



THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

July - September 2011

Issue No: 3/2011



Field Trip Report, Sunday 29th May, 2011 **Annual Mystery Trip 2011 - Lacano** *Report by Bruce Lanckner*



**This year's
Mystery Trip came
with it's own
Mystery Owl.**

**An impressive
Spectacled Owl
which was roosting
in an relatively open
area in the middle of
"The Coles"
river bed.**

(full article page 3)

photo: Eddison Baptiste

Inside This Issue

- Cover**
Annual Mystery Trip 2011
 Field Trip Report, 29th May 2011
 - Bruce Lanckner
 (full article page 3)
- 7 Kissing Bugs**
 - Elisha S. Tikasingh
- 10 Northern Crested Caracara**
 Sighting and Behaviour
 - Imran Khan and Mike Rutherford
- 12 TTFNC Position On Quarrying**
 - 2009 letter to Ministry of Planning
 - Letter written by Reg Potter
- 14 We Go to Grenada 1975**
 Feature Serial (part 1c)
 - Hans Boos
- 20 2011 Member's Evening**
 Extracted from Minutes
 - Paula Smith
- 23 [Management Notices](#)**
- 24 [Notes to Contributors](#)**

Editor's note

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

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July - September 2011

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Field Trip Report, Sunday 29th May, 2011

Annual Mystery Trip 2011 - Lacano

Report by Bruce Lanckner



The annual club Mystery Trip was held on 29 May 2011. The group of around 25 naturalists who gathered at UWI moved off a little behind schedule and turned West onto the Churchill Roosevelt Highway; this was followed by a right turn at the Uriah Butler and then West again onto the Eastern Main Road at Mount Hope. Turning right onto Abercromby Street suggested that we were headed into Santa Cruz. So it proved, but surprisingly **soon after hitting the Saddle Road we swung right into La Canoa, apparently virgin territory for the Field Naturalists' Club as no member could remember the club venturing into that area before.**

After perhaps 2-3 km we stopped at a point where the road appeared to be moving away from the continuous ribbon development of small houses, shacks and bars. Here a small river crossed under the road before joining the main stream running down the valley. A briefing followed in which we were informed that we would be walking alongside the small river (which apparently does not have a name, but is called "The Coles") up to a waterfall. Bobby Oumdash, our local guide, and Dan Jaggernauth were both carrying bundles of ropes and Bobby warned that the rocks were "very slippery"; perhaps this trip was not going to be a Sunday stroll after all.

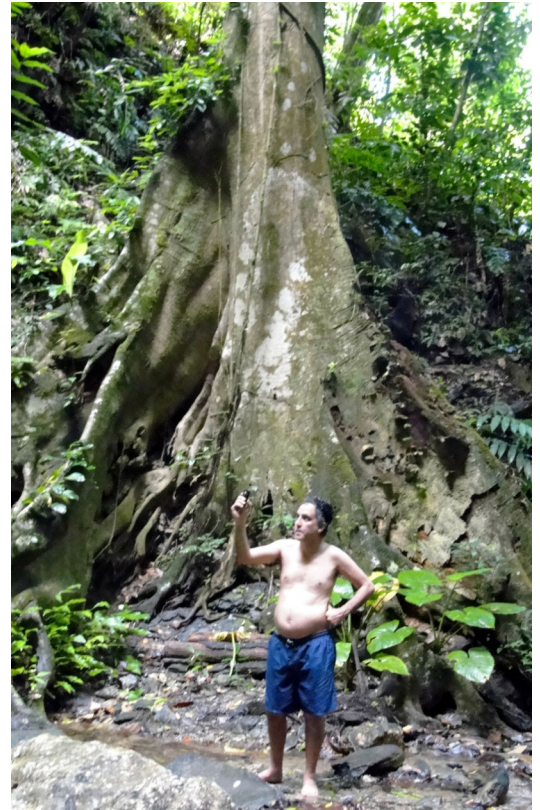
We started up the side of the river and soon heard the calls of the Collared Trojan Bird and the White Bearded Manakin. After about 10 minutes, we came to what was obviously a local picnic spot with a small pool and, sadly, quite a bit of unsightly litter. Local folk had built a small chute in the stream and a local resident was filling his bucket with crisp clean water. He didn't seem too pleased to see us and warned us that the trail was to the side of the river and not to walk in the water.

This was not always possible as the trail kept crossing the water and the rocks were more than treacherous after some overnight rain, so wading in the shallow water was inevitable in some places. At one of these river crossings about half the party had crossed the water, too busy to spot a very impressive Spectacled Owl sitting on a rock less than 10 metres from the crossing. This really was a Mystery Trip mystery as to why such a creature would choose to roost in a relatively open location. The conclusion was that the owl was in trouble as he/she remained motionless as all gathered round, not too silently, and peered. Eventually our attentions were too intrusive and the owl suddenly spread its wings and moved off. Unfortunately we had disturbed its Sunday rest.

As we moved upstream we had to bypass several small gorges and the ropes were brought out to assist our passage on the steep slippery surfaces and to ensure that nobody lost footing and tumble many metres onto dangerous rocks. The efforts required to prevent mishaps did not stop us from noticing that we were passing through abandoned estate lands. Old cocoa trees were seen as well as breadfruit roots, but not actual mature breadfruit trees. As expected on abandoned land heliconia plants were in evidence including *Heliconia Hirsuta* and *Heliconia Baliser*. An attractive Hot Lips flower was admired.

After an hour or more of pretty slow progress the waterfall came into sight. This turned out to be a pretty impressive series of cascades. The lower drop was around 30 metres, but above this another main drop could be seen with some sort of intermediate drop obviously existing but not viewable from our location at the foot. The total drop may well have been close to 100 metres with quite a volume

(Continued on page 5)



A

B

Mystery Trip 2011



C



Bobby Oumdath's offering of two bunches of Gri Gri fruit brings delight to the faces of (left to right) a young (unknown) guest, Dan Jaggernaut and Paula Smith
Page 4 (A) one of the gorges along "The Cole" river

(B) Selwyn Gomes at the base of a Silk Cotton Tree Trunk

(C) some members at the base of the water fall

photos: Eddison Baptiste

Annual Mystery Trip 2011 *report by Bruce Lanckner*

(Continued from page 3)

of water. Bobby assured us that this drop never dries to a sprinkle even in the harshest dry seasons. Truly an impressive fall for an unnamed water course. The fall is also not named; the suggestion was that it should be named Santa Cruz Falls (plural); they are not in Santa Cruz proper, but more geographical detail would let the secret out to too many others. Shouldn't a Mystery Trip be to a place that will remain mysterious?

