THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

April - June 2010 **Issue No: 2/2010**

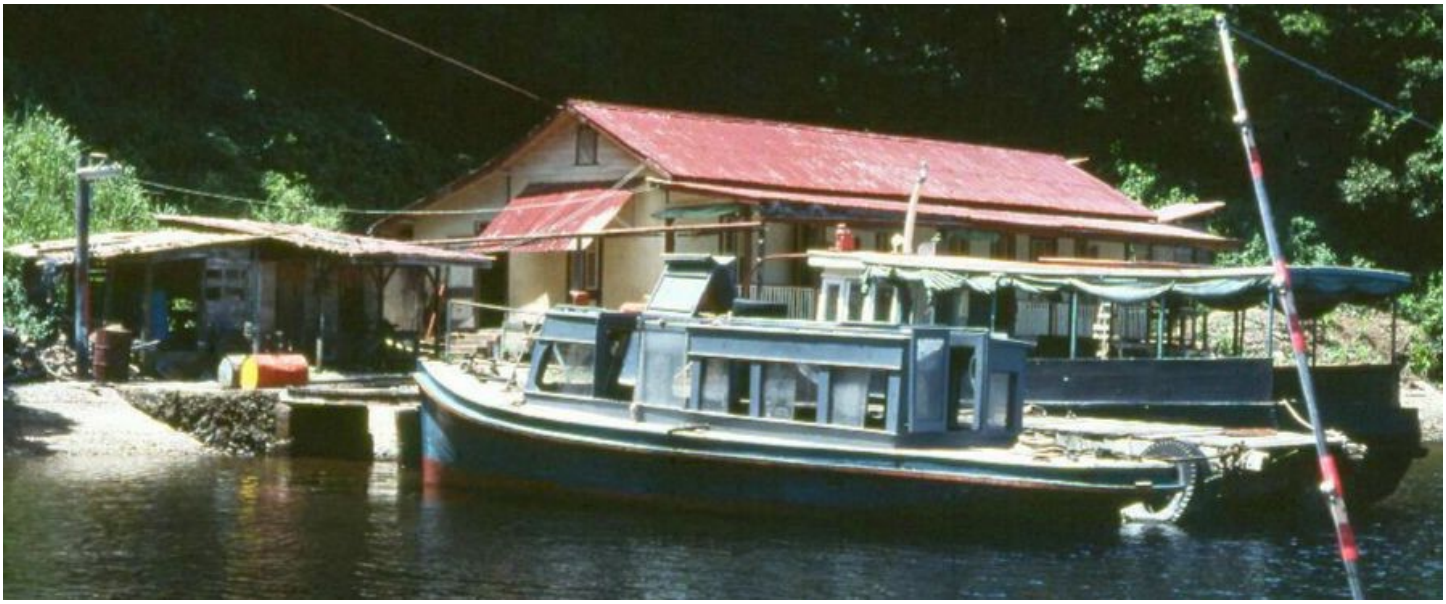
The journey that is Chacachacare - *part 2/3*

A personal account by Hans E.. A. Boos

TOBACCO

It is interesting to note that Trinidad, under Spanish rule had grown tobacco since 1595 (Purseglove 1988 p.541) and had exported tobacco in great abundance. A report of 1611 recorded many English ships actually in port at Trinidad, and others on the way there, to pick up cargoes of tobacco, one of which upon arrival in England was valued at 500.000 ducats. The author of that report, Don Alonzo de Velasco, recommended that the Governor of Trinidad be punished for allowing this trade. (THS #115)

But trading was carried on in spite of the prohibition against the illegal trading with Spain's enemies at the time, the French, Fleming (sic), (Dutch) and the English. In 1612 this prohibition was so great that an investigator into the illegal



Supply boats (early seventies) *Photo Hans E. A. Boos*

trade recommended the death penalty for the then governor of Trinidad, Don Fernando de Berrio as a result of his ignoring the prohibition against trading tobacco with the enemy. (THS #148.)

That same year, the Governor of Margarita Island made recommendations to the King of Spain, that tobacco should be prohibited from being sowed on Trinidad and, by this prohibition, protect and thus prevent the population from trading with the enemy. (THS #149)

This resulted in the King of Spain issuing a Cedula, or order, in 1612, for an armada of warships to go to Trinidad (on their way to pick up silver from the mines in South America,) to burn and sink any enemy ships that they encountered

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Many thanks to all who contributed and assisted with articles and photographs.

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April - June 2010

Editors
Eddison Baptiste, Shane T. Ballah

Editorial Committee
Palaash Narase, Reginald Potter

Contributing writers
Christopher K. Starr, Dwayne H. Burris, Elisha S. Tikasingh, Hans E. A. Boos, Selwyn Gomes

Photographs
Dwayne H. Burris, Eddison Baptiste, Elisha S. Tikasingh, Hans E. A. Boos, Ian Lambie

Design and Layout
Eddison Baptiste, Shane T. Ballah

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Management Committee 2010 - 2011

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Contact us!

