agenda and the proposed amendments to the Club Rules.

STB

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July - September 2008

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Turtle Watching - June 28, 2008

Nicholas See Wai & Paula Smith

Club Trip

An overcast sky failed to dampen the spirits of a small group of eager naturalists who ventured to Manzanilla Beach on Saturday 28th June, 2008. Our group of naturalists was going to witness the annual egg-laying of the Leatherback Turtle. After meeting at St. Mary's College at approximately 5:30pm, and then joining the other members at the southern entrance of The University of the West Indies (UWI), we departed for the long, but interesting drive to Manzanilla Beach. Upon arrival at Sangre Grande, we took a right turn which would take us to the south eastern side of Trinidad. As we drew closer and closer to Manzanilla Beach, our excitement grew with much anticipation. By this time it was around 8:00pm and we stopped at the Manzanilla Beach Resort to wait for our guide. After a few minutes we followed the guide to our destination for sighting of the Leatherback Turtle.

People came prepared with torch lights, red lights and cameras to capture the wonderful moments they were about to experience. We drove into the beach and parked in total darkness. We took the opportunity, led by our President Reg Potter across the road into the Nariva Swamp to look for Caiman, but we turned up empty and were soon alerted to the first sighting of a Leatherback Turtle. We had to be like cats that adjust their eyes to the darkness, so we could see in the distance a turtle making its way onto the beach. We were told by the guide to remain in the distance for a while until the turtle had found its appropriate spot and prepared to dig the hole to start her process of the "Cycle of Life". Any movements towards it, too soon, might scare it and cause it not to lay its eggs on the beach. While waiting, people were scouting the upper ends of the beach for more turtle sightings. Seeing nothing for the moment we slowly and quietly gathered around the turtle that had started digging a hole in the sand to lay her eggs.

Watching the turtle nesting
Photo courtesy Reginald Potter

Standing around a Leatherback Turtle in the process of laying her eggs, is a truly humbling experience and one never to be forgotten. It is amazing to believe that this huge creature slowly heaved herself onto the beach, looked for a suitable spot in the sand and proceeded to dig a chamber for her eggs. This Leatherback Turtle was colossal in size, about 5 feet long and 1 ½ meters wide and probably weighed close to 300 lbs.

The guide gave us some history of the Leatherback Turtle that is an endangered species. Leatherback Turtles commonly called "Caldon" are the largest marine turtle in existence; they feed on jellyfish, squid and plankton.

Female turtles weigh between 260-500kgs. Their shell length varies from 130 -175 cm. The female adult turtles nest 5 to 7 times each season in 10 day intervals. Each Turtle's clutch contains 80-120 white soft-shell eggs and incubation of these eggs lasts 60-70 days, until the eggs hatch and the hatchling turtles will emerge from their shells to begin hopefully a successful journey of the lives. The guide told us where on the turtle we were not to touch and which were ok when the Turtle

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Turtle Watching - June 28, 2008

Nicholas See Wai & Paula Smith

Club Trip

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was in its egg-laying stage.

When laying eggs the turtle is quite oblivious to its environment and it is safe for us to touch. The turtle made some soft grunting sounds while laying its eggs. When around these magnificent creatures we were told not to shine bright lights in their face or use cameras with flash as their eyes are very sensitive. The turtle, after some time, started to lay her eggs and we could see the eggs dropping by the two's and three's. The hole took the shape of an" L" which is like the shape of their flippers to secure the eggs from predators.

By this time there was a second sighting of another turtle further down the beach and this turtle was even bigger than the first and seemed to be more experienced, as this turtle dig, lay and covered her eggs in a shorter period that the first. This turtle was working very diligently, if one had to describe the pace of work of the turtle.

Being in the presence of these majestic animals just brought an *ocean of feelings* that I am sure filled all present on that night with ultimate jubilation and amusement to experience this miracle, and passage of rite in a creature that has lived thousands of years, which we as an environmental organization hope will live on for a thousand more through the education of the people. it is imperative that we do what we can to save it for future generations.

Seeing no sign of other turtles on the beach we called this the end of our stay at the beach and departed to our homes around 10:00pm ending the Turtle Watching Trip.