The vegetation around was still very much abandoned estate, but a magnificent Silk Cotton tree with some big buttress roots was well established very close to the pool at the bottom of the falls. This pool was populated with a small unidentified "guppy" type fish. Perhaps unique to that particular pool as it would be unable to travel to similar pools, even though close cousins probably exist elsewhere. Bobby disappeared briefly and then reappeared with two huge bunches of Gri Gri which were shared

(Continued on page 6)



**Our friend the Spectacled Owl watches attentively from its new roost
as we exit the “The Coles” River**

photo: Eddison Baptiste

Annual Mystery Trip 2011 *report by Bruce Lanckner*
(Continued from page 5)

and enjoyed.

After a fairly lengthy sojourn, rain began to threaten and not wishing the return trip to be any more dangerous than the upward journey, we trekked back slipping on many rocks and being very grateful for the ropes positioned by Bobby and Dan. **When we were within sight of our parked cars somebody looked up in an old cocoa tree and saw our friend, the Spectacled Owl who had found another spot to snooze away his/her Sunday. Once**

again the owl was motionless in rest and this time we knew not to disturb him/her. The manakins and other birds nearby were not so happy with the owl's presence and were making quite a noise.

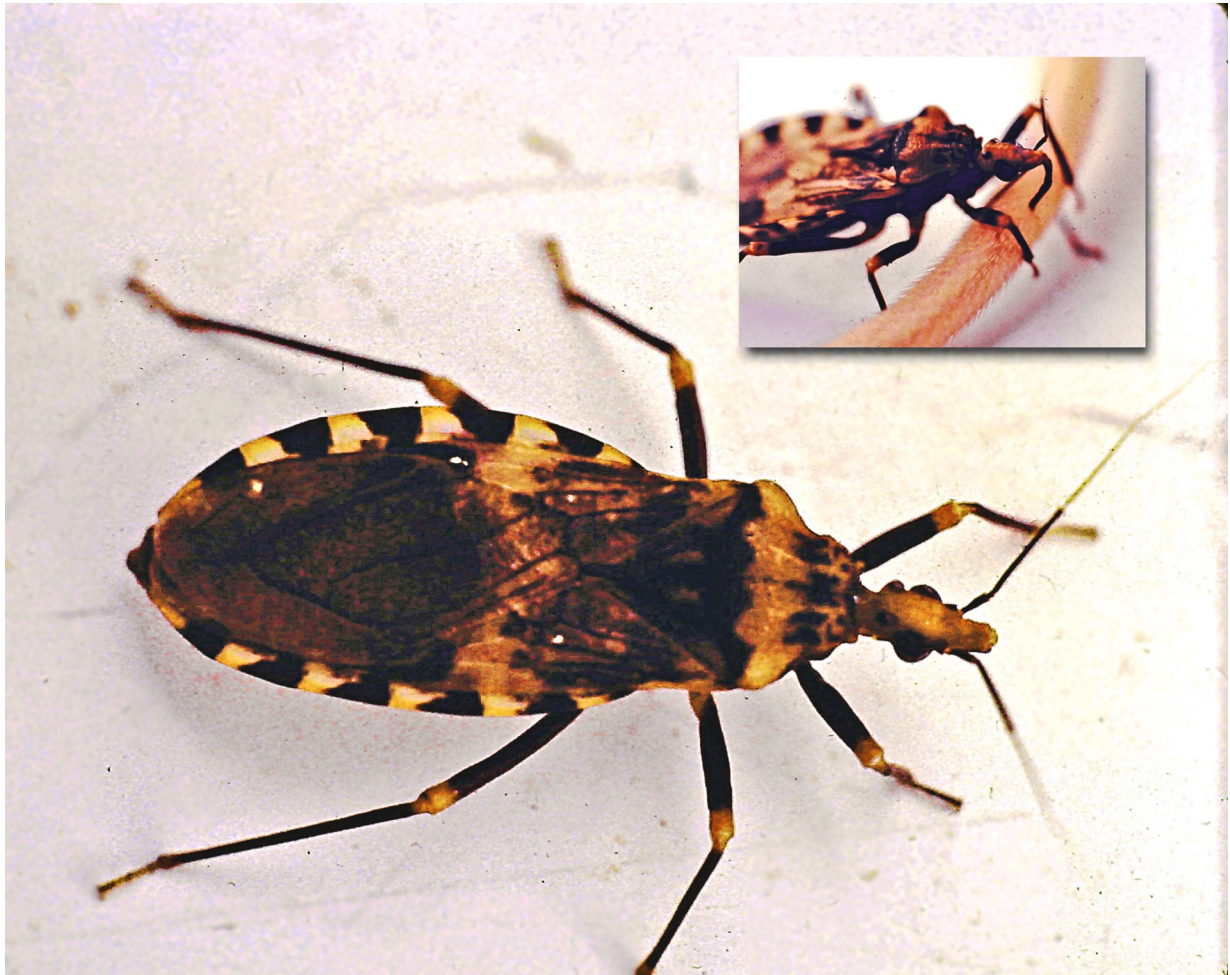
Perhaps not the most interesting trip for those looking for natural forest, but one wonders how many other almost unknown waterfalls exist in Trinidad (and Tobago). And none of the naturalists on this Mystery Trip will forget the Owl and the mystery of its choice of daytime roost.

Annoying and Blood Sucking Arthropods of Trinidad and Tobago



4. Kissing Bugs

by Elisha Tikasingh
elisha.tikasingh@gmail.com



Panstrongylus Kissing Bug

Kissing bugs are also known as assassin bugs and conenose bugs. They are widespread in the Americas and are an important group of insects because they carry a parasite which affects the heart muscle and other organs of the human body. The disease is known as Chagas's disease or American trypanosomiasis.

The bugs belong to the family Reduviidae and sub-family Triatominae. Most of the triatomines take a blood meal from vertebrates. Reduviids are generally oval in shape. The head is elongated and cone-shaped, hence the name conenose bugs. The mouthparts are short, three segmented and bent backwards under the head when they are not feeding (photo). They are generally black or brown in colour. Females lay from a few dozen to several hun-

(Continued on page 8)

Annoying and Blood Sucking Arthropods of Trinidad and Tobago

4. Kissing Bugs

by Elisha Tikasingh



(Continued from page 7)

dred eggs. Eggs are hatched into nymphs and there are five nymphal moults before reaching to adults. The life cycle is about a year.

