THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

October - December 2011 Issue No: 4/2011

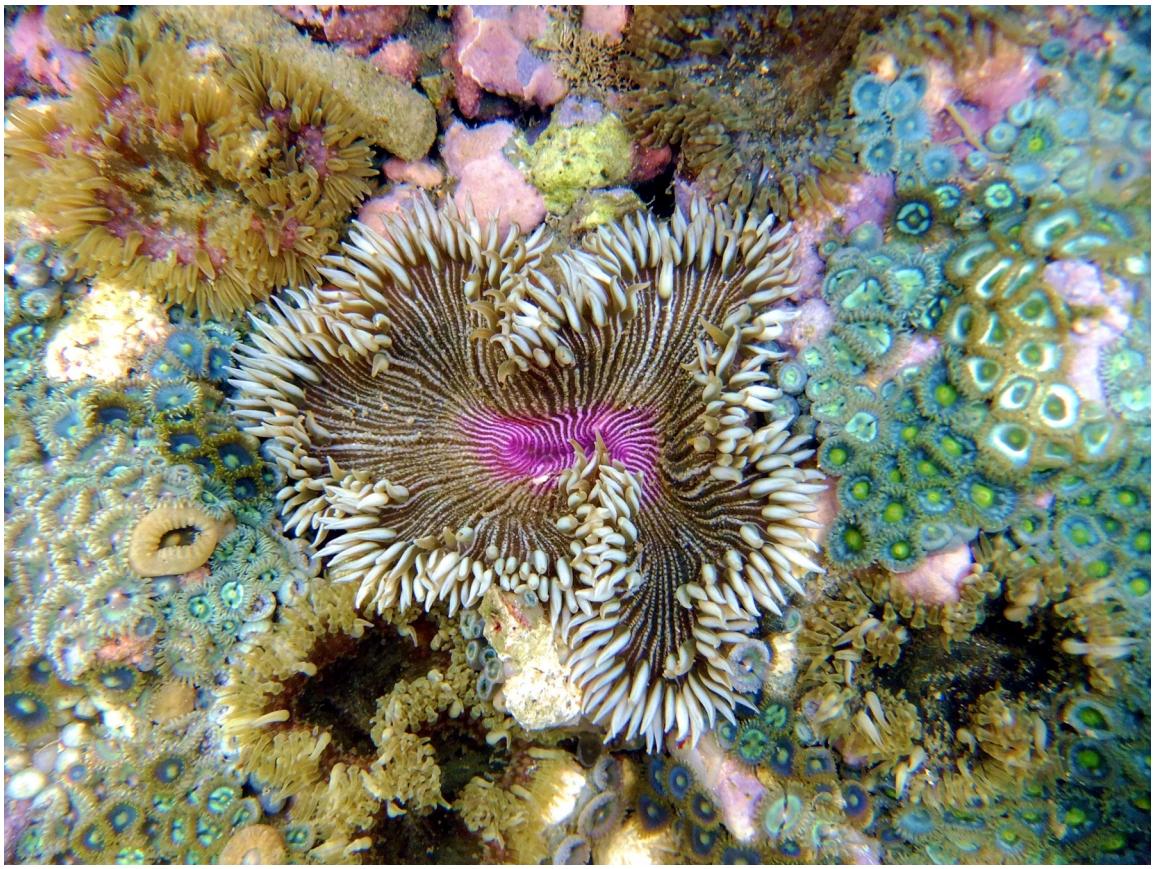
Salybia Reef - Toco

(TTFNC Marine Group Field Trip Report, Sunday 14th May, 2011)

Report by Mike G. Rutherford

The inaugural outing of the newly formed TTFNC Marine Group took place on May 14th 2011. Four members (Bonnie Tyler, Rich Peterson, Amy Deacon and Mike Rutherford), and three guests (Aidan Farrell and Eileen & Zoe Rutherford) made their way to Salybia Beach near Toco in the north-east of Trinidad. The plan was to wait for the low tides during the night and during the day to see if different creatures would be observed .

(continued on page 3)



Beaded Anemone (*Phymanthus crucifer*)

Inside This Issue

Editor's note
Many thanks to all who contributed and assisted with articles and photographs.

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October - December 2011

Editors
Eddison Baptiste, Elisha Tikasingh (assistant editor)

Editorial Committee
Eddison Baptiste, Elisha Tikasingh,
Palaash Narase, Reginald Potter

Contributing writers
Elisha Tikasingh, Hans Boos,
Mike Rutherford, Reg Potter

Photographs
Eddison Baptiste, Hans Boos,
Mike Rutherford, Paula Smith

Design and Layout
Eddison Baptiste

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	Dan Jaggernauth	659-2795
	Mike Rutherford	329-8401

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

Salybia Reef - Toco

(continued from page 1)

Whilst waiting for the tide to drop on the Saturday night we sat on the sand, cooked dinner and watched the fireflies. There seemed to be two distinct types flying around us. One species gave off a continuous yellowy-orange light and flew low through the vegetation whilst the second had more of a greeny-yellow light and flashed intermittently whilst it flew high in the trees. Unfortunately we did not have a Chris Starr or other suitable entomologist on hand to help identify them further.