BG Insect Guide

Tiger mimic (*Lycorea* sp.) resting on leaf of Vervine (*Stachytarpheta* sp.) in the Central Range, Trinidad
Photo courtesy Shane T. Ballah

Large Tiger (*Lycorea cleobaea* [Godart])

Wing span: 3 3/4 - 4 1/4 inches (9.5 - 10.8 cm).
Identification: Large. Orange with black horizontal stripes; stripes on hindwing join to form a loop. Tip of male abdomen has black hair pencils (scent brushes).
Life history: Males perch in the morning to await receptive females. Around noon, females lay eggs singly on the underside of host leaves, usually depositing several eggs on the same plant. Caterpillars eat leaves.
Flight: April, July, and October in South Texas; all year in the tropics.
Caterpillar hosts: Papaya, fig, bloodflower, *Jacartia*.
Adult food: Bird droppings.
Habitat: Tropical forests.
Range: Tropical American lowlands from the West Indies and central Mexico south to Peru. Strays to South Texas

Information courtesy:
http://www.nearctica.com/butter/plate20/Lcleob.htm

Venezuela - 2007 part 3

Kathleen Hinkson

Overseas Trip

We present the final in a three part series documenting the Club's Overseas trip to Venezuela in 2007

MON 16TH JULY: DAY 6

After a good night's rest on a comfortable mattress, we assembled at 6a.m as we were to breakfast at the Pier before boarding the ferry to Araya. Breakfast at the Pier was "total local". At the roadside, we drank fresh squeezed orange juice and ate empanadas. We were treated to an aerial display of flight formation by a group of cormorants. As we went across to the boarding terminal, we were told that the ferry was not operational that day. We suspected that as it was the start of a work week, ours was the only vehicle going across to that Peninsula.

The tour guide and driver were unfamiliar with that territory traveling by road. Anyway, nothing ventured, nothing gained. Off we went on a scenic route, newly paved road, mountains to the right, coast on the left. People dozed after the early wake-up call at 5a.m. The Monday morning traffic that headed towards the city was heavy, beaches with facilities, a promenade with pavement cafes where the work force breakfasted, was all part of the scene. On approaching the road that led to the Peninsula, there was a protest by the residents, because the company that was working on the pipeline had promised to install a police station in the area, which at the time was not forthcoming, hence the barricade. It was noticed that in the area from Cumana to Araya, the population is mainly of African descent. Maybe we weren't meant to go to Araya.

A Plan C was formulated. Cesar, pulled one out of his hat. The story that was told to the man in charge of the protest, was comical and bordering on the ridiculous. Juanita, Haroon, Michael and moi, were to sit up front, the lighter shade of pale persons to relocate to the back of the bus. How times have changed!! Reason being that Juanita and Haroon were going to donate a kidney each to their cousin Pedro in Margarita and Michael and myself were relatives, so we had to have a serious concerned look about us, and time was of the essence, as the ferry wasn't running and we had to get to Chacopata for a pirogue. Margarita was a 45 min. ride from that point. It cost about 13,000 bs. ($26TT)

As we entered the Peninsula, we traversed along a narrow, winding road through some rocky mountains, noticeably, tools and construction equipment were downed for the day, as workers were not allowed through. It was a very arid area, with scrub, cactus and heaps of broken shells, reminding one of Chacachacare, although with a lot more desert -like (Red earth). One restaurant, tepee styled, small housing settlements and a beach which boasted an assortment of shells. We travelled through a pass, which looked like the Wild, Wild West and Michael thought that a movie could be filmed there, Janice commented that at

Araya peninsula
Photo courtesy
http://www.panoramio.com/photo/2625511

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Venezuela - 2007 part 2

Kathleen Hinkson

Overseas Trip

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any moment we would see The Lone Ranger and Tonto but Avereil's spin was that in no Western Movie , you would ever see the sea. *Correcto*!! Guamache was the next town, a town without character, some run-down pueblos, and nothing much happening. There were visible signs of salt mixed with the dirt, some stilts and a caracara perched on an overhead line.

At noon, we arrived in the town of Araya. Café Eugenia on the beach was the restaurant for lunch. The meal was fried bony fish served up with the "full monty" (scales & fins) and eyes which looked at you, fried plantain and hayacas (arepas). A platter was brought to the table with a block of salt, halite crystalline, a form of sodium chloride for display purposes.