Website: http://www.ttfnc.org

Postal: **The Secretary, TTFNC, c/o P.O. Box 642, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago**

Email: admin@ttfnc.org

The Journey that is Chacachacare

A *personal account by Hans E. A. Boos*

Feature

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in the harbours of Trinidad. (THS#134)

By 1614 things had deteriorated to a sorry state for the tobacco industry in Trinidad. The Spanish were not sending ships to buy the crop, the Dutch were cultivating it extensively on the mainland, in Spanish territory and on the banks of Spanish rivers, and continued to frequent the ports of Trinidad to buy the crop and to attempt, with the aid of the Caribs, to set up settlements, and to raid for produce and women from the Arawaks. (THS #169)

In 1618, the Spanish tax on tobacco was lifted for a period of six years and trade was going ahead, but the depredations on the high seas continued. For example, on November 21, 1617, Turkish pirates captured a vessel transporting an important crop of tobacco and the profits were therefore lost. (THS #190). Despite extensions of the tax exemption on tobacco both for Trinidad and the plantations on the Orinoco, Spain was unable to supply neither the necessary trade facilities, nor give the protection of the trade, from the Dutch entrenched nearby on the rivers of what is now Guyana. But the growing and export of tobacco must have continued for some time, and even Tobago got into the act, for in 1655, the Courland settlement on Tobago sent to Courland, in Europe, a shipment of sugar, pepper, ginger and tobacco. (HSTT #766)

But, all this success seems to have been comparatively short lived, for by 1807 merchants on Trinidad were petitioning the Secretary of State for permission to land " 25 hogsheads of tobacco from an American ship, that article being in great demand for the use of the slaves, the Colony being bare of it."(HSTT # 990), a condition which is reflected in the statistics given by Hart in his book on Trinidad (Hart (1866 p.156) when in 1864, not a single pound of tobacco was exported and a total exceeding 305.000 pounds was imported to Trinidad.

When the cocoa cultivation failed on Trinidad in 1725, the demand for tobacco in Europe. (THS #55) made it a very good replacement cash crop by 1737.

The suitability for the cultivation of tobacco was well known from earlier than 1637 when the Governor of Trinidad, Diego Lopez de Escobar made a report to the King of Spain. (THS # 82), and Ousiel had estimated that 100,000 pounds of tobacco was grown and reaped on Trinidad each year (THS #137) This in addition to another 50.000 pounds imported from farms on the Orinoco River.

But, something happened! The whole industry fell apart.

Possibly the extensive cultivation of tobacco in post civil war United States, ruined the market price that planters in the West Indies could command on the European Markets, and they all went broke.

The fact remains, that Trinidad, once a tobacco producing country, by the turn of the nineteenth century, produced no tobacco whatever, neither on the main island nor on Chacachacare.
It was not until 1952 that the growing of tobacco on Trinidad as well as on Tobago was restarted, first as an experimental crop to see if the Virginia type tobacco could be adapted to grow in the local climate and then in 1956 Tobago started the commercial growing of this tobacco, to be followed by Trinidad in 1960. Between the years of 1962 and 1977 tobacco farmers on Trinidad grew 5,558,098 pounds and on Tobago 925,775 pounds of tobacco to be sold into the cigarette manufacturing business in Trinidad.
By 1994 Tobacco ceased to be cultivated as a cash crop on either of the islands. (Correia 2002.)

THE BRITISH.

The British conquest of Trinidad in 1797 saw the transfer of Spanish influence to that of Britain, with also an added influx of Antillean French settlers, fleeing the terror of the French Revolution that had spilled over into the West Indies. These French settlers were, in the main, farmers, and would have set up estates on the main island of Trinidad to grow the cash crops of the day, sugar, cotton and tobacco. Soon they were

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fully integrated into the plantation economy of the island and some of them undoubtedly sought economic advancement by settling and farming Chacachacare.

Once again the clearing of land on Chacachacare for the planting of cotton and tobacco, must have affected the natural vegetation to some extent. There is little flat land on this island, except in the valley behind Sanders Bay, so that the mountainsides must have retained much of their natural forest; and this seems to be the general condition today.

By 1814 the impending war in Venezuela sent many refugees fleeing across the Grand Boca and the Governor of Trinidad, Sir Ralph Woodford, reported that there was an influx of these refugees on to the island and that "several good Houses are to be found on the island." (THS #298).

These refugees were some of the remnants of the expedition that had set out from Chacachacare in 1813 to assist Simon Bolivar in Venezuela in the war of independence from Spain, and led by Santiago Marino, the grandson of Geraldine Carige (Mavrogordato c.1972). How many of these people settled on this dry and demanding island is not recorded, but it is certain that they, in seeking shelter and refuge, would have cleared land and building sites to erect huts and houses, and attempted to plant crops that would give them sustenance during their stay there.