Rich found an almost complete dried Caribbean spiny lobster (*Panullirus argus*) washed up on the beach, the colours in its carapace were still bright and fresh and I added it to the specimens to be taken back to the University of the West Indies Zoology Museum.

Eventually, around 8:30pm, the tide reached its lowest point. Five of us set out with two viewing buckets and several torches. The viewing buckets consisted of large plastic tubs with the bottoms cut out and Perspex sheets glued in (courtesy of the UWI Engineering Workshop). The idea was that they would allow easier searching and group viewing rather than everyone wearing a mask and snorkel.

We headed to the western end of the beach and walked out over the rocks so we could get right on top of the fringing reef. The water was low but quite choppy and there was a brisk offshore wind blowing. Fairly quickly we got the hang of using the buckets and they proved to be a great way of allowing several people to view the same thing at the same time. By dropping a waterproof torch down inside the bucket it was possible to scan the reef quite efficiently and it wasn't long before the Marine Groups first fish was spotted, a purplemouth moray eel (*Gymnothorax vicinus*). The eel was half concealed under a rock but stayed in place long enough for everyone to see it and for pictures to be taken.

We carried on searching, trying to avoid the sharp rocks and timing the waves to avoid being knocked over. There weren't many more fish sightings but we did find a fair number of sea anemones, corals and zoanthids. Eventually we headed down to the eastern end of the beach and walked out over the reef again. By now the wind and waves were even stronger and after some fruitless searching we decided to call it a night.

People camped in a mixture of tents, hammocks and sleeping mats alongside the beach and after an uneventful but hot night we awoke early on Sunday morning.
The sky was overcast and there was only a slight breeze, good conditions for being out on the reef. We headed straight out to the western end of the beach again, as the low tide exposed its daytime inhabitants. We were soon joined by Dan Jaggernath, dressed in his standard outfit but with the addition of a life jacket promoting good safety on the water!

The search in the daytime proved to be much more productive than the night-time. It was easier to gain a more complete picture of what was living on the reef around us and we spread out in order to cover more

(Continued on page 4)

Salybia Reef-Toco
(Continued from page 3)

ground.

The majority of the substrate was composed of tightly packed mat zoanthids (*Zoanthus pulchellus*), white encrusting zoanthids (*Palythoa caribaeorum)* and finger coral (*Porites porites*). Amongst these were a huge number of beaded anemones (*Phymanthus crucifer)*, which at first glance looked like many different species as they come in a wide range of colours. Another cnidarian seen in large numbers was the sun anemone *(Stichodactyla helianthus)* around which we trod carefully as it can give a painful sting.

As well as all the sessile animals there were many mobile creatures swimming and scurrying around. These included a bright yellow and black chain moray eel (*Echidna catenata),* the ubiquitous Sally lightfoot crab (*Percnon gibbesi)*, a small green clinging crab (*Mithrax sp.)* the slow moving purple-spined sea urchin (*Arbacia punctulata*) and the tiny but beautifully coloured lettuce sea slug *(Elysia crispata).* This last one was found most often amongst some of the algae we encountered, the green grape algae (*Caulerpa racemosa*) and the green feather algae *(Caulerpa sertularioides).*

Although the viewing buckets had proved useful several people were happy just wondering around using small nets and their hands to find and catch creatures. Amy found a slippery dick fish (*Halichoeres bivittatus*) stranded on a rock by the dropping tide. It appeared to be close to death but after a bit of tender care the fish was revived and we placed it in a plastic tank for a closer look. Not long after I was turning over some rocks under the water and found a large banded-arm brittle star (*Ophioderma sp.*) which was fascinating to watch as it crawled away at some speed once released. We also caught a long clawed crab called a porcelain crab *(Petrolisthes sp.*) and found some warty anemones (*Bunodosoma sp.*). There were more fish sightings, including damselfish and blennies, but they were too fast for us so could not be identified further.