A lovely beach with carat roofed gazebos at 8ft. intervals, awaited us after our tour of the Salt ponds. We were given a detailed account of the process, where we learnt that trenches are dug from the seaside, to accommodate the flow of seawater which settles in the dug out ponds. The sun , breeze and arid conditions are crucial for the evaporation of the sea water. The fineness of grain of the product depends upon temperature and rate of evaporation. Enormous amounts of the deposits made mountains on the plant's compound, several feet in height and thickness. Later that afternoon while relaxing at the beach, many trucks laden with the unrefined material were at the ferry terminal ready to ship to other parts of Venezuela and overseas.

Our accommodation for the night was at Posada Helen on the beach; some went to the Fort and others settled on the beach with a book. Dinner at Eugenia's was carded for 8.00pm, so we cleaned up and strolled across to the restaurant, a sneeze away, around 7.30p.m. We pulled chairs outside as though we were at Smokey and Bunty in St. James,

Paria peninsula Venezuela.
Photo courtesy http://www.venezuelatuya.com/historia/2descubrimiento/paria.jpg

dealt with the left over spirits, while Hans delighted us with some old Irish ditties, strumming on the quatro he had purchased in Carupano. At 9.30p.m Posada Helen's beds welcomed us with warm open arms.

TUE 17TH JULY: DAY 7

This day is the long 6hr, haul back to Guiria. After a comfortable night's rest on a firm mattress, we assembled (not too early or rushed) for breakfast at Eugenia's. We were delighted by the English meal, poached eggs, ham (jamon), cheese (queso), arepas, coffee and juices.

At 9a.m. we bade goodbye to Araya , retracing our journey through the scrub country, which was fairly straight-forward. A stop was made to identify some cacti as time did not permit on the inward journey. Some of the species seen were: Acacia (bull horn); agaves; barrel cactus; opuntia (ratchet) disc bladed; numerous helical shells 1" long - fresh water gastrpods and an aloe plantation. The soil was of a soft yellow brown alluvian with embedded multisized rocks of highly meta-

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Venezuela - 2007 part 2

Kathleen Hinkson

Overseas Trip

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morphosed quartzite and vein quartz. Signs of water flowed in the desert, everywhere traces of salt deposits could be seen in the soil. A lizard 1ft. long with tail shinnied up a scrubby tree. The huge mounds of white stuff were identified as shells, yet at no restaurant were we offered any shell food.

At noon we stopped in the town of Cariaco for lunch which was a casual affair at a Quick Shoppe. We spent about 21/2 hours there as it was quite a wait for the pizzas. Mountains, savannahs, an area of coconut trees, was not unlike driving through Cedros to Icacos, pigs in the road, a couple dancing outside the Police station. At 5p.m. we arrived at our hotel in Guiria to discover that the tour company's reservation was axed from the register. A long wait in the coach while Cesar haggled. A drive all around Guiria and outskirts looking for a place for the night. NO ROOM IN THE INN!! We were prepared to sleep in the bus if necessary, but at last we spotted a new establishment which was not as yet ready for occupancy and still in the throes of completion. No reason not to ask, we were accommodated. By this time Cesar had to return to the first hotel for a refund, which luckily was reimbursed. Basic bed and bathroom with a bachelor fridge, just right for the night. Dinner for our last night was a festive affair at a Chinese restaurant. A monetary presentation was made to Cesar (tour guide) and Darwen (coach driver) by our TTFNC President, Reg Potter, as a gesture of good faith and trust in them for being our safe angels. At 10p.m we were back at the motel, just happy to have a bed for the night.

WED 18TH JULY: DEPARTURE DAY

Our return to Guiria seemed to be a comedy of errors. At 9a.m. we breakfasted at a questionable establishment in the City while making plans for our departure; return to motel and pack, back to town at noon for lunch and shopping, then to the port for 3pm check-in.

These plans changed as Reg, always a step ahead, decided to go to the cruise office, just to ask if we could leave our luggage there while we shopped, but instead was told that we were not listed for the sailing that afternoon. Panic stations! Reg gave us exactly half an hour to shower, change, pack and get back to the office before they closed for siesta at noon. This was accomplished with the support of our guides who, luckily, were still with us. Many people were there in that tiny office waiting to get a space on the sailing, Not before us!! Reg was going to make certain of that! We were re-listed, our drivers departed, leaving us to organize transport for our luggage to the Pier, though it was within walking distance. It was the siesta hour, and almost impossible to get transport. Eventually a "perrera" (maxi) appeared, and we implored the driver to take all 11 persons with luggage to the Port.

At 4p.m we boarded the "Sea Prowler" bound for home. The boat left late, so we arrived at Pier 1 around 9.45p.m. Customs and Immigration formalities took forever and we eventually left for our respective abodes around 11.30p.m.