WHALING.

Mavrogordato (1972) states that the humpback whales were hunted by the boats of Don Geraldo Carry from the island in the 1780s.

By 1820 a new economic demand was met in Trinidad by supplying whale oil for the use in lamps. To this end several land-based whaling stations were established on the Boca Islands, one being established by Henry Joell on Chacachacare. (Reeves et al 2001 p.50.), and according to the diary of Amelia Gomez, on September 4, 1841 there was a large whaling "fishery" established by a Mr. Grell. (Pocock.2002. p193.) This type of operation must have entailed quite an establishment of buildings and equipment, and, in that the whale blubber had to be boiled and rendered down to a usable form of oil, one has to speculate where the wood for the fires was sourced, and it is more than likely that timber was cut on the island to supply the fuel for the fires. This whaling went on for much of the nineteenth century until about 1870, when the whaling station on Chacachacare virtually ceased operation, (Reeves et al 2001) though Collens (1888) states that the station was still in operation in 1888. There is no record of what degradation to the vegetation on Chacachacare took place, but cotton was still being grown in great quantities until the emancipation of the slaves in 1835, when, due to the withholding of their labour, this cultivation had to be abandoned.

However, by 1866, Messers Gerold and Urich had resumed cultivating cotton, due no doubt to paid labour. (Hart 1866 p.142.) The difficulty of transport to and from Chacachacare would have necessitated the labour force being housed in barracks or small chattel huts on the island. Besides the cutting of timber for firewood, some planting of vegetable and fruit crops must have been done to sustain the population of these enterprises.
Towards the end of the nineteenth century Chacachacare supported a population of about 400 people and in 1844 the Archbishop of Trinidad sent a Dominican priest to the island to minister to the people, and he succeeded in building a small church, a presbytery and a school. The Holy Ghost Fathers replaced the Dominican order in 1901, and they lived in a rest house on the island. (Rétout 1988). Whether this was a new church building or an addition to the one being built by Madlle Emilie Marain in 1841 is not clear. (Pocock. 2002 p.193.).

THE LIGHTHOUSE.

In the 1870s the lighthouse, standing today on the highest point of the island, 825 feet (251.5 m) above sea level (W.I. Pilot. 1931), was constructed by the British Government. Extensive surveying of the area must have been done prior to the cutting of the road along

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Feature

the top of the ridge up to this point for the construction of the lighthouse. All the support facilities for the import of the materials and labour to build this structure and the road leading to it from the landing jetty in Chacachacare Bay must have entailed quite an amount of denuding of the ridges and surrounding slopes of the natural vegetation.

THE LEPROSARIUM.

Due to a Government decision to establish a Leprosarium on the island, all the inhabitants on the island were evicted towards the end of 1921, and the early part of 1922. The inmates of the facility for the confinement of the suffers of Hansen's disease, leprosy, then housed in Cocorite to the west of Port of Spain, were moved into the facilities that were built on the northern arm of the island to accommodate them. Cottages, a hospital, an infirmary, a common refectory, bakery, kitchens, storerooms and other service buildings were constructed on land cleared in the flatter areas that had access to the beaches and landing places where several roads and jetties were constructed. Two churches, Protestant and Catholic, were built and there are the remains of a small Hindu temple near one of the settlement ruins, to serve the resident population, which was drawn from all quarters of the people of Trinidad who were infected with Hansen's disease. A large convent, dormitory and chaplain's residence were also built on the southern arm of the island

Thus a complete system, far removed from the population of Trinidad, was established on Chacachacare, and the people housed there had to make do with what was brought in from the mainland and to subsist from what they could glean from the severely dry island.

They fished when they could steal an opportunity for the authorities forbade this activity, and they grew water- melons, tomatoes and pumpkins. (Rétout 1988 p.106)

WORLD WAR II.

This Leper Colony settled into the very fabric of what life was on Trinidad until the outbreak of World War II, when the United States Forces were granted leases on large tracts of land on Chacachacare to protect the passages between the islands, the Bocas, and to prevent enemy activity in the approaches to Trinidad's safe harbour.

To this end the United States Construction Battalions built a base on Chacachacare to house 300 marines. There were nine military barracks in all; three near the Convent in Marine Bay, one in Perriquer Bay, three up on the mountain near the lighthouse, and two above Rust's Bay. There were roads carved out of the island, running up along the ridges and connecting all the facilities. There were fences erected to enclose the 961 acres covered by the lease. Large water cisterns were built to supply the needs of so many isolated men on the dry and unforgiving island.

There must have been a considerable amount of damage to the trees and vegetation on the island during this construction and occupation, but by 1947 the Marines were gone. Today there is little to show that they were ever there, as the dry scrub and xeric vegetation has reclaimed most of the facilities and obliterated the fences, buildings and roads.