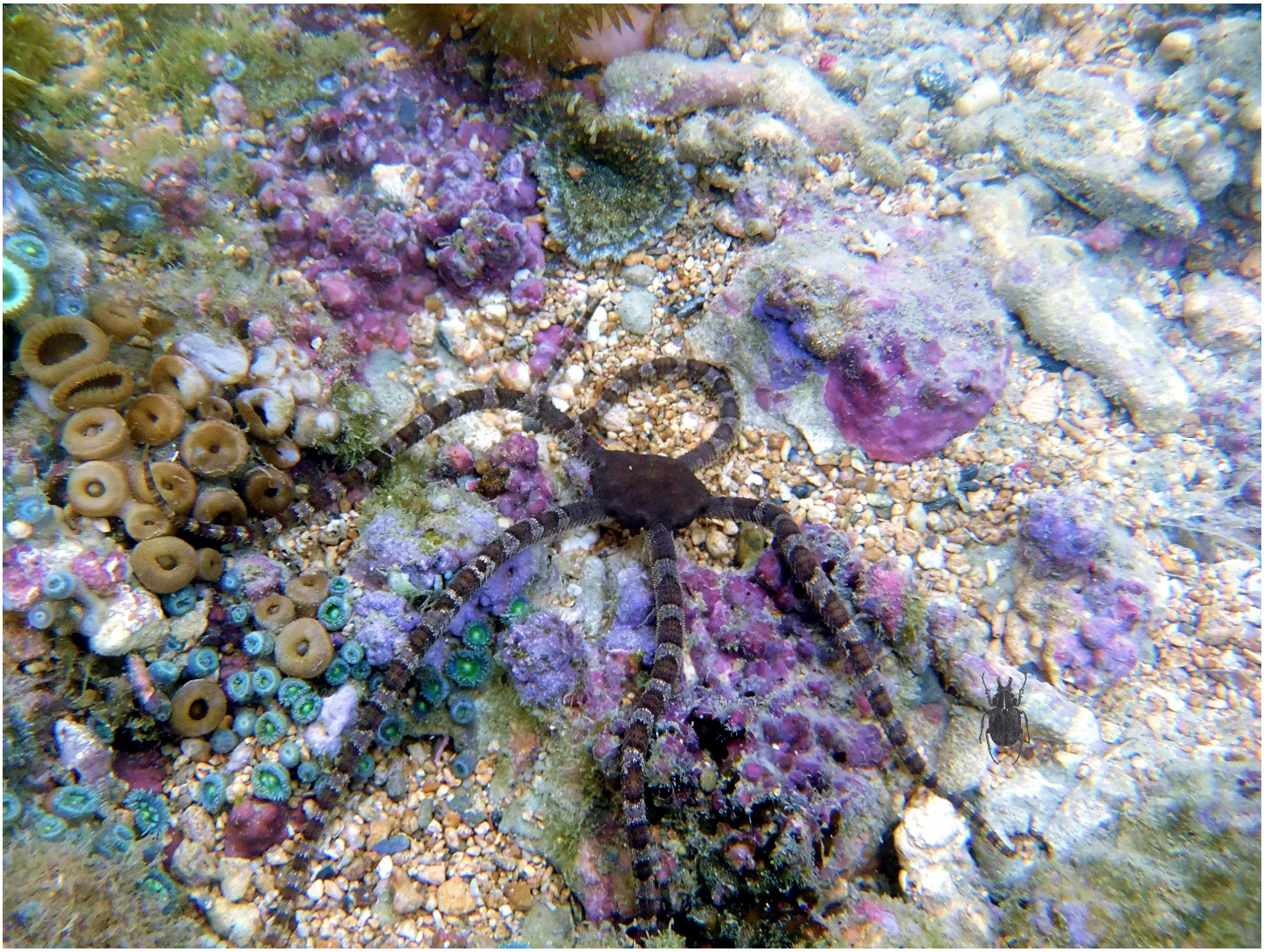
At the far west end of the beach there was a rocky headland with many small, exposed, pools scattered around. A quick investigation revealed hermit crabs and molluscs such as nerites and moon snails crawling all around the pools. I also found more corals, including a small colony of the lesser starlet coral *(Siderastrea radians)* and one of the many octocoral species found around Trinidad, the slit-pore sea rod *(Plexaurella sp.*).

By now the tide was starting to rise and we had been out for a couple of hours so we called it a day. Returning to the campsite there was a last zoological encounter when three of us saw male and female zandoli lizards (*Ameiva ameiva*) engaging in some foreplay before a quick and rough mating, following which the male bobbed his head a bit then ran off into the bushes.

The first Marine Group trip had been a success, all participants had enjoyed themselves and I hope that this will be the first of many outings to come.

(Continued on page 5)

Salybia Reef-Toco
(Continued from page 4)



Banded-arm Brittlestar (*Ophioderma sp*.)

Anyone interested in the Club's Marine Group may contact
Bonnie Tyler or Richard Peterson
Phone: 662-0686
E-mail: prof.bonnie@gmail.com

Annoying and Blood Sucking Arthropods of Trinidad and Tobago

4. The "Mosquito Worm", *Dermatobia hominis*

by Elisha Tikasingh
elisha.tikasingh@gmail.com

The so-called "mosquito worm" is not a worm at all. It is in fact a maggot of a bot fly, *Dermatobia hominis* (Family: Cuterebridae) which attacks wild and domesticated mammals and occasionally attacks man. *D. hominis* was known to exist in Trinidad since the 1850s when de Verteuil (1858) recorded its presence in the island as *"Ver-muringorin* or mosquito worm - the people being under the impression the larva is that of a large mosquito; but the fact is that no one has ever seen the mother insect." Subsequently, a member (Meaden 1892) of The Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club noted that other members of the Club might also be acquainted with the "mosquito worm" when he described its presence in the agouti, lappe,

(Continued on page 7)

Adult female *Dermatobia hominis* *Courtesy Wikipedia*

4. The "Mosquito Worm"
(Continued from page 6)

deer and a bird, Grieve. Meaden further noted in referring to the agouti that "the amount of suffering this little rodent goes through while the eggs are incubating must be enormous, for I had shot them when they have been simply a mass of sores caused by the worms forming, and thus rendered quite unfit for food". Meaden also noted that " a large black mosquito which the hunters asserted was the parent of the worm".