Everyone on the trip has iterated that we would definitely sign up for a similar trip in a heartbeat.

This year Reg!!

Venezuela, Orinoco Delta - 2008

Reginald Potter

Overseas Trip

Early in the morning of Wednesday 18th June, 12 persons assembled at Pier 1 dock, Chaguaramas for the start of our one-week trip to the Orinoco delta. Departure was at 8.45 am, ahead of schedule, and the trip down to Guiria, passing Patos and Macuro, that we recognized from last year, on the way was uneventful in fine weather. A couple of dolphins were seen as we left the Grande Boca.

In Guiria, as always, there was a long wait before the Venezuelan authorities boarded the boat to begin immigration clearance, followed by each individual having their bags checked in the customs tent on the dock. Our Natura Raid air-conditioned Mercedes bus waited patiently on the dock throughout, and Cesar our popular guide from last year was there to greet us. From the dock we went straight to the office of Agencias Acosta to reconfirm our return trip and exchange money, then set off for the 6 hour drive to Maturin at about 3.00 pm. In view of the late departure we opted for sandwiches from a local shop instead of lunch.

The long drive first west to Carupano, then south to Maturin took us through the rural scenery of cocoa plantation we had seen last year, and scrubby foothills of alluvial wash below the mountains to the north, all remarkably like the country around Valencia in Trinidad. It was dark long before Maturin and a pre-booked traditional Venezuelan dinner awaited us in the restaurant El Toro Gordo before checking into the Hotel Jardin and bed.

Camp Ubanoco jetty
Photo courtesy Reginald Potter

In the morning of Thursday we had coffee then hit the road again with a brief stop for breakfast, and onward to Temblador near the Cano Ubanoco. The countryside soon became flat as far as the eye could see, with cattle ranching and some oil production seemingly the most important activities. In Temblador we loaded up with essential supplies of beer and rum, Cesar bought food and we drove the short distance to Boca de Uracao where we met Capitan Gordo and crew Luis in the long, roofed, boat that would be our transport for the next 5 days. They were to be our constant companions, cooks and bottlewashers during our Orinoco stay. Two hours down the Uracao and Manamo canals brought us to the jetty of Camp Ubanoco operated by Natura Raid. The river here and for a long way downstream is cluttered with

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Venezuela, Orinoco Delta - 2008

Reginald Potter

Overseas Trip

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drifting water hyacinth and the river banks near settlements were planted with mango. Here we checked into our rooms for one night, had lunch in the big darkened Warao-styled dining room (fortunately mosquito-proofed), then set of for a brief trip to a nearby Warao village of Santo Domingo to buy local artifacts and note the appalling litter and lack of hygiene that seems to typify these Indian settlements. A government-installed water treating plant stood unused on the river edge. We were told that the river upstream is blocked by a sluice dam so that flow is directed to other river channels in the delta and consequently large areas of the swamp have been dried out enabling cattle ranching to be practiced. Consequently flow is almost entirely tidal and one gets the feeling that the same rafts of water Hyacinth go backwards and forwards with each rise and fall.

The birders were already active noting the first Hoatzins or "chenchena chickens" that we saw, seemingly every day. These large birds are very common and related to our Tobago Cocricos. We were fortunate to have the seemingly unlimited expertise of Graham identifying birds, while many were spotted by Selwyn's sharp eyes. From the village we did a short bird watching tour of a side channel ending in cattle ranching country where buffalo grazed, then went down river briefly to catch a glimpse of the river dolphins in a glorious sunset. That night the staff produced passion fruit juice that Cesar mixed up with rum into "babusca" which was well received.

Friday morning after breakfast we packed up and left by boat for the long ride down to Camp Simuina, passing Indian villages, red howler monkeys, a king vulture, scarlet ibis and numerous other bird sightings along the way. Brief showers of rain and an occasional soaking from the boat wash livened the journey. A stop for lunch and a siesta at an empty camp was also called. The flat delta country showed several changes in vegetation, from the much denuded forest around Ubanoco, to Moriche palm flooded forest, mangrove, and with bends in the river we re-entered forest types several times. In areas with forest on the shore the most common waterside plant was Montrichardia. Seen from water level we could not get any idea of what the country was like behind the first row of trees.