If there was any interaction between the Marines and the personnel of the Leprosarium it is not recorded, but the two groups lived side by side on an island that for years had been isolated from the general population of Trinidad, and the rest of the world.

THE COAST GUARD.

Not too many years later, new medications were formulated to combat and control Hansen's Disease and the spiralling cost of maintaining the Leper Colony, as well as the lessening number of recruits from the religious orders to be sequestered on the island with the high risk of contacting the disease, led to the decision to close the Leper Colony forever.

All the inmates and their caretakers were gone by 1985, and the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard took over the responsibility of occupying what were once the Chaplain's residence and the nun's dormitory. Ma-

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rine Bay became an anchorage for the derelict ships of the Coast Guard and destruction of the buildings on the island began. The leper colony buildings and facilities, shunned for a while, soon began to be stripped of everything that could be moved or carted away. The classic old house of the resident physician became a fisherman's weekend headquarters, and slowly the bush began to reclaim the island, Weeds and rank grasses now choke nearly all the roads and pathways. The sea-wall road has collapsed and all the jetties but one, the one that services the lighthouse, are unusable. Picnicking and weekend fishing or camping trips and swimming are the activities that bring the people who now visit Chacachacare, the site of so much history, now swiftly being forgotten. The once proud buildings, hospital, cinema, dormitories, living quarters and churches whether Christian, or Hindu, are all being rendered into the materials from which they were constructed. The termites and weather have made the wooden structures unstable and unsafe, and soon only the stone and concrete foundations will bear mute testimony to the throngs of people who through the past centuries lived and died there, some of their remains till resting in the almost forgotten graveyards in the dry bush of Chacachacare.

Over the years there have been many ideas bandied about concerning the eventual fate and possible "development" of Chacachacare. Proposals for lavish tourist resorts, complete with casinos and facilities to constitute a playground for the rich and famous have been brought forward, but have happily faded away in the reluctance of any agency or any funding, to commit to this further invasion of an unique island.

Presently the island is under the aegis of the Chaguaramas Development Authority, which oversees, in a very desultory manner, what happens on and around

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BG Insect Guide

Male Emperor Moth
Saturnia pavonia

Photo (http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6e/Saturnia_pavonia_01.jpg)

MOTHS A **moth** is an insect closely related to the butterfly, both being of the order Lepidoptera. Moths form the majority of this order; there are thought to be 150,000 to 250,000 different species of moth, with thousands of species yet to be described.[1] Most species of moth are nocturnal, but there are crepuscular and diurnal species.

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Arthropoda
Class:	Insecta
Order:	Lepidoptera
Family:	Saturniidae
Genus:	Pavonia

The **Saturniidae**, commonly known as **saturniids**, are among the largest and most spectacular of the moths. They form a family of Lepidoptera, with an estimated 1,300 to 1,500 described species worldwide [1]. The Saturniidae include such Lepidoptera as the giant silkmoths, royal moths and emperor moths. Adults are characterized by large size, heavy bodies covered in hair-like scales, lobed wings, reduced mouthparts, and small heads. They lack a frenulum but the hind wings overlap the forewings, producing the same effect of an unbroken wing surface[2]. These moths are sometimes brightly colored and often have translucent eyespots or "windows" on their wings. Sexual dimorphism varies by species, but males can generally be distinguished by their larger, broader antennae. Most adults possess wingspans between 1 to 6 inches (2.5 to 15 cm), but some tropical species, such as the Atlas Moth (*Attacus atlas*), may boast quite incredible wingspans of up to 12 inches (30 cm). Together with certain Noctuidae (chiefly Calpinae and Catocalinae, such as the genera *Ascalapha*, *Erebus* or *Thysania*), the Saturniidae thus contain the largest Lepidoptera, and indeed some of the very largest insects alive today. (source: Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturniidae)

Fishing Pond (Monday 13th, July 2009)

Monthly Field Trip Reports

Dwayne H. Burris

On the 26th of April 2009, the members of the TTFNC and their guests embarked on a nature trip to the Fishing Pond area. A total number of twenty-four persons attended this trip. The group arrived at Fishing Pond at 8:10 a.m. and then proceeded along the wind belt trail. Birds seen at the beginning included the Southern Lapwing, the Smooth Ani, the Cattle Egret and the Blue Grassquit.

In the early reaches of the trail a *Leptodactylus fuscus* (a species of frog) was heard calling which was queer as this species of frog was usually heard at night. Further along, a Wattled Jacana was spotted and we also noticed an abandoned sluice gate. While walking, the aroma of cane juice could have been smelt from a nearby savannah. It was also apparent that the savannah grass was being burned probably to make way for agriculture.