In the December, 1892 issue (No.5) of the Journal of the Field Naturalists' Club, Dr. Rake, a physician and member of the Club noted that he collected a specimen from a patient who had visited Venezuela and had sent it to the British Museum (Natural History) and which was subsequently identified by Chas. O. Waterhouse as *Dermatobia noxialis* (now *D. hominis*). Subsequently, there have been isolated reports of *D. hominis* in humans in Trinidad: one by Raju *et al.* (1986) on a single case while Chadee & Rawlins (1997) reported on 20 cases. As noted above, *D. hominis* has been existing in Trinidad for a long time and are not recent introductions as suggested by Chadee and Rawlins (1997). The distribution of this fly is from Mexico through Central and South America.

Dermatobia hominis has an interesting method of getting its eggs to its host. The adult *D. hominis* catches a blood-sucking insect, usually a mosquito, and attaches its eggs on to the body or legs of the insect. When the insect tries to take a blood meal from its mammalian host, the attached eggs, possibly due to the warmth of the host, hatches and the maggots find themselves on the skin and penetrate the skin burying themselves probably on the wound made by the mosquito. It is not known if the maggots crawl on the legs of the insect or drops to the skin, but Dr. Wilbur Downs, late Director of the Trinidad Regional Virus Laboratory (TRVL) noted the following: "Sitting on a ridge top … I was catching *Phlebotomus* (now *Lutzomyia*) and mosquitoes. A *Trichoprosopon theobaldi* settled on my finger and began to bite. Just before I popped a chloroform tube over it, I chanced to note some wiggling on the underside of the mosquitoe's abdomen. Close observation revealed 3 larvae of *Dermatobia hominis*, popped out of their shells as far as they could stretch (estimated 4 mm), weaving slowly back and forth, and evidently trying to make a contact before they could relinquished their hold on the egg case. They did not jump, or drop, although observed for two minutes". It is the presence of these larvae on mosquito legs which hunters might have witnessed and gave it the name of "mosquito worm". Penetration of the larva to subcutaneous tissues is practically painless but the area itches. As the larva grows and moults the area becomes large like a boil and painful. Such a condition where a dipteran larva invades the body is known as myiasis. There are three moults then the larva emerges and drops to the ground and pupates. The larva takes about 6-8 weeks to mature in its host and another 3-4 weeks in the ground before emerging as a mature fly. Thus the total life cycle of the fly might take up to four months. The adult fly is robust, hairy, brown, sometimes gray and measures from 12 to 16 mm. Adult *D. hominis* lack mouthparts and therefore do not feed. They live for only a few days.

(Continued on page 8)

4. The "Mosquito Worm"

Continued from page 7)

Staff of TRVL have collected nine mosquitoes representing six species in Trinidad with *Dermatobia hominis* eggs. The species were *Aedes serratus, Phonomyia splendida, Psorophora albipes, Psorophora ferox, Trichoprosopon theobaldi* and *Wyeomyia pseudopecten*. The mosquitoes were collected at Scotland Bay, Cumaca and Melajo Forest (TRVL 1958).

Infestation with *Dermatobia* maggots usually occur in the hand, head region and other exposed parts of the body. Therefore, it would be prudent to use an insect repellent containing diethyl toluamide (deet) when going into the forest. Once a larva gains entry it breathes with spiracles which is about flush with the skin so that one can cover it with vaseline or a thick piece of tape or nail polish to prevent it from breathing. The maggot will attempt to crawl out to breathe then it can be removed with a pair of tweezes or gently squeezed out. Or, one can resort to surgical removal. There are home remedies such as applying a lighted cigarette near to the area which I understand is what hunters do when they become infested.

(Continued on page 9)

Larva of *Dermatobia hominis* *Courtesy Wikipedia*

4. The "Mosquito Worm"
(Continued from page 8)

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Our heartfelt condolences go out to the Family and Friends of

Aubern Nash

Former TTFNC Committee member, former policeman, and well-known active member of the club.
Aubern was also a Life member of the Trinidad and Tobago Field naturalist Club.

La Table

(Field Trip Report, Sunday 13th July, 2011)

Report by Reg Potter

This was finally a successful trip to La Table beach after three previous unsuccessful attempts, but the costs in terms of risk were high and I very much doubt this is a suitable destination for club day trips.

The first attempt was in January 2010 to get to this remote beach on the southern coast and accessed from the Guayaguayare "Mainfield Road" which runs east west between Guayaguayare and Edward trace. Any trails there were expected to head south across the extension of the Trinity Hills ridge

(Continued on page 11)

La Table Beach -The Final Destination

Photo: Reg Potter

La Table
(Continued from page 10)

into the La Table river basin deep in the Trinity Mayaro forest and game reserve. I had been there several times in the 70's with a guide and by sea. This was a full club trip with people of all walking abilities. Our guide had taken us down an old oilfield exploration road heading essentially in a straight line SSW, but branched off this along a side path on the left which took us to a well used camp, possibly belonging to ganja farmers. It should be noted that despite it being a forest reserve we passed evidence of illegal felling of cedar trees.

Our guide evidently disliked continuing along paths used by ganja farmers, so had back tracked a bit then cut into virgin forest and straight up the side of the Trinity ridge. By the time we got to the top more then half the group had turned back, and those of us who continued down the other side were soon abandoned in a very steep gulley, by our guide who pressed on alone. We all left the forest and the guide later reported that he had made it all the way to the sea and back.