At Camp Simuina it finally sunk in what was meant by 3 nights in hammocks. Our home was a shed with no walls in true Warao style, with the boat moored half way into the "kitchen". We were issued hammocks and mosquito nets which we hung almost touching each other, and a table with benches represented the only furnishings. The "toilet", set a short distance away from the camp in the forest, and accessed by a board walk was a shed with a hole in the floor and a small pile a of quick lime to apply to keep down the smell! A certain amount of instant constipation resulted but after a few days things seemed to 'break loose' as normal!

Paddling up the Uracao River
Photo courtesy Reginald Potter

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Venezuela, Orinoco Delta - 2008

Reginald Potter

Overseas Trip

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That afternoon Stuart, Laurent and Michael elected to take a trip to nearby Pedernales with the local Indian guide, Julian. 'Nearby' in this case meant a 5 hour trip there and back, but since we were so near it seemed worth it. By reports on their return Pedernales is nothing remarkable, and from the pictures, consisted of a dock and a few streets and buildings. It is so near to Icacos in Trinidad that the logical plan would have been to get to the delta by boat, but there was no evidence of immigration and customs seen. Being set in the delta streams there's nowhere to drive so no traffic. While they were away the rest of us paddled quietly up a side canal to observe more birds including Blue and Yellow Macaws, Wattled Jacana and Kingfishers, but the bird life was not particularly prolific.

That night a few of us went in the boat to look for Caimans but were disappointed so we returned to camp for drinks. Unbeknown to the rest of us some members offered a drink (or drinks) to Louis the assistant boatman, which he gladly accepted. That night he was in the hammock next to Kay. As some members sank into a deep sleep complete with loud snores, Kay called out that a hand was reaching out to her in the dark. Then he started walking around and rocking her hammock. After swapping hammocks so that I was then next to him the hand again reached out from the night and grabbed the edge of my hammock. A few kicks strangely had no effect, and he could be seen sitting up in bed, then getting up and walking around and remaining generally restless while moaning and muttering. I awakened Cesar who was in a deep sleep and unaware of the commotion. He spoke to Luis quietly and got him back into his hammock, while I was convinced he had gone quite mad. No sooner had Cesar returned to sleep than Luis again began his wanderings, which this time included getting into Gordo's hammock.

Fin of a fresh water dolphin
Photo courtesy Reginald Potter

This continued with mutterings and hammock rocking until at last he subsided into deep sleep (in his own hammock) till morning. The next day Cesar explained that Warao are easily influenced by alcohol and the man was quite drunk. Sure enough at dinner the next night Luis presented himself at the head of the table and, with interpretation by Cesar, he apologised to the whole group. No more drinks were offered, doubts about his sanity were lifted, and he was an excellent crew member for the rest of the trip.

On Saturday next morning there was another trip down river to observe bird life, including kingfishers, and some of the exotic plants along the river. This was followed by a most interesting walk in the forest where Julian (our local guide) showed us some of the skills of the local Waraos in roof thatching, making a water bucket from a palm sheath, medicinal plants, the palms used to make bows and arrows, palm tree climbing, obtaining heart of palm for us to eat, and back at the camp, how to make fire by rotating one stick against another. It was a most interesting morning and we learnt that the soil is composed largely of decaying

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Venezuela, Orinoco Delta - 2008