After passing through the savannah area we proceeded into forested area. Along the way and throughout the rest of the hike, a black dog provided us with adequate companionship. In the early reaches of the forested area, a silky anteater was spotted by Sheldon Brown and further along the way we saw spiders of the species *Nephila clavipes*. As we continued to traverse through the forested area, we came across different species of trees, some of which had been labeled. The trees that we saw included: Juniper, Acoma, Guatacare, Mahoe, Cooperhoop, Coco Macaque, Cannonball, Bactris Major and Chac Chac.

Nephila clavipes *Photo Dwayne H. Burris*

After hiking through the forested area we met a stretch of beach. The group proceeded along the beach in an easterly direction. While walking along the beach I had the privilege of having a water nut which Dan had cut from a tree along the beach. It was most refreshing.

Physalia physalis *Portugese Man-O-War*
Photo Dwayne H. Burris

Further along the beach I spotted three dead Portuguese man-o-wars which had been brought in by the waves. Also present were 16 gauge shotgun shells which marked the presence of poachers. Though these shells indicated the intent to kill, there was another type of shell which indicated the birth of life. These shells were those of the leatherback turtle. Members

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Close up of house
Photo Hans E. A. Boos

the island, and it falls under the unsupported and unwritten legislation of a "National Park."
How many plants and trees were ever destroyed over the rich history of this small island is hard to say.

The vegetation, like the people who have lived there over the past centuries, is hardy, resilient and long lasting, and it can only be hoped that no tree or shrub or plant, unique to the island, has vanished, without being identified as such, forever.

We will never know.

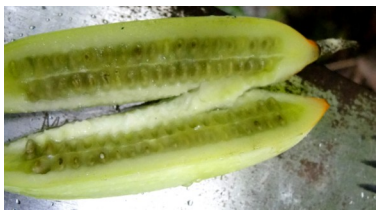
Modern collecting and surveys of the vegetation will only give us an idea of what has survived, and was once there when, perhaps mystified Arawaks watched Columbus' ships as they sailed out the Grand Boca, all the souls on board happy to escape those dangerous currents that, today, still swirl around Chacachacare Island.

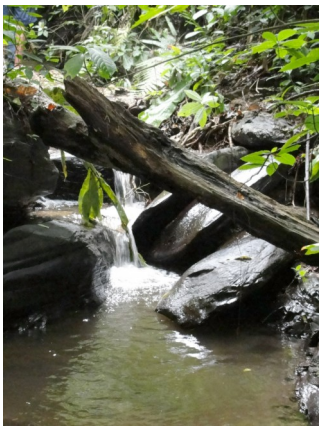
Look out for Part III in the next issue of the QB.

Photo Corner

Photos from the TTFNC – Yearly Mystery Field Trip - **CAURA WATER FALL** 30th May, 2010.








Club members hiked deep into the Caura Valley.
Richard Peterson standing in front of Caura Water Falls, pretty rock, Caura Ravine, a mystery vine and fruit also came with the trip that no one in the group could identify. Can you? *Photos Eddison Baptiste*

Fishing Pond (Monday 13th July, 2009)

Dwayne. H. Burris

Monthly Field Trip Reports

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from the group had indicated to me that they had spotted forty turtle nests and their trail marks could have also been distinguished upon the sand. Flying overhead from time to time were frigate birds.

Bede Rajahram had found some orchids on the trail and these were the species *Epidendrum fragrans* and *Brassavola cucullata* (which is very rare). After walking

Cyclopes didactylus Silky Anteater

Photo Dwayne H. Burris

the beach for a while, we returned to the trail and made way for our vehicles. On our return back to our vehicles, we stopped to take some photographs of the silky anteater.

While passing back through the savannah, Reynold Boyce spotted a plant which he knew but could not at the moment remember its name. By about 12:15pm, we had all reached back safely to our vehicles, but our excursion was far from over. Reynold Boyce invited us over to his home for some mauby and to take a look at his beetle, insect and mollusc collections and his garden.

Mr. Boyce's home was located on Panchoo road and was situated on five acres of land. When we arrived, we all took shade under a mango tree and a few moments later the mauby came out along with some biscuits. Well the decision as to how the mauby tasted was a unanimous one - It was great. While relaxing under the tree, members were also treated to some mangoes and were eventually invited inside. Inside the house we all stood in front of a chest of drawers. Now a chest of drawers as far as I understood, was usually used for storing clothes. In this case however there was an exception. These drawers contained biological specimens which Reynold had collected over the years, ranging from bugs and butterflies to molluscs. Many members were in awe at the diverse species that Reynold had; the high level of preservation of his specimens and also the fact that many of his specimens were labeled.