Six species of triatomid bugs are known to exist in Trinidad: *Panstrongylus geniculatus* (photo), *Rhodnius pictipes*, *Eratyrus mucronatus*, *Triatoma fasciata*, *Microtriatoma trinidadensis* and *Panstrongylus rufotuberculatus* (CAREC unpublished data, Omah-Maharaj 1984, 1987). Staff at the Trinidad Regional Virus Laboratory in fact have maintained laboratory colonies of the first three species. Some species such as *P. geniculatus* are attracted to light and will fly into homes at night. Such specimens have been collected and brought to my laboratory from residents living in Diego Martin and a specimen was collected from a home on Lady Chancellor's Hill near Port of Spain.

Kissing bugs generally are found in forested areas and species like *P. geniculatus* live in animal burrows such as armadillos while some species like *E. mucronatus* and *R. pictipes* live in palm trees (Maharaj 1987). In rural Latin America some species are adapted to human habitation where the poorer people live in adobe houses. The bugs live in cracks and crevices in the walls and may also hide behind hanging pictures and under mattresses. At night when people are sleeping they come out to bite usually in the face and head region. The bites of some species are painful, but in others the bite is hardly felt. Some individuals who are sensitive to the bites of these bugs might experience burning sensations with itching and some swelling.

Kissing bugs transmit a parasite called *Trypanosoma cruzi* the aetiological agent of Chagas's disease. Dr. Wilbur Downs (1963), Director of TRVL was the first person to draw attention to the presence of the parasite in Trinidad. At about the same time Dr. T.H.G. Aitken found the bug, *Panstrongylus genicula-*

tus in Trinidad and Fistein (1966) collected *P. geniculatus* and noted the infective stage of the parasite was present in the bug. The infective stage of the parasite is found in the hind gut of the bug and eliminated with the faeces. Staff at TRVL - CAREC have subsequently found that more than 50% of *P. geniculatus* collected and examined harboured the infective stage of the parasite in the hind gut. Maharaj (1987) found 42.5% of *P. geniculatus* and 8.3% of *Rhodnius pictipes* infected. During feeding or right after taking a blood meal the bug defecates and the infective stage is eliminated with the faeces. Transmission of the parasite occurs when an individual itches after a bite by the bug and contaminates one's fingers with the faeces containing the infective stage of the parasite and then rubbing one's eyes with the infected fingers. Soon there will be swelling surrounding the eyelid the first sign of Chagas's disease. Symptoms of the disease include fever, enlargement of the lymph nodes and damage to the heart muscles. In some people the digestive tract may be involved as well as the brain.

Dr. Omah Maharaj (1987) examined a number of wild mammals in various parts of Trinidad and found the opossum *Didelphis marsupialis* and armadillo *Dasybus novemcinctus* naturally infected with the parasite.

A cardiologist, Dr. B. Fistein during routine clinical investigations found a few of his patients had heart problems suggestive of Chagas's disease. Later, Fistein and Sutton (1963) published the results of a serological study which suggested that the parasite might indeed be affecting humans in Trinidad. However, a serological study on 512 individuals conducted by Maharaj (1987) found no evidence that people were being infected with Chagas's disease in Trinidad.

The parasite, the vector and reservoir hosts are present in Trinidad, but a conclusive human infection is still to be recorded.

(Continued on page 9)



**Our heartfelt condolences
go out to the Family and Friends
of**

Professor Julian Kenny

Professor Julian Kenny was a Life Time member of
The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC)
up until the time he became a Senator.

*The unique contribution of this treasured individual
and member of the Club will be explored in upcoming
TTFNC publications.*

4. Kissing Bugs

(Continued from page 8)

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Northern Crested Caracara

Sighting and Behaviour

Report by Imran Khan and Mike G. Rutherford

A Northern Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) was sighted on May 25, 2010 about 100 m away from the Toco Light house. It was first spotted in flight at 4:30 pm, and was observed at the location for about an hour afterwards. Our field description was not fitting of the adult male or female provided by Kenefick *et al* (2007). However, the darker brown plumage coloration and the larger extent and brighter red/orange coloration of the facial skin led us to believe that it was a juvenile male.

The bird was observed in the vicinity of a nearby road kill. A few Black Vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) were already upon the carcass on the north side of the road, with three more on the opposite side. The Caracara got closer to the hotspot of activity by means of gliding in large looping half circles in the strong-winded area. It then perched on the electrical pole and a nearby Coconut Palm before dropping down onto the road.

Surprisingly, the Caracara seemed more interested in the few vultures on the south side of the road than the more crowded road kill. It began to attack one of them by jumping up slightly and lashing out with its talons at the vulture's head, and occasionally pecked at its head, neck and wing. The two closest vultures just "hopped" around and spread their wings; possibly clueless of it all, or trying to defend their own.

An untimely interruption from a passing vehicle chased off the Caracara and others, making it circle and perch on the Coconut Palm once more, whilst the vultures went further off the road. Interestingly, its smaller cousin, the Yellow-headed Caracara (*Milvago chimachima*), also appeared on the scene and chased off its larger relative after a very short show of domination; flapping its wings, pointing its talons, and screeching its voice at the Northern Crested Caracara. However, just as the Northern was forced to flee without putting up any fight, a lone Tropical Mockingbird (*Mimus gilvus*) was also



Northern Crested Caracara
***Caracara cheriway* juvenile male**

photo: Mike Rutherford

effectively able to chase off the Yellow-headed, and it never returned to bother the Northern Crested Caracara for the duration of our observations. Other than that, all other bird species seemed oblivious of the visitor, and did not mete out the treatment that they typically would to our Yellow-headed Caracara.

During the time that all the birds had flown away an opportunity presented itself to examine both the road kill and the vulture that the Caracara had at-

(Continued on page 11)



Injured Black Vulture
Coragyps atratus

“The bird was not a healthy individual, perhaps being hit from a vehicle whilst feeding at the nearby carcass or probably just too exhausted to care much about anything else.”

photo: Mike Rutherford

(Continued from page 10)

tacked earlier. There was nothing special or unusual about the former – a typical dead dog. The latter however, proved much more interesting. The bird was not a healthy individual, perhaps being hit from a vehicle whilst feeding at the nearby carcass or probably just too exhausted to care much about anything else. Either way, this state enabled us to get within inches of the bird, whose eyes remained closed at all times. Its face suffered some punctures and/or lacerations, and there were several drops of blood on the soil. No other sign of injury was observed; the shape of the body and the positioning of the feathers seemed intact, but the bird was clearly void of the behavior that healthy individuals are known to exhibit.