Reginald Potter

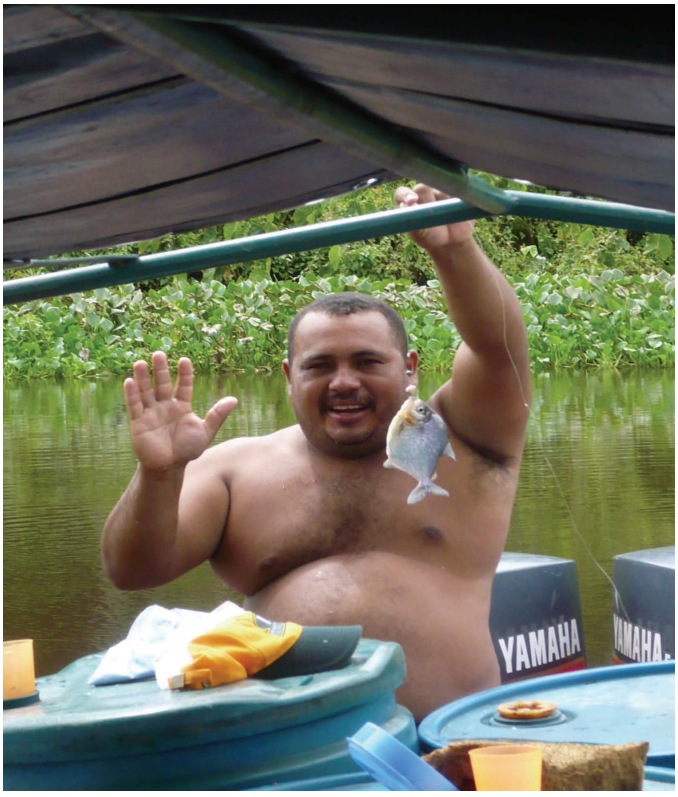
Overseas Trip

(Continued from page 10)

vegetable matter, which Stuart discovered when he sunk his leg to the knee in a soft spot. This appears to be one of the environments of peat and ultimately coal formation. After lunch we bathed off the front steps to the camp and after siesta took a second trip later in the evening which did not result in many sightings. The evening trip was at low tide and we noted the strong smell of the swamp. This smell was unusually concentrated at a fork in the river raising the possibility of it being due to a hydrogen sulphide gas seepage rather than the normal swamp odour. In the night some of the party again went in search of caimans, this time succeeding in catching a small specimen.

The next day Sunday we bathed in the river again then 'broke' camp, packing up our hammocks and belongings and loading them into the boat for the journey back up river. This was the day we would offload our gifts brought from Trinidad to give to the impoverished (but apparently happy and healthy) Indians. We said goodbye to Julian and traveled through small channels to the main river, passing a house along the way where we observed the construction of a dugout canoe, then immediately afterwards, a 3-toed sloth, which was about to descend into the water within grabbing distance. This must now be the most photographed sloth in the Orinoco. Passing a village where Christian Sunday worship was in progress and stopping whenever we saw a few Indians paddling in canoes or not in great numbers, we eventually distributed most of the gifts keeping some for our overnight stop. We saw fresh water dolphins pass quite close to the boat, then after passing through some rain showers we landed at the relatively large settlement of Culebrita complete with long boardwalk, generator, and street lights. This was to be our overnight with the Waraos. We were shown to the large empty house of the chief who lived with his wife in two tiny hammocks at one end, and sat all day apparently doing nothing while his wife made hammocks and the villagers busied themselves with their daily chores, largely ignoring him.

Having put up the hammocks and checked out the kitchen and (un)sanitary arrangements, and made the final distribution of gifts, we again set out in the boat to Bird Island. This is a mangrove island in the main river, separated from possible shore-based predators, and is a night time roost for thousands of scarlet ibis, rather like our own Caroni swamp. We made a few passes of the island before their arrival then drifted past when the ibis had all settled in. In this we were somewhat worried that our presence seemed to spook the birds, which all took off in fright, but to our



Piranha (Family Serrasalmidae), called caribes in Venezuela rivers
Photo courtesy Reginald Potter

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Venezuela, Orinoco Delta - 2008

Reginald Potter

Overseas Trip

(Continued from page 11)

relief returned once we had passed. Orinoco ibis watching could learn some things from our own expert guides in Caroni. A walk along the board-walk that evening revealed again the general litter that the Indians throw everywhere, and required some careful navigation to avoid the unpleasant deposits the several dogs in the village leave about. That night at dinner a huge rhinoceros beetle suddenly appeared on the floor beside the dinner table, and was promptly captured as a specimen. During the night red howler monkeys in the adjacent forest kept up their calls at intervals, temporarily drowning the noise from our ever-present snorers.

Monday morning we again broke camp, loaded the boat and stopped first at a lone house to buy gusanos – grubs of a beetle that lives in dead Moriche trees. The Warao cut a tree down leaving it on the ground, then return in one year and extract them. This is taken as a delicacy when fried, which we tried that night. Further up river, we branched into a tributary of cleaner water and numerous water Hyacinths where we anchored on a submerged sandbar and swam, and ate lunch. This tributary, the Morichal Largo, was unlike the main waters in the Orinoco delta in being relatively clean, coloured by tannin rather than mud, and the presence of a sandbar in such a muddy area seemed strange. Further upstream we experienced our only traffic 'accident'. Capitan Gordo struck a log while rounding a bend, lost control and buried the boat deep into a soft cushion of water Hyacinth. A few minutes of reversing and clearing propellers and we were off again having had a close up inspection of the Hyacinth environment, to the next stop on the same river where we pulled into a deserted looking cattle ranch to fish for Piranha. On the way there two enormous Horned Screamers were sighted. These birds were formerly found in our Nariva swamp but are now extinct there. While several birders checked out the surrounding pasture area Capitan Gordo and Luis caught 5 piranha. The efforts by our members were entirely unsuccessful.