Flower of *Thalia geniculata*

Photo Dwayne H. Burris

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Fishing Pond (Monday July 13th, 2009)

Dwayne. H. Burris

Monthly Field Trip Reports

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Reynold's collection of biological organisms was not the only intriguing thing he had for us to see; his garden was spectacular as well. Reynold's garden consisted of a variety of plants which included: oranges (navel, king, valencia and onic), cassava, mangoes (veer, dodos, starch, ice cream), paw paw, banana, sapodilla,

Ronald Boyce's Butterfly collection b #2
Photo Dwayne H. Burris

plums, cayenne guava, neem, ink berry, sour tamarind, pomerac, fever grass, dasheen, tomatoes, pumpkin, patchoi, cashew, coconut, Cherries (rolling cherry, West Indian cherry and sour cherry), abiu and chenet. In his garden orchids were also seen growing two species of which Bede Rajahram spotted - *Epidendrum fragrans* and *Epidendrum stenopetalun.*

Two ponds were located on Reynolds land which had fish types such as cascarub, cascadura and guabine.
Though the garden was a beautiful sight to behold with its many species of plants and two ponds, Reynold made it clear that maintaining his garden was very labour intensive. He gave an insight into what he meant when he told us that the area where he had decided to place his vegetable garden was initially comprised of sapatay soil and was not good for planting. Some inches of this soil had to be removed and replaced with

Fruit of *Desmoncus polyacanthosb*
Photo Dwayne H. Burris

a more desirable soil type.

Reynold kept a record of his fruit trees and the amount of produce that they bore. Maintenance of his trees involved trimming, fertilization and pest control where needed. One instance where pest control was needed was with his plum tree which was being attacked by fruit flies. Reynold used an ingenious way to control the fruit flies by placing onion bags containing neem leaves over the plums. To keep his vegetable plants healthy, Reynold used compost, which was

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Pungent is as pungent does. *Part 2..*

Christopher K. Starr

Feature - serial

In the previous issue I drew your attention to the colourful, conspicuous caterpillar of the hawk moth *Pseudosphinx tetrio* and posed the question of how it could possibly survive in the presence of kiskadees and other predators. I then showed how you could personally test the hypothesis that the caterpillars are defended by distasteful compounds in the body. I trust that you have all done the experiment, instead of just waiting for me to tell you. My own experience is unambiguous. The blood is majorly bitter, quite possible enough so to deter even the hungriest kiskadee.

***Pseudosphinx tetrio* caterpillar**
Photo Wikimedia

How, then, does it get that way? When I ask naturalists and students about this, the usual conjecture is that the caterpillars take up the noxious compounds from their food, the leaves of the frangipani tree (*Plumeria rubra*). This is a fair hypothesis. Animals can become distasteful and/or poisonous in two fundamental ways. *Synthesis* is the process of forming compounds anew from precursors, or building blocks, while in *sequestration* they are taken up ready-made from the food. It has been suggested to me, then, that *P. tetrio* caterpillars defend themselves by sequestering existing compounds from the frangipani leaves that they eat.

***Pseudosphinx tetrio*, adult**

Photo Wikipedia

There is no need to eat a leaf in order to carry out a quick and simple test of this hypothesis. Like many members of the Apocynaceae, frangipani produces a milky sap. Break off a leaf cleanly at the base and taste the conspicuous drop that appears. Well, is it strongly bitter or otherwise distasteful? Does it, in particular, taste like the blood from the caterpillar?

There will not be a Part 3 to this article, so if you don't do this experiment you really, truly will never know.

Christopher K. Starr
Dep't of Life Sciences
University of the West Indies
ckstarr@gmail.com

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Fishing Pond (Monday 13th, July 2009)

Dwayne. H. Burris

Monthly Field Trip Reports

mainly made up of vegetable remains. Before we left Reynold's home, he had found the name of the plant that we saw on the way out of the savannah. It was *Thalia geniculata*. How did he find it? Well, for a person who had showed us a well organized and magnificent collection, to a beautiful well managed garden what could you expect? He had the plant listed in a database of plant species which he had compiled.

I must say the fishing pond trip was a day well spent. From seeing an anteater in the wild, to having a great tasting mauby, to seeing a wonderful collection of biological organism and traversing a beautiful garden, I could not ask for anything more.

Plant species seen

Common name	Scientific name	Family
Abiu	*Pouteria caimito*	Sapotaceae
Acoma	*Sideroxylon quadriloculare*	Sapotaceae
Bois D'orme	*Guazuma ulmifolia*	Sterculiaceae
Cannonball	*Couroupita guianensis*	Lecythidaceae
Chac chac	*Canna glauca*	Cannaceae
Coco Macaque	*Pouteria coriacea*	Sapotaceae
Cooperhoop	*Brownea coccinea*	Fabaceae
Guatecare	*Eschweilera subglandulosa*	Lecythidaceae
Juniper	*Genipa americana*	Rubiaceae
Mahoe	*Sterculia caribaea*	Sterculiaceae
Matapal	*Clusia rosea*	Guttiferae
none	*Brassavola cucullata*	Orchidaceae
none	*Bactris major*	Arecaceae
none	*Epidendrum fragrans*	Orchidaceae
none	*Thalia geniculata*	Marantaceae
none	*Epidendrum stenopetalum*	Orchidaceae
none	*Desmoncus polyacanthos*	Arecaceae