We retreated to allow nature to take its course and soon the Northern Crested Caracara again flew down to the injured vulture rather than the carcass. This time although there were no nearby protectors for the injured individual the Caracara still seemed wary, perhaps knowing that its next meal was still alive, or that some of the vultures kin were feeding only a few meters away. It was observed pecking at something on the ground, either the spilt blood or

possibly the insects that were attracted to it. After this strange behavior it cautiously tried to peck at the vulture's wing but although it held onto the feathers, it did not manage to pull any off. Reprieve eventually came for the injured vulture, with three individuals again landing in its vicinity which made the Caracara even warier.

Given that we saw the Northern Crested Caracara possibly feeding on the spilt blood and trying to decide between attacking an injured vulture or getting involved in scavenging some dead dog from a crowd of rowdy vultures, we surmised that it was very hungry. Eventually, perhaps being too wary of the “guardians” of the injured vulture, the Northern Crested Caracara moved towards the dog carcass to try his luck for the last time but for every few steps forward it would bounce a couple of steps back every time a vulture got a bit close. Then suddenly without any warning, the Caracara flew off much further than it had done when previously disturbed. This led us to believe that it had become frustrated at not having the chance for a meal and decided to look elsewhere.



TTFNC POSITION ON QUARRYING

As expressed in a letter dated/mailed 5th July, 2009 to Ministry of Planning

This Letter was written by Reg Potter



The Honourable Emily Gaynor Dick-Forde Minister
of Planning,
Housing and the Environment.
44-46 South Quay
Port of Spain
Dear Minister;

5th July, 2009

RE: GOVERNMENTS POLICY WITH RESPECT TO QUARRING OPERATIONS.

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC) has noted with some alarm the fact that the government has again diluted the intent of the Environmental Management Act by reducing the CEC requirements for quarrying. In December last year when attention was diverted towards Christmas, a notice was published in the press indicating that the Certificate of Environmental Clearance (CEC) would not be required for the purposes of establishing a quarry of under 150 acres. This notice was laid before parliament for "negative resolution" (meaning that if nobody raises the matter it will become effective in 40 days). No objections were made. Preceding this, the activity of quarrying was exempted from the list of "Designated Activities" under Section 35 of the Act so that prospective quarry operators would not have to apply to the EMA for clearance, but the drafters of that resolution made a tactical error by not changing the requirement to have a CEC before forest or other vegetation could be cleared. Also, an error was made by using "acres" as the stated area measurement, when our laws use the metric system.

Few quarries are as large as 150 acres so this effectively means that quarrying can proceed almost anywhere, in forest reserves for example, without the stipulations of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA). One of the major beneficiaries will be Sunway, the Malaysian company who are blasting their way through limestone in the Arima valley to-

wards our internationally renowned Asa Wright Nature Centre, and no doubt wish to expand to other areas for other materials. Sunway was introduced to this country by UDECOTT who are themselves presently under scrutiny by Commission of Enquiry. Widespread destruction of the environment in the foothills of the Northern Range around Valencia and onward to Matura is the result of quarrying for sand and gravel.

Quarrying is responsible for serious loss of natural environment and consequently is an activity that requires careful regulation. This indecent haste to remove the restrictions on quarrying can only be viewed as a backward step and does not signal to the world that we are a mature nation that recognises the importance of the of our environment. The claim put forward that shortages of aggregates is the result of insufficient quarries which has caused the increase in prices for building materials is questionable. On examination, the shortage in supplies seem more related to the rapid pace of developments, consequently, established quarries and normal growth simply can't keep up. The pace of building has resulted in a gross oversupply of residential and commercial properties, which combined with the downturn in world business has already resulted in the fall of in property prices. TTFNC notes that the majority of large building projects are being done by government agencies.

TTFNC accepts that the Environmental Management Act is not perfect and has not, in its implementation resulted in effective protection of the environment. We believe that very little protection from projects have resulted, penalties have been ineffective when directed at agencies of the government (offender and recipient of penalty being the same party), loss of previous enforcement such as noise pollution has effectively occurred when the police surrendered control to the EMA, water and air standards took too long to enact, and harmless

(Continued on page 13)



Above one of many trucks on the road to Guanapo Heights Widening the road and dumping the "waste" at will.

To the right the scar of Quarrying/Greed deep in the northern range where issues of the water shed, flooding and silting of rivers down stream seem to be no concern. This is just one of many quarries. The next time you experience a flood on the low lands think why?

Quarrying deep in the mountains of the Northern Range. This scene is repeated many times all over the country.

WITH LITTLE REGARD FOR

- **Silting of rivers or flood damage down stream**
- **Damage to water sheds and the general environment**
- **General quality of life and resulting economic cost**

**Aren't the damages incurred by the general public an issue?
Does anything goes for a buck?
Is this ethical? Is this just?**

QUARRYING IN THE HEIGHTS OF GUANAPO

photos/commentary: Eddison Baptiste



(Continued from page 12)

legitimate projects have had to suffer high costs of CEC requirements. There also appears to be a lack of coordination among government departments responsible for project approvals so that much time and effort is expended, at the end of which the project is approved anyway, and the environment suffers the consequences.

However until a better system is legislated, the Environmental Management Act must still take precedence. We are concerned that such conspicuous moves are being made at the highest levels to undermine the law of the land. TTFNC stands ready to

assist in the drafting of more effective and practical legislation, but must condemn in the strongest terms this deliberate abuse. This particular exemption will allow new quarries to start up in almost any area unchecked by the EMA, and will be a major embarrassment to the nation when such large-scale environmental destruction is able to by-pass the very agency responsible for environmental protection.