That night was spent in the relative comfort of Ubanoco Camp where the beds, showers and toilets seemed like 5-star accommodation. Laurent finally concluded his 4-day negotiations and took delivery of his moriche 'matrimonial' hammock from Maria, wife of Angel the camp manager, and this was added to the several hammocks acquired by Stuart and others. A pre dinner snack of gusanos and piranha was quite good but I don't think their later absence will be missed, the fish being so small and bony.

Tuesday saw us packing and leaving hurriedly because we had a long trip ahead of us. First problem was at Boca de Uracao where the Mercedes bus was not awaiting and no cell phone contact could be made with driver Edgar. Members of the group wandered around changing money, buying boots, which seemed better the those in Trinidad, and being entertained by a quatro playing 'limer'. The ever-resourceful Cesar had just arranged for alternative transport, when Edgar appeared in the bus seemingly wondering what the problem was. We then embarked on a long drive crossing the Morichal Largo again and on to Rio Caribe on the north coast of the Paria peninsula, but not before stopping for an excellent lunch at a roadside restaurant where barbequed roast beef "carapacato' was served with 'cachapas' (corn with cheese), cassava, and a drink. In Venezuela we did not see anybody looking hungry, particularly in this cattle-ranching area. The road was long, passing through first the flat land of Orinoco and the well laid out town of Maturin, then low hills, then crossing through the northern mountains to Carupano and out onto the north coast where we were diverted around a flooded section in the village El Morro, finally arriving at Rio Caribe where we drove right

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Venezuela, Orinoco Delta - 2008

Reginald Potter

Overseas Trip

(Continued from page 12)

through onto our next stop at the Museo del Cacao in the gathering dusk and a power failure. This was an interesting tour of cocoa agriculture, which although familiar to some from our own cocoa agribusiness, showed what can be achieved. We were shown cocoa in the field and all the processes involved in fermentation, drying, roasting, grinding and final roasting. Then onto the machines used for chocolate manufacture and an opportunity to buy some, plus a cocoa liqueur. Finally when the electric power was restored we saw a short video on the subject with a background music of Calypso de Cacao. That night we put up in the Posada del Ruta de Cacao which was familiar to some of us as we had stayed here last year. The same interesting maps, and books on Venezuela were there to be inspected together with some saddles and riding equipment typical of Venezuelan handiwork. After some decockroaching of our luggage (souvenirs from Ubanoco) we went into the town for a good dinner, and farewell speeches for Cesar and Edgar. A brief stop was made in the town square, but Cesar ushered us quickly back into the bus when he sensed some danger in the area. This town, like all on the peninsula of Paria is contaminated by the drugs trade. Small signs like the lack of families and children sitting out in the evening were enough warning not to hang around. Although we had traveled all around the peninsula through the thick of the drug trading area last year, we heeded Cesar's assessment of the town and returned to the Posada.

Our final day Wednesday we left early and headed for Guiria, initially on an unfamiliar road which then joined the only main road to Guiria. There was one stop along the way to photograph a wide savannah looking much like the Nariva swamp that we had seen last year. In Guiria we bid farewell to Cesar and Edgar who then had to return to Maturin, had lunch in town and hired taxis down to the Pier 1 boat to Chaguaramas.

Some parts of the trip were disappointing in the lack of hygiene we had to accept, but that may be looked at as the price of seeing the Warao in their current condition and as they really are. The long time spent on journeys, and between toilets, are always a feature of Venezuela because it is a large country, unlike our island where things tend never to be very far apart. Nevertheless it was a fascinating experience inspecting another part of our large neighbouring country to the southwest, and already we are making plans for a visit to a new area.

Photos L-R

Leatherback Turtle *Dermochelys coriacea* returning to the sea after nesting - Turtle watching Manazanilla June 28 2008

Members enjoy the Christmas luncheon at Mariposa Restaurant, Lopinot - 2007

Photos courtesy Reginald Potter and Shane T. Ballah

Notice of General Meeting

(Continued from page 17)

Attachment

Proposed Amendment to the Rules of TTFNC

Change to Rule 26 as follows:

Change heading for 26 to "**Finances**"

26 a Annual subscriptions …….(as presently written.)