For the second attempt in May 2011, Edmond Charles and I again hired the guide believing that he would now be well qualified to find the way, but again we were disappointed. He started us in a totally different position, east of the old exploration road, but it was soon evident that he was not on any trail so we had to navigate through the bush, again climbing the ridge travelling further along it, and again ending , quite out of time, in another steep gulley. An agouti and some capuchin monkeys that appeared very tame were sighted. This time on the return we kept to the ridge which runs more or less NE and followed this high ground on a good path almost all the way to the Mainfield road.

On the third attempt in June 2011, I enlisted a friend, Philip Thomsett from Santa Cruz, together with Ishmael Samaad. We located another person who claimed he knew La Table and set off armed with advice and a good GPS from Peter Reis. We again took the oilfield exploration road which has the advantage of getting us quickly about 3 km into the forest and near to the headwater of the La Table which starts in a lower pass in the Trinity ridge. The total distance by this approach should be 7 km. Several people were at work clearing seismic survey paths in a N-S and E-W grid in the forest and had cleared the exploration road far in to the point where we had to leave it and make our own trail east. Without any assistance from this "guide" we made it to the watershed, crossed into the La Table valley and followed the stream for a short distance before having to turn back due to time. The guide proved to be largely useless, grumbled, made unreasonable demands and seemed petrified by a large Mapapire Philip and I had unknowingly walked over.

Since the scheduled trip for July was to La Table, I discussed the options with Dan Jaggernauth and we agreed that it would still be interesting to take the club as far as we could into this beautiful forest and turn back when time ran out.

So on 31st July I duly turned up at Central Bank to find only President Eddison Baptiste

(Continued on page 12)

La Table
(Continued from page 11)

(Eddy), Paula Smith and Charles and Philip De Gannes there to do the field trip. It seems that my warnings about the difficulties had indeed been heeded by most of the club as nobody turned up at the UWI meeting point either – not even Dan! This small party of 5 set off and the driving time to Guayaguayare was much quicker than most normal trips so we were ready at the starting point at 08.50 hrs. It was realized by all that with such a small group we might actually make it to the sea. We made good time and were at the turn off point on the road by 10.50 and crossed the watershed by 11.00 hrs.

Down the La Table valley we went following the river with occasional diversions when paths were found, until at 12.00 we came to an opening in the forest canopy caused by tree falls, and stopped for lunch and to take a

(Continued on page 13)

Near the mouth of the La Table River
photo: Eddison Baptiste

La Table
(Continued from page 12)

GPS position. Moving off at 12.30 it soon became apparent that Eddy and myself might make it all the way, but not if we stayed with the others. We continued at a faster pace gradually leaving the rest of the party behind. On and on we went down the winding river course, feeling sea breezes at times which spurred us on. It should be noted that the word "river" is used rather loosely since the La Table is actually a tiny stream, but spate flows have eroded quite a significant valley into the hard rocks of this area. An agouti ran across the river bed ahead of us and wildlife tracks were plentiful.

Finally long after we had lost sound contact with the rear party, I rested on a log on yet another river bend and told Eddy it looked like we weren't going to make it. The river just seemed endless and it was turning back time – 14.00. Eddy replied "what about the boat?"

I took this as joke but followed him to a trail he had found beside the river and he again said "did you see the boat?" I was amazed. There tucked against the bank was a small aluminium boat, half filled with water. The river here was deep and still so it was obvious we had reached the tidal estuary. We discussed this and agreed to push on for 10 more minutes. This we did at fast speed, now out of the river since it was clearly too deep to walk in.

Eventually while on a steep slope we sighted the beach through the trees, and moments later we were there at 14.10.

The La Table beach is very small but quite picturesque and unspoilt. There are good views to the east and the flat rock that presumably gives rise to the name, can easily been seen. We enjoyed this very briefly, took photos then headed back into the forest for a rapid return and to collect the remainder of the party.

Walking back through the forest to avoid the deep river we found ourselves on a path that allowed much quicker movement and followed it past the small boat and on up river with the ground sloping away to our left toward the river. This continued for over a quarter mile until it descended to the river bed again. The first surprising thing noted was that there was no evidence of our footprints from the walk in. Then we sighted a camp above the river on the left bank so approached it knowing we had probably already been sighted. Banging my cutlass against a tree to demonstrate that we were not sneaking up, we found about 5 evil-looking men, 2 armed with shotguns. I should mention that this was out of hunting season and in a game sanctuary so that they were up to no good. However we exchanged pleasantries and after a few evasive answers and misdirections one of them came down to the river where we had returned to continue homeward, to explain that we were not in the 'main' river but in what he called 'a ravine' that would take us high into the mountainous Trinity Hills and we would 'remain in the bush tonight'. He directed us to return downstream until we met the main river. This we did until, almost when giving up, we found the fork, complete with our footprints. Amazingly this tributary we had been wrongly ascending appeared almost identical in size and appearance to the main river we

(Continued on page 14)

La Table
(Continued from page 13)

had descended! We had missed this fork since we had been walking in the forest instead of the river.