Bird Species seen

Blue-black grassquit	*Volatinia jacarina*	Emberizidae
Cattle egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	Ardeidae
Frigate bird		Fregatidae
Smooth-billed Ani	*Crotophaga ani*	Cuculidae
Southern lapwing	*Vanellus chilensis*	Charadriidae
Turkey Vulture	*Cathartes aura*	Cathartidae
Wattled jacana	*Jacana jacana*	Jacanidae

Mammal seen

Silky anteater	*Cyclopes didactylus*	Cyclopedidae

Amphibian heard

Rana picuda	*Leptodactylus fuscus*	Leptodactylidae

Arachnid seen

Golden orb-web spider	*Nephila clavipes*	Nephilidae

Couroupita guianensis Cannon Ball Tree
Photo Dwayne H. Burris

Trips to Soldado Rock with the Late Richard ffrench

Elisha S. Tikasingh

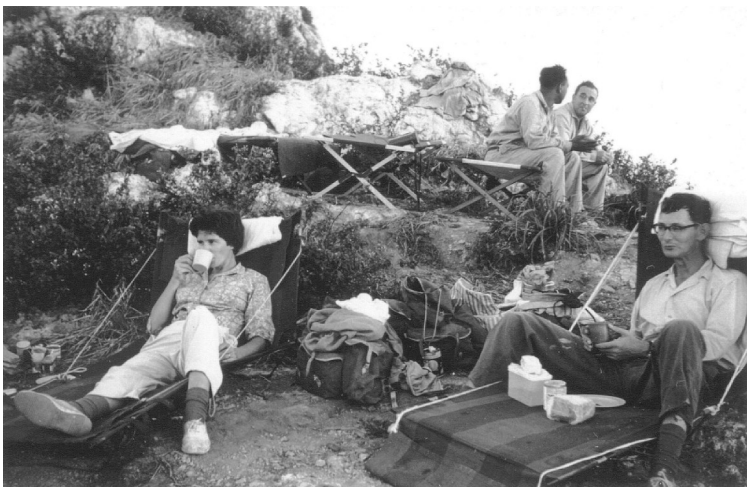
A page from the past

Richard and Margaret ffrench
Photo Ian Lambie

It was with sadness that I learnt of the death of Richard ffrench on 10 May, 2010. He was 80 years old. I first met Richard and Margaret ffrench in the early 1960s. I was a staff member of the Trinidad Regional Virus Laboratory (TRVL). Staff of the TRVL started a collaborative project with Richard to study sea birds on Soldado Rock. Richard was interested in banding sea birds and the TRVL staff were interested in taking blood samples from the birds for processing for virus isolations. The objective of our study was to determine if sea birds and their associated ticks can transport viruses over long distances particularly as sea birds are cosmopolitan in distribution.

These studies were carried out two to three times a year for about three years, 1962 - 1965. The usual plan was that TRVL staff, which usually included Dr. T. H. G. Aitken, a technician, occasionally Dr. C. Brooke Worth ("A Naturalist in Trinidad") and myself would journey to Pointe -a-Pierre to meet Richard and Margaret at their home and have a delightful lunch prepared by Margaret. Then we would journey down to Cedros. Richard knew a boatman who would ferry us over to Soldado Rock on a Saturday afternoon and return for us around noon the next day. While the TRVL paid for the use of the boat we left Richard to make the arrangement for its use. It was comical to see Richard haggle over the cost the boatman would charge – the boatman wanted to charge too much and Richard was asking for a much lower price. If things reached a stalemate or the price was still too high Richard would leave the boatman and report back to us standing a distance from the boatman. Richard would go back and forth a few times before the deal was struck.

On arrival on the Rock, we would take all our sleeping gear and food up a steep climb to the saddle of the Rock. Other equipment would be taken to an area where it was flat enough where we could place a work table. After dark and before "dinner" we would go around on the saddle collecting birds (usually *Sterna fuscata* and *Anous stolidus*) sitting on



Breakfast on Soldado Rock
Foreground: Margaret and Richard ffrench
Background: Elisha Tikasingh and Arthur Green.
Photo Courtesy CAREC's Archives

the ground and placed them in cloth sacks which were securely tied leaving them in the sacks overnight.

The next day, after breakfast, we would journey down the steep cliff to our work area and start the process of taking blood samples from the birds and handing them over to

(Continued on page 14)

In memory of valued TTFNC members and friends

Our heartfelt condolences go out to the Families and Friends of

Colin Agostini

Muriel Pierre

Richard ffench

Richard Wallace

The unique contribution of each of these treasured individuals will be explored in upcoming QB issues.