Yours Respectfully
Palaash Narase



WE GO TO GRENADA 1975

Feature Serial by Hans Boos
(Part 1c)



(left to right) **Julius Boos, Hans Boos and Terry Boylan,**
posing with the rented Austin Mini-minor

We were going to spend the first night in a cabana-like bungalow on Grande Anse beach, which circumstance had been arranged by one of those family chains that are familiar to West Indians. The Prime Minister of Grenada had a brother who, due to this connection, had wrangled permission to build a series of these cabanas on Grande Anse beach in anticipation of the tourist boom, which never really materialized due to the increasing troubles in Grenada, brought on by the autonomous and oppressive nature of the government. Connections with the equally repressive regime in Guyana, under Forbes Burnham — a connection that had led to the setting up of the ambitious scheme of the Grenada Zoo with a large donation of Guyanese fauna — was having similar effect on the normally quiet Grenada. Racial tensions in Guyana, after the greater majority of the whites had fled to North America, thus de-

priving the majority of the population of a minority scapegoat, turned inward, and tensions between the descendants of Africa and India had had the usual results of the embracing by emerging independent nations of socialism and ill-concealed communistic leanings.

In Grenada however, the situation had been somewhat different. The Prime Minister, accepting the knighthood bestowed on him by the Queen of England, was perpetuating the pomp of colonialism over an increasingly poor population. Without another enclave of race, as was present in Guyana, against which to vent its frustration for not receiving what they thought they had been promised when they severed the apron-strings of the "Mother Country," the poor, looking for another mother

(Continued on page 15)

(Continued from page 14)

other than the rich politicians, turned to the very "ism" that was keeping the rich in power in Guyana. And in Cuba. Socialism and crypto-colonialism fuelled the opposition parties in Grenada, and actions by the aggrieved poor were aimed at the one group who were seen as symbols of their "oppressors," the tourists, whose dollars were so essential to fuel the island's economy, where a flight from the land and agriculture had caused revenues from traditional crops — cocoa and nutmeg — to dwindle and disappear. These pale northerners who rushed ashore from the tall cruise ships tied up at the new deep-water harbour dock, to spend a day, hustled by local vendors who belligerently pressed them to buy shoddy souvenirs and made their attempts to find a quiet spot for sun, sand and a swim impossible, were staying away from Grenada in droves, as the liners, more often than not bypassed the island for more salubrious and aware destinations that welcomed tourists and their dollars with open arms.

So, the brother who was related in some way to the maid who worked for Julius' wife's mother, had made arrangements, by phone, for us to stay — for free — at one of these beach-side cabanas on one of the most beautiful bathing beaches in Grenada.

The car we rented was an Austin Mini-minor, and it was obvious after a few hours of driving it over Grenada's badly maintained roads, that not only would it not survive, but it was far too small to stow all our gear, and the cages, should we locate any monkeys on our forays into the hinterland, where it was likely that monkeys were captured and kept as pets. The Zoo had told us that they had had no success in locating any for us, so it was up to us to acquire any we might be fortunate enough to locate. We drove to Grande Anse after securing the keys from the owner, and located the cabana where we were to spend the night. We off-loaded our gear and, at Julius' suggestion, we continued on to Pointe Saline, where he remembered he had caught the "sarpints" on a previous trip. This was agreeable as we had several hours to spend before we could complete the "monkey business" back at the zoo, when the veterinarian came to work

sometime between mid-morning and noon.

We parked the Mini beneath the trees that lined Point Saline beach and began to search the branches above us for the tell-tale balls of coiled snake which was the characteristic way in which the tree boas spent their daylight hours. They were nocturnal feeders, and became active at night, searching out the *Anolis* lizards which are their primary food. And these lizards were abundant on the trees and bushes around us. Large *A. richardii* perched, head down, on the boles of the larger trees, while *A. aeneus*, which had been transplanted to Trinidad, were everywhere, scampering over the smaller bushes, and occasionally foraging on the ground around the roots and among the leaf-litter there. Males of both species bobbed their heads and puffed out their dewlaps, challenging and signalling to one another and to females, that they were there, defending their territories, and advertizing their prowess.

I photographed a few of these lizards and we caught them with swift snatches, as both Julius and I had been able to do since we were boys, amazing Terry with our dexterity, as we had often done to North American naturalists and students who had come to Trinidad to study the behavior and speciation of these fascinating little cousins of the iguana.

But there were no snakes there. We moved on to an area near the proposed airport and on to some cliffs overlooking the sea, where after a search we saw our first balled sarpint. But it was high in a smooth barked "naked Indian" tree, and climbing after it was a hazardous business. We left it sleeping in the now intense morning sun. A few minutes later, Julius spotted another, in an easier and safer position in a tree. This one was easily caught, and we saw that it was a pale yellowish form, not too unlike the ones found on Trinidad, and nowhere near as beautifully patterned as the ones we hoped to capture. But, we bagged it, as it struck at us again and again. Sarpints, or as they are internationally known, Tree boas, Garden Boas or Cook's tree boas, are irritable, biting snakes, seldom settling down to a placid captive life. They retain their sav-

(Continued on page 16)

WE GO TO GRENADA 1975 (part 1c)

Feature Serial by Hans Boos

(Continued from page 15)

age individuality, and will bite at every opportunity. In daylight their slit-pupiled eyes render them almost sightless, and they strike out blindly. The bite from the needle-like teeth, though not venomous, is nevertheless quite painful, and many a row of tiny bleeding holes along a finger or arm has been the result of any careless or casual handling of these snakes.

We searched for about an hour and found a couple more, only one of which we kept. The other one, that we released after capture, was the same colour morph as the first we had bagged. We had to get back to the zoo at the arranged time, and we drove back to St Georges, picking up some food along the way. We still had to wait for the veterinarian, so we wandered around the piteously depleted menagerie. The wonderful plans to have a "National Zoological Garden," stocked by a sister, former, colony, had fallen apart. There were few animals left alive in the cages. A single white-lipped peccary, one tayra, a couple of macaws, and a sorry sloth were all that remained of the large shipment that had been received from Guyana. Empty cages and weed-choked enclosures told of ambitious plans gone astray. Their one Mona monkey was old and diseased, and somewhere there was a starving lion. It was heart-breaking to see the ravenousness with which the tayra, a carnivore, seized an offered Anolis, and bolted it down, in preference to the all-fruit diet that had been offered.

We had had no idea that this was what we would find when we offered the Grenada Zoo the Capuchin monkeys. Though they were, in reality, zoological dead-ends, probably too human-imprinted by their stay in the pet trade from the time they were captured in Venezuela, until they had been re-introduced to their own kind in the surplus colony in the Emperor Valley Zoo, I had no desire to condemn them to the untender mercies of an organization which had no basic ideas of animal husbandry, and no more experience than what misguided intuition suggested.