We started hurrying upstream. By this time in our haste, we were walking straight through pools instead of wasting effort climbing onto ledges to keep our feet dry, as on the downstream walk. Eventually we heard calls from the others waiting upstream and found them resting at the lunch stop. We were a bit surprised that they had not started walking back upstream since they were unable maintain our pace and this measure would have shortened the return time. The time now indicated that we almost certainly would be caught by darkness. The first objective was to get back to the oilfield exploration road. We crossed the watershed in the gathering evening and descended the stream flowing westward urging on Paula who was extremely tired (as were we all). I cut a water vine since all our water had now been finished. This stream starting initially a gulley then becoming a deep stream bed, then a boulder strewn valley difficult to transit especially in the growing dusk. Finally we sighted concrete culverts and we were at the exploration road.

Here we elected to rest and eat the last remaining food (one orange) and Philip filled the water bottles from the rather brown river. Eddy and Charles lay down and immediately fell asleep. But this was no time to slow down so everyone got back on their feet and walked on into the descending dusk. The only light was my own and this was deployed. Although morale was now on the rise because we had only the reasonably clear road to navigate, progress was slow since I had to look ahead then back to illuminate the ground for the others.

Soon it was black night and after crossing two more gulleys I lost the trail and we found ourselves on an unfamiliar seismic trail. Contemplating what next to do the others rested while I scouted ahead, determining that the trail was clear and heading north toward the cars. Returning to the group I found that Paula had discovered her cell phone light so we now had two lights. The remainder of the trip involved a short transit E-W then back onto a N-S line, across a small river, and over some hills (seismic lines are no respecter of topography and follow a compass bearing), until finally we sighted the grass over the pipeline wayleave bordering the road. We were out at last. It was 8.30 pm!

Opinions vary on the degree of "success" but personally I felt it an excellent hike though some lessons emerge:

Strictly adhere to agreed turn back times.

A river is easy to follow downstream but special care must be taken upstream.

There should always be at least 2 lights per 5 walkers in case of late returns.

Clarify in advance what should be done when part of the group cannot maintain a fast pace.

Bad Taste and the Naturalist

By Christopher K. Starr
University of the west Indies ckstarr@gmail.com

John G. Myers (1897 – 1942) was an outstanding entomologist, whose all too short career was mainly devoted to biological control of pests. In particular, he explored widely, including in the West Indies, for possible biological – control agents (Cock & Bennett 2011). At the same time, he took opportunities to make original behavioural/ecological observations on species he happened to encounter.

One paper of this type is on cotton-strainers bugs (*Pyrrhogoridae*) in Cuba (Myers 1927). Cotton strainers are often quite abundant in second growth and scrubland, where their (usually) contrasting red-white-black patterns render them conspicuous.

This looks a great deal like warning colouration, yet cotton strainers do not have a disagreeable odour, even when molested, nor are they armoured or armed against predation. So, why do these slow-moving insects sit colourfully in full view on vegetation, to all appearances just asking to be eaten? The obvious hypothesis is that they taste bad.

Now, Myers was a smart, diligent biologist, so this hypothesis certainly occurred to him. However, it is here that he dropped the ball in a rather shocking fashion. He remarked that "Distastefulness is extremely difficult to prove" and later "it remains to show whether distastefulness can be deduced in *Dysdercus* from the behaviour of possible predators."

Much as I admire Myers, this is flagrant nonsense. Not only is it inaccurate, it is dreadfully wrong-headed. First, it is, in fact, extremely easy to find out whether something tastes bad. We have all done innumerable times in the kitchen and living room. Many years ago, I did what Myers did not do and masticated a few cotton strainers from two species. They were, indeed, distasteful, strikingly so. They taste exactly like stink bugs (*Pentatomidae*) smell. This is consistent with the hypothesis that these two families have the same main defensive compound, with the difference that cotton strainers do not emit theirs to the outside.

Myers's point was evidently that knowing how it tastes to us tells us nothing about how it tastes to a bird or lizard. I have heard this objection several times over the years and have never taken it seriously. A compound that is bitter or pungent to one animal is almost certainly bitter or distasteful to another. It is certainly a good idea to pursue experimental corroboration, but Myers could have confirmed his hypothesis with little chance of error in just a few seconds.

(Continued on page 17)

A Drive to Talparo to Visit Victor Quesnel

By Reg Potter

After the Christmas lunch on the 11th December Eddison Baptiste, John Correia and Reg Potter took a drive down to Talparo to visit Victor Quesnel. Victor has not been able to travel in to Port of Spain in recent months and had been experiencing some bad health which greatly restricts his movements.

We telephoned ahead to Victor's brother Vin who lives in an adjacent property where he and his wife have been looking after Victor. Vin drove down to open the gate for us to enter and escorted us up to the house where after a short while Victor came out to meet us in the living room accompanied by various tubes and bottles attached to him. He seemed fairly cheerful and we were told that he has been gaining some weight and strength recently, much to our relief. Victor's voice has weakened with the illness but we nevertheless had a great conversation with him, Vin and Vin's wife Ulucia, while enjoying some delicious Portugal juice. The house is a piece of rural utopia with humming birds busy at the feeders over the front door and luxurious plants, trees, and flowers everywhere.