HAPPY HOURS WITH MURIEL

a Tribute to Muriel Pierre by *Selwyn Gomes (part 1)*

A small story with a BIG message - In 1986 I had the good fortune of meeting Muriel Pierre when I joined the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club. A lady with a most positive outlook on life! Age was not a factor when it came to getting a job done.

I always wondered where all her energy came from especially when the Horticulture Society and the Orchid Society Annual Flower Shows came around. On these occasions Muriel's whole demeanour was transformed into what the young people would say "a mean machine". The air around her will be buzzing as she instructed all her family members whom she brought together to assist her in setting up the special kind of displays of plants and fruits she thought would be the most effective of the day. Her one important objective was that the public was educated on what nature had to offer. She spared no effort in encouraging the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club to get more involved in projects that would continue to educate the public at large in matters relating to the environment.

There are two things that we hold in common — the same birth date (November 4) and a love for photography. Muriel has been an avid photographer and everytime I see mud volcanoes and rocks, Muriel comes to mind as she would not hesitate to point out the beautiful patterns made by the dry-mud around the volcanoes and the depictions of various scenes created by the rocks.

She has been most generous in sharing her knowledge with members of the Club teaching them how to develop slides and encouraging them to exhibit their photographs when opportunities arose for them to do so.

(to be continued)

Soldado Rock continued from page (13)

Richard and Margaret for banding. Ticks, *Ornithodorus capensis* from the birds usually dropped off in the sacks so all the sacs were retied and brought back to the laboratory in Port of Spain for identification and processing for viruses. It is of interest to note that we did isolate several strains of two viruses. The first one was Hughes Virus which was isolated from the same species of ticks collected by other workers in the Dry Tortugas (Florida) at about the same time we isolated ours. We isolated another virus from both ticks and terns and at the time was new to science. We named it Soldado Virus.

We also discovered a new subspecies of rodent on Soldado Rock which was named *Zygodontomys brevicauda soldadoensis.*

The collaborative effort on birds between Richard and the TRVL continued with Richard visiting TRVL many tines to study the bird skins we had in our museum in preparation for writing his book "A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago" which was published in 1980. Likewise when we had any problems with bird identification we would contact Richard for his assistance.

In one of his emails to me a few years ago, Richard indicated that he was working on the 3rd edition of his book. Hopefully, it can still be published.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to Margaret and the children.

A tribute to Richard will be published in the 2010 issue of "Living World" by Graham L. White.

Management Notices

New members; Volunteers; Publications

New Members

The Club warmly welcomes the following new members:

Ordinary members:

Alesha Naranjit, Ali Shan Ellahi, Anne Marie Sankashing, Jorindel Sooklal, Kriston Khan, Mazmoon and Kimberley Rajcharan, Mike Rotiford, Omar Mohommed, Sabetha Charles and Sunil Ramnath.

New Website

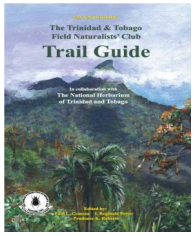
The Club has transferred to a new domain name and email address. The change allows us more space and greater control to reach out to the public and stay in touch with members.

Website: www.ttfnc.org **Email:** admin@ttfnc.org

facebook http://www.facebook.com/pages/Trinidad-Tobago-Field-Naturalists-Club/68651412196?v=info

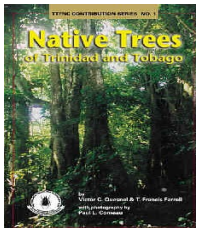
PUBLICATIONS

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

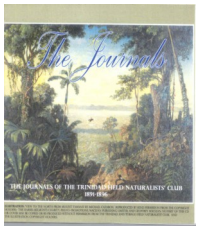


The TTFNC Trail Guide

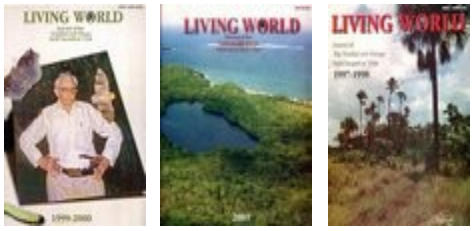
Members = TT$200.00



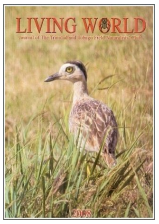
The Native Trees of T&T 2nd Edition Members = TT$100.00



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



Living World Journal 2008
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 3nd Quarter 2010 issue: **August 31st 2010.**
8	Email	• Electronic copies can be submitted to the 'Editor' at admin@ttfnc.org • Include the code **QB2010-3** in the email subject label.
9	Hard copies	• Hard copies can be delivered to the editor or any member of the Management Committee.