But the die had been cast and we could do nothing except try to advise the misinformed keeper of these animals on the right diets, promise to send photocopies of whatever instructional manuals we had, and to ask the veterinarian to take a more active interest in their captive conditions that would perhaps ensure a better life for not only the Capuchins, but all the animals in the sad little zoo.

Walking along the sloping paths of the zoo, Terry's sharp eyes made out the slim length of one of the Grenadian whip snakes, *Mastigodryas brusei*, as it lay along the top of a low hedge beside the path. A swift grab, and he had it, writhing and whipping about in its attempt to escape, finally biting him on one of his fingers, chewing, working its teeth into the soft flesh. This bite left its characteristic crescent of tiny holes which bled heavily for a few seconds. It was pretty little snake, about 2 1/2 feet long and as thick as a finger. A light gray-white chin was the only contrasting feature to a light chocolate-brown body with a pair of lighter pale brown stripes that ran dorsolaterally, one pair on each side, down the entire length of the snake. It resembled very closely other species found on Trinidad and on Tobago, the differences only obvious upon closer examination of the scalation of the body, belly and under the long, thin tail. Feeding during the day on the abundant Anolis lizards and perhaps the young ground Lizards, *Ameiva ameiva tobogana*, they were no competition to the nocturnal arboreal hunting of the Tree Boas, the "sarpints." I photographed this snake, and we released it. It slithered into the bushes and disappeared with a rapidity that seemed magical.

Our business with the veterinarian, who had finally arrived, completed, we set out, assisted by clues given by the zookeepers and others who had gathered to watch as we handed over the monkeys, had them inoculated, and released into a cage, to track down anyone who may have had a Mona monkey who would be willing to part with it, or who could point us in the direction that would assist us further in our search. Clue after clue finally led us to a house high on the hillside in suburban St Georges, where we found the owner of an adult male

(Continued on page 17)

(Continued from page 16)

Mona monkey who was willing to part with him, as he had outgrown his cage and the owner could not or was not interested in funding the cost of a larger, more suitable cage or enclosure which it was obvious the large male primate needed. He was about as large as an adult domestic cat, and in his full adult colours. Though he was exhibiting serious human imprinting, which showed itself by his compulsive displacement behavior — constant yawning to show off his canines, stooping and slapping the cage floor, and a distracted gaze that never focussed — we thought it was worth the try, if not to give him a chance to realize his natural zoological potential by breeding with the remaining female we had, but at least to take him away from his awful confinement and have the chance of straightening out his non-primate behavioral aberration.

So we bought "Pressy," for that was his name, and arranged to pick him up shortly before the "Starlight V" was due to sail back to Trinidad. I had told Julius that there was no way I was making the voyage back on that boat. I would send St John back with whatever monkeys we managed to get and he and Terry were free to go that route as well, but, for me, I would take a plane, rather than be subjected to the hell I had endured on the way in. Sympathetic to my feelings and fears, they nevertheless made a few jokes at me and suggested I keep an open mind, and that we should seek out some anti-sea-sickness medication prior to the return voyage. During the course of that Friday afternoon as we scoured the surroundings of St Georges for any further Mona monkeys in captivity, we managed to locate and buy some Dramamine tablets, which the dockside pharmacy kept in stock to supply the crews of the dozens of international yachts moored in the yachting basin at the St George's harbour.

As we came around a corner in the city during our search, we suddenly found ourselves followed by the smoke-belching jitney in which St John had driven away. They were blowing their horn and the people in both the cab and the tray were yelling and waving their arms at us to stop. We did, and we all met on the side of the road, where it very soon became obvious that not only was St John al

most blind drunk, but the driver, Dr Bones, et al. were just as intoxicated. I thought ruefully that the money I had entrusted to Doon-dan had been put to a different use than that which I had intended.

It was difficult to extricate ourselves from their well-meaning camaraderie. They assured us they were going to get us all the monkeys in Grenada, and as an added deed, they would rid it of all the snakes, forever. They saw themselves as part of a great enterprise to assist Doon-dan's bossman from the mecca of Trinidad.

They told us they were off to Sauteurs in the north and that we should rendezvous with them at a place called "The Hiltons." Everyone in Sauteurs knew where "The Hiltons" was. They had arranged, or were going to arrange, for our stay there, and Dr Bones, who was a local celebrity at "the Hiltons," had everything well in hand.

We agreed to meet them there on the following day, and resisting Doon-dan's request for a further subvention, we parted company, the smoking jitney to the north — we hoped — and us to try to exchange the fast-fading Mini for a promised, larger car that the agent was expecting to be turned in, and to find somewhere to lie down, for by late afternoon, our night aboard the "Starlight V" was beginning to catch up with us. Even Terry, though he had not had to survive the ordeal of vomiting that I, and to a lesser degree Julius, had endured, he had had little or no sleep that night.

We managed to exchange the Mini for a larger car, a Ford Cortina, and we returned to the cabana at Grande Anse. Falling on the bare mattresses of the beds in different bedrooms, we were soon asleep as the shadows of evening cooled the sand outside. Being a light sleeper I was aware, every time I changed position on the hard unyielding mattress, of a dull, grating, scratching noise which came from the wall panelling close to my head. This light plywood sheeting over 2"x4" timbers, separated the cheaply built structures into the required living and bed-rooms and kitchen. It sounded a little as if mice or rats were gnawing inside the panelling,

(Continued on page 18)

WE GO TO GRENADA 1975 (part 1c)

Feature Serial by Hans Boos

(Continued from page 17)

and I would silence the incessant clicking and ticking by pounding on the wall. It would go quiet for a while and then resume in the same insistent way. Later that night, when we awoke rested but hungry, we were visited by the owner, the Prime Minister's brother who came, he told us, to pick up a bag of blue crabs that he had left under the sink in the kitchen.

We had noticed the bag, but when we picked it up there were no crabs. A dozen or more of the large land crabs, *Cardisoma guanhumi*, valued as a delicacy in callaloo as a Sunday traditional meal, were gone. The bag was still securely tied at the mouth, but a large hole in the fragile half-rotted fabric showed where the crabs had pushed free and walked away. How they got into the space between the panelling of the cabana we did not discover, but it was obviously them, not rats, that we had heard clicking and scratching. Mr. Minister's brother bemoaned his loss, and soon left to try to purchase another bag full, and we drove into the city to find dinner, before once more falling into bed, too tired to pay much attention to the noises in the walls or the screaming of the frogs outside.