When it was time to leave Vin took us on a tour of their property which has been beautifully developed with a group of rental hard wood air-conditioned villas each with a small verandah overlooking a large artificial pond complete with lotus lilies. There is also a bar area with changing rooms and small swimming pool for guests all surrounded by trees and constantly attended by a flock of yellow winged 'spur-wings' or jacanas after which the property is named – "Hacienda Jacana". (http://www.haciendajacana.com/). At the gate is an area of more intensive agriculture where we saw corn, chives, various vegetable crops, chickens, rabbits, 2 donkeys, sheep, an area previously occupied by geese, various fruit trees, and a kitchen/factory where co-

Victor Quesnel
(April 2011 TTFNC Special Meeting)
photo: Eddison Baptiste

(Continued on page 17)

A Drive to Talparo to Visit Victor Quesnel

(Continued from page 16)

conut water is bottled for sale. It is operated by Vin's 2 sons and their wives who all live on the property and all looked quite inviting. This is offered as a sort of eco-resort and is located on the border of a forest reserve. In fact the 'eco' aspect of the place has been a bit of a problem since they have lost several geese and macaws to raiding ocelots!

We wish Victor a speedy recovery and were pleased to see him in such beautiful surroundings that must surely be conducive to good health.

Lakeside Cabin at Hacienda Jacana
Courtesy: hacienda Ajacana

Bad Taste and the Naturalist

(Continued from page 15)

Second and more broadly, his remarks expose a certain prissiness. If there is a good reason to suspect that something is poisonous (e.g. many seeds) or unhygienic (e.g. feces), the intelligent naturalist does not taste it, but for a great many things the instinctive naturalist takes a taste if she/he is interested in knowing. Compulsively.

Many years ago I noticed that a great big (raisin-sized) bright red velvet mite (*Tetranychidae*) was fairly common in the early morning on the University of Ghana Campus. They walked slowly about on the soil surface, easy for any predator to catch. I picked some up an found that they were soft bodied – as the sun rose, they were no longer to be seen, presumably taking cover to avoid water loss – and had neither spines nor any means of retaliating against my discourteous fingers. Nor were they smelly.

So why were the agama lizards not snarfing down these free, meaty velvet mites? As Myers or any of you would do, I conjectured that they were distasteful. And then, unlike Myers but hopefully like you, I exercised the naturalist impulse and masticated one of these little darlings. The results of this test was absolutely unequivocal. The mite was so god awfully bitter that I couldn't bring myself to taste a second specimen. It was terribly unscientific, I confess, but my sample size remained just one.

References

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We Go To Grenada 1975

Feature Serial by Hans Boos

(Part 2a)

We pulled up into the dirt ramp leading to the shop and she paused in her chopping to stare with black, intense eyes at the three white strangers who repeated to her our plea for directions to where we could find something, anything, to eat. She was a while answering. She seemed to rearrange her bulk on the rickety bench, which swayed from side to side, as she readjusted her body preparatory to standing and gingerly stepping out from between the ramparts of her labour.

"Mister, all yuh hungry?" she deduced. All three of us assured her that we would gladly buy *anything* that, were she good enough to open her shop, would be entirely satisfactory to us. Anything, for we were sure that there would be a selection of, if not the Crix biscuits that formed a major part of the cargo of the "Starlight V" back in St Georges harbour, then at least sweet biscuits in little cellophane packets, or cheese sticks, or soapy-tasting cheese-balls. Maybe we would get lucky and be able to buy a block of the popular New Zealand cheddar "rat" cheese which, with Crix, would be manna. We crossed our collective fingers and tagged after her as she strenuously waddled up the side of the yard beside the building, assuring her that we

(Continued on page 19)

Corallus grenadensis

We Go To Grenada 1975
(Continued from page 18)

were indeed *very* hungry and would be eternally grateful if she could et cetera. We went on and on, to her impassive swaying back.

"Siddong dere," she grunted, pointing to a pair of long benches off to the side, under the spreading branches of a sapodilla tree. "Ah go bring you someting," she called, as she disappeared around the back of the two-story building and into a low barrack-like out-building set into the hillside that rose behind it in a jumble of thickly tangled trees and vines. We sat gingerly on the benches. Large *Anolis richardii* squirreled around the bole of the sapodilla tree, and peered at us, only one eye and the square angular head visible around the rough bark.

We regarded one another, exchanging shrugs, not knowing what to expect, especially Terry, a true ocker Aussie a long way from the oddities of his home-land, thrust into the oddities of this small island which was also somewhat strange, even to Julius and me.

After a while, our hoped-for benefactor waddled out to us, accompanied by a pre-teen girl, both carrying an odd assortment of pots, pans and enamel plates, and we got the first whiffs of something glorious. Setting down the utensils and the containers, and handing us each a light spoon she signalled us to help ourselves.

"I hope it suit you," she said. We were speechless, as we uncovered the chipped containers and the hot steam of a dark golden cook-down of mixed pieces of unidentifiable meats wafted up. It was one of those oily, but undescribably delicious stews of chopped pieces of pork and chicken, in a thick, spicy, peppery gravy. Other pots contained equally steaming mixtures of ground-provision, yam, and sweet-potato, and stewed down pigeon peas, in which pieces of pumpkin had not quite dissolved. A wide-eyed boy, about 6 or 7, came from behind the skirted mass of this Grenadian angel and held up a huge avocado pear, dully sheened, that told of its exact ripeness for cutting into crescents and embellishing this feast.