26 b Club funds will be held in a bank account or similar secure account at a finance house that is widely recognized to be a reputable and responsible custodian of public funds.

26 c The Club finances will be controlled by the Management Committee.
The following require a majority vote by the Management Committee:

- Purchase and sale of club equipment that will be recorded in the Clubs capital asset register.
- Purchase and sale of investments in equities or interest-bearing funds or land or similar quality investments, provided they, on reasonable investigation, appear sound, to an aggregated maximum of 50% of the Clubs cash and liquid assets.
- Debts for the Club to an aggregated total amounting to half the membership subscription for that year.
- Delegation of authority to selected officers and/or Committee members to authorize expenditures up to half the membership subscription for that year.

26 d The following will require a majority vote, in which a minimum of 40% of the membership participated. Such a vote may be at a monthly meeting or Special Meeting and the proposal must be circulated 2 weeks in advance. The Management Committee may arrange for, and publish at least 2 weeks in advance, a system of proxy voting for the determination of such a proposal.

- Purchases of investments of a greater amount than described on 26 c.
- Debts for the Club to a greater maximum than described in 26 c, and the offering of Club property as security for such debts.
- The sale of any real property that the Club may possess.

New members / Volunteers / Publications

Management Notices

New and Returning Members

The Club warmly welcomes the following new members:
Ordinary members:
Maria Chan Chow, Michael Lau, Denyssa David, Kayman Sagar, Simone Diffentaller

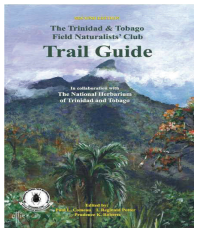
VOLUNTEERS/ASSISTANCE

Volunteers are required to assist in the following:

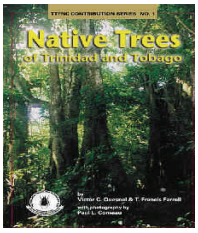
- Typing of an index for the Quarterly Bulletin covering 16 issues for the period 1986 to 1988.
- Becoming a part of the newly formed Environmental Group. Interested persons are asked to contact the Secretary.
- Assisting the Club in finding a permanent location to conduct our business and house our historic records and materials

PUBLICATIONS

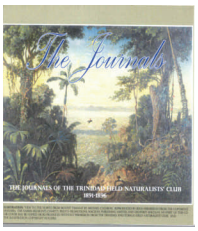
The following Club publications are available to members and non-members:



The TTFNC Trail Guide
Members = TT$200.00



The Native Trees of T&T
2nd Edition
Members = TT$100.00



Living world Journal 1892-1896 CD
Members = TT$175.00

Living World Journal 2007
Living World Journal back issues
Members price = free

MISCELLANEOUS

The Greenhall Trust

Started in 2005, in memory of Elizabeth and Arthur Greenhall, dedicated artist and zoologist respectively, the Trust offers financial assistance to aspiring artists and biologists (in areas of flora and fauna) in Trinidad and Tobago. Full details are available on their website:
http://www.greenhallstrust-wi.org/link.htm

Club Polo Jerseys

Available Sizes: medium Colours: Kahki and green Costs: TT$50.00

Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club
P.O. Box 642, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS

Guidelines for Articles and Field trip reports:

Contributors and authors are asked to take note of the following guidelines when submitting articles for inclusion in the newsletter

1	Font Type:	• Times New Roman
2	Font Size:	• 12 point
3	Maximum Length:	• 1,750 words (approx. 3 pages unformatted)
4	Content	• Field trip reports should include a separate table listing the scientific names, common names and families of plants and animals already identified within the body of the report.
5	Photographs	• Provide images in the following format JPEG, BMP, PICT, TIFF, GIF • Images **must** not be embedded into the word processing files. • Information on the image content including names of individuals shown **must** be provided.
6	Format	• Acceptable formats for electronic submissions are doc and txt.
7	Deadline	• All articles **must** reach the editor by the ninth week of each quarter. • Submission deadline for the 4nd Quarter 2008 issue is **November 24**
8	Email	• Electronic copies can be submitted to the editor at **shane.ballah@gmail.com** or to **ttfnc@wow.net.tt** • Include the code **QB2008-4** in the email subject label.
9	Hard copies	• Hard copies can be delivered to the editor or any member of the Management Committee.