Dawn found us well on our way. We returned the key to the cabana to the owner, telling him that we thought we knew where his escaped crabs were, and we gave little thought of what the smell would be if the crabs could not or did not find their way out from within the walls, and eventually died there. Open the panels would have to be, rather earlier, to remove the living animals, than later, to remove the dead and rotting bodies, and their residual stench.

Julius wanted to look in on a family of "red-leg" Grenadians, who lived up in a hill community, and who he was sure would be the best ones to advise us who had monkeys for sale. We drove through the tunnel that links the harbour roads of St Georges, and up the west coast, the road climbing over headlands, and descending into valleys, to cross narrow bridges spanning rivers that had cut the val-

leys in the volcanic hills of the island. We would check these valleys later, advised Julius, as tree boas were usually plentiful here in the trees overhanging the rivers, and in the cocoa and scattered citrus plantations that were still maintained. We found the road up to the hill village where the Dowdens lived, and soon were among them, a few whites in an almost totally black Grenadian population. Mainly they had resisted intermarrying with blacks, and exhibited all the traits of inbreeding that are seen throughout the Antilles where the descendants of the first white settlers, colonists, convicts and transportees had gathered together in mutual support and misery, with little choice of marriage partners. The Dowdens were fixtures in the village, and they recalled Julius' previous visit. Soon they were calling to one another, house to house, to come and greet the returning visitor, who wanted to buy monkeys, and was once more amongst them, crazily catching snakes.

We sat on the grassy bank outside their small one-room shacks, and listened, as they told us of the paucity of the number of monkeys in the bush when they went hunting. They knew of no one who had baby monkeys or young ones for sale. And no one had any adult ones either. We were out of luck when it came to monkeys. Snakes? Well as usual, there were plenty of those. We would have to catch them ourselves.

We had forgotten to change our Trinidadian dollars into Eastern Caribbean currency in enough quantity the day before when the banks in St Georges were open. Today was Saturday, and all we had in our wallets were T&T dollars. In any event the bank would only exchange \$20.00 per person a day. That would not get us very far, but we gave Auden Dowden a twenty-dollar gift anyway. He would put it to good use for trade with the traffickers. Their village shipped green bananas, breadfruit, soursops and sugar-apples regularly. He accepted the money gratefully with a toothless grin. We told him, as we drove away, that we would try to return, if not that weekend, some time in the future. We never did.

The road crossed a newly repaired wooden

(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 18)

bridge where the river, wide and slowly flowing, wound its way out of a broad valley. A road led off to our right, alongside the river, and up into the valley, which we could see was heavily clothed with a mixture of cocoa plantation, scattered coconut trees and the ubiquitous breadfruit trees. Here would be perfect for snakes. It was time to hunt a few.

We parked the car, and leaving it at the side of the narrow road, walked up the river, sometimes along the bank, at times in the stream itself, over the smooth stones and gravel, the shallow cool water a pleasant relief, as it flowed over our feet.

Soon we saw our first specimen in this area, a beautiful black and white checkered adult, asleep in a ball a scarce dozen feet over the flowing river. A cut branch from a nearby bush, fashioned into a crook-stick, brought the supple branch of the breadfruit tree where the snake had been peacefully sleeping, within easy reach, and we had the lovely creature. Terry marvelled at the abundance of these snakes and the ease of spotting and collecting them. A few low trees were easily climbed by a younger and lighter Julius than I, though I, too, took my turn and shinnied up a tree or two and, violently shaking the tree branch on which the snake was perched, but out of reach, knocked it out of its perch to fall into the hands of Terry or Julius waiting below.

In an hour or two we had caught six or eight of these snakes, releasing a couple that did not suit our choice of pattern or colour, or that were too small to feed readily in captivity. We moved on, realizing we were becoming hungry. We were sure we would find some grocery or shop in the villages ahead where we should be able to buy rations for the rest of the weekend. How wrong we were. It was Saturday, and like the banks in St Georges, all the shops were closed.

As our hunger increased we grew desperate. Village after village we drove through and made enquiries as to where we could buy even the minimum sustenance — biscuits and cheese. A bottle of jam, perhaps? Some fruit? Ripe bananas? Grenada was proving to be worse than Tobago. Even if in To-

bago, you were forced to eat in the hotels, at least in Tobago there were hotels. Here on the west coast of Grenada, no hotels spoiled the countryside that had probably seen little change for the past century.

We drove on up this leeward coast on the west of the island, around head-lands where the gentle Caribbean waves formed white garlands around algae-covered volcanic boulders. Small clusters of wooden houses and shacks, inland from black sickles of sand, were the only evidence of the towns on the much creased map by which we positioned and tracked our travel. Beached pirogues and fat dinghies lay aslant among the sea-grape and coconut palms. But there were no open shops. Large double doors remained shut beneath upper verandas where people snoozed in the still, Saturday morning, becoming noon.

We pulled up alongside a muscled young man, walking on the hot asphalt, his bare feet calloused and oblivious to the heat. He registered only an indulgent smile, when we asked directions to the nearest place where we could perhaps find something to buy to eat. He simply said in the distinctive Grenadian flat accent, pointing with his cutlass back to St Georges, from whence we had come, "Is Saturday," with a shrug of his shoulders.

We drove on, our stomachs protesting. Rounding a corner, we once more saw the small group of weathered houses and village shop, sporting the flapping, rusting signs for Pepsi Cola, Ovaltine, and cigarettes. This time there was a woman sitting beneath the veranda. Around her was a mound of dried coconuts, which she was slowly and deliberately husking. As we slowed down we could hear the ring of the blade of her cutlass as it bit into the dry, brittle outer covering of the large nuts. Another two piles lay behind her: one of the hairy, fibrous husks, and another of the shorn, cannon-ball sized inner nuts.

(to be continued in QB4)

MEMBERS' EVENING - 120th ANNIVERSARY

On 14th July, 2011 the Club celebrated it's 120 year anniversary



Congratulations to The Trinidad And Tobago Field Naturalists' Club On its 120 Anniversary.



Below is a report on presentations done by members of the Club
Extracted from minutes by Paula Smith / photos: Paula Smith



(Left to right) **Ishmael Samad, Eddison Baptiste, Hans Boos**

There were a number of presentations during the evening's proceedings from:

1. Hans Boos's Presentation was about a sample of books from his extensive natural history library. Some of which were very old, hard to get and out of print books.

2. John Correia's Presentation was about Archaeological Findings in North Manzanilla from the Arawaks (Amerindians). He had a display with remnants of pottery, grindings stones and axe heads. He pointed out that the type of pottery on display had

(Continued on page 21)



above

Some Archaeological samples

Right **John Correira**



(Continued from page 20)

similarities to vases found in Venezuela in the Paria peninsula. He mentioned that they have never found Carib pottery in Trinidad and that the Banwari Site is 6,000 to 7,000 years old.

3. Kay Hinkson's Presentation was about the Club's Grand Riviere Overnight Field Trip to the Plateau Pawi Observation Centre at the end of January this year. She said that many interesting pictures were taken of birds such as Pawi (Piping Guan), Violaceous Trojans, Orioles, Silver Beak Tanager, Frigate birds and many others. Kay proudly showed as a fantastic shot of a Harlequin Beetle on the shutters of the Plateau Pawi Cabin.

4. Reg Potter's Presentation was about the club's last trip to La Table in 2008. He said that we failed to find the sea coast on that trip and that the guide lost his way in the forest and lead them into a ganja camp. He spoke about signs of illegal logging (mahogany and cedar) and expressed hope that we would make it to La Tab Beach when we attempt the same trip in July.

5. Allan Hook's Presentation was about Wasps in

the Caura Valley. He spoke generally about their habitat and nesting behaviors, including their nest types and their egg laying patterns.

6. Stevland Charles's Presentation was based on the findings of Herpetology Group's survey in Aripo Savannah's Scientific Reserve on the 17-18th of June. This was the Herpetology's Group's first field trip. Stevland publicly thanked and recognized Mr. Edmund Charles who he said went above and beyond the call of duty to ensure the success of the trip. He also did the same for the Club's management committee (Eddison and Palaash Narase), thanking them for supporting the formation of the Herpetology Group. He said that the Aripo Savannah is the "last" remaining/largest network of natural savannahs between Cumuto road and Valencia stretch explaining that it is made up of areas of tropical savannah's and marsh forests with poor soil. He said that group conducted transect surveys along the marsh forest (both night and day). Stevland found an interesting snake with a meal in its stomach. They also saw a Hinged Galap (a turtle) during the study. The Herpetology Group was able to obtain permits to collect specimens and Stevland ex-

(Continued on page 22)



Shane Ballah
Past president of the club
Giving his presentation

MEMBER'S EVENING 120th ANNIVERSARY

Extracted from minutes by Paula Smith

(Continued from page 21)

plained that this was a very big milestone for the Herpetology Group and the Club in general. Many lizards were also recorded. Visitor students from Glasgow also assisted in the research/survey.

7. Chris Starr Presentation was about wasps and the type of nests that they build.

8. Shane T. Ballah Presentation was about his visit to Japan, to study disaster preparedness strategies. Shane left Japan just before (a few days) before the Tsunami struck. He showed pictures of places before the Tsunami so that we got a clearer idea of the extent of the damage. He explained that South west of the island is an active volcano that is a first world Geo Park called Nagasaki Geo Park and Station. He said that the Japanese spent a lot of money to form barriers to control the pyroclastic flows. Shane showed pictures of the mechanical works being done to clear the area of the pyroclastic flows

which is done remotely; no humans (robotic equipment used to clear the site) are allowed near the site as a safety precaution.

9. Ishmael Samad Had a display of Rock Crab shells.



One of the Rock Crabs Shells in
Ishmael Samad's display

Management Notices

New members; Volunteers; Publications

Management Notices



New Members

The Club warmly welcomes the following new members:

Ordinary member:

Ken Gonsalves, Perry Polar

New life members:

Richard Farrell

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

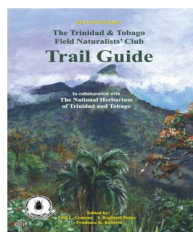
Email: admin@ttfnc.org



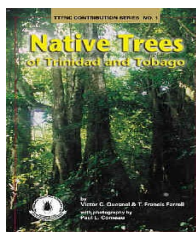
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Trinidad-Tobago-Field-Naturalists-Club/68651412196?v=info>

PUBLICATIONS

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



The TTFNC
Trail Guide
Members =
TT\$200.00



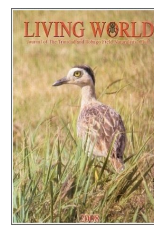
The Native
Trees of T&T
2nd Edition
Members =
TT\$100.00



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



Living World Journal 2008
Living World Journal back issues
Members price = free



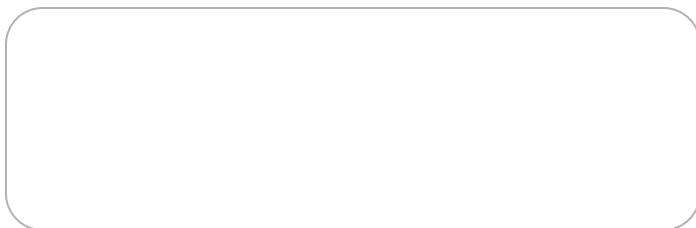
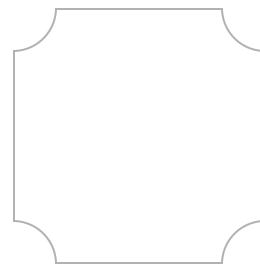
MISCELLANEOUS

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>

Your 2011 Annual Membership Fees are Due:

Please view bottom right of the mailing label to check if your subscription has been paid.



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. Articles must be well written (structure/style), and be interesting and fun to read.
3. Articles must have a sound scientific base.
4. Articles submitted must be finished works. Please no drafts.
5. Articles should generally not exceed 3000 words. Longer articles, if interesting enough, will be broken up and published as separate parts.
6. Articles should be submitted as a text file, word or text in an e-mail.
7. Field trip reports may include a separate table listing the scientific names, common names and families of plants and animals identified within the body of the report.
8. Photographs can be in any of the following formats JPEG, BMP, PICT, TIFF, GIF. They must not be embedded into the word processing files. Information on the image content including names of individuals shown must be provided.
9. Acceptable formats for electronic submissions are doc and txt.
10. **All articles must reach the editor by the eight week of each quarter.
Submission deadline for the 4rd Quarter 2011 issue is October 31st 2011.**
11. **Electronic copies can be submitted to the 'Editor' at: admin@ttfnc.org
Please include the code QB2011-4 in the email subject label.**
12. Hard copies along with CD softcopy can be delivered to the editor or any member of Management.