Before we could voice either our astonishment or thanks, the trio had turned and were disappearing back into the house and to the pile of coconuts. We heard the "chop, chop" restart, as we helped ourselves to the food. Three tall cold bottles of orange and banana flavoured Ju-C sweet drinks were brought out moments later by the girl, who once more silently disappeared.

It was a meal I, nor we, will ever forget, not only for its timeliness to our empty bellies, which would have settled for anything to fill the void, but for the rustic, and delicious quality that is unique to the cooking of the Caribbean. We were not embarrassed to return the dish empty. The pork fat and chicken bones, we fed to the usual two or three scrawny dogs that emerged to scrounge. We tried to thank our host, and though she waved us away with a depreciating comment of "Ah see all yuh was hungry," we managed to press payment for such kindness on her, which she pocketed in her wide apron pocket, stained with coconut water, and dollar bills widened the eyes and smiles of the two children who hung back beyond the edge of the still shuttered shop, much like the chunk-headed anoles hid shyly be-

(Continued on page 20)

We Go To Grenada 1975
(Continued from page 19)

hind their tree-trunks.
We drove north, sleepy and sated like large snakes after a big meal. We had little desire to continue hunting for snakes, when we felt great empathy for them as they dozed in their daytime balls up in their trees digesting, perhaps, their night-before meals.

A long sloping hill-road led us down into a thriving village with citrus and breadfruit trees surrounding every house on the seaward side of the road, and a prosperous-looking and well-kept cocoa estate on the inland side. The land, here, sloped upwards steeply, and the multi-coloured leaves of the new growth of the well-pruned and trimmed trees, and the abundance of the green, yellow and red pods protruding from the trunks and branches, told of the attention given to this estate.

It would be a perfect place to enquire after, and hunt for snakes, and best of all, to hire a host of young village boys to be our extra eyes. Though they themselves would not attempt to catch or capture a "sarpint," they could spot them with a facility that was amazing. Julius had employed these village children on a previous trip to assist in the spotting of the sleeping snakes. They had entered into the adventure avidly, for the spotters fee of a "shilling" per "spot" was a great incentive, and they scampered through the bush and the plantation of mixed cocoa and coffee, their shrill excited cries telling when they located a specimen high up in an overshading breadfruit tree, or in the low branches of a back-yard lime or orange tree.

They scattered through the village and estate hinterland, and with a dozen or so eager boys working frantically to earn their "shilling" — in reality a 25-cent piece of the new West Indian currency, which nevertheless usually retained the old name of the British "shilling," worth originally 24 cents — at least a half dozen or more sightings were a guaranteed result.

Not all these snakes were or could be caught. Often they were so high up in a tall and brittle-branched tree, such as the breadfruit, that it was prudent to leave them there, even for the lightly constructed boys who were often willing to risk the climb, not to catch them, but to shake them down, as dangerous an activity as the actual climb out on to the brittle extensions of the slender limbs. It took an extremely vigorous shaking of the snake perch, once it was awakened and had clamped its prehensile tail to the branch, to dislodge it, or to encourage it to relinquish its hold and seek escape from the thrashing about of its peaceful perch of a few minutes before.

Julius told an amusing tale of his previous collecting efforts using the local juvenile forces. Eager to earn their rewards for each sighting, and the added bonus of another "shilling" for the climb to shake, the entire village population of boys had spread out into the bush and cocoa plantation and within minutes the cries of "Ah see one! Ah see one!" were echoing back to tell of the locations of the sarpints. One slightly slower, and fatter boy — every village seems to have one — could not keep up with the more agile, swift and wiry ones who always seemed to be one step ahead of him, one second be-

(Continued on page 21)

We Go To Grenada 1975

(Continued from page 20)

fore him in claiming, in shouting out "Ah see one," which became the standard cry of triumph and the guarantee of another earned "shilling." "Ah see one! Ah see one! Ah see one!" The voices were coming from all points of the compass as Julius tried to keep up with the swift-footed boys scattering through the bush all around him.

The fat boy could be glimpsed from time to time ahead of him as he struggled to keep up with the others, look for snakes, and yet not entirely lose visual contact with the man who was paying out the bounty. This hesitation, and lack of physical ability, or perhaps visual acuity, left him empty-pocketed.

Suddenly he cried out, "Ah see one!" Being close to Julius, he was easy to locate, as he stood beneath a tall tree — a breadfruit — pointing upwards. "Ah see one," he repeated, as Julius caught up to him. Julius looked. He looked harder. He could not see one. "You see it?" asked Julius. "Ah see one," affirmed the fat boy.

Julius, who wears glasses and is somewhat short-sighted, decided that the boy could probably "see one" much better than he could. He kicked off his shoes, as the tree was a climbable one, and where the boy said he saw the snake did not seem too difficult a climb. Shinnying up the main bole and coming to the first major fork, he asked the boy, standing below, "This side, or this side?" and when being assured by the boy that the side branch chosen by the slapping of a hand on the bark, that that was indeed the side of the tree up which Julius should continue to climb towards the snake, he climbed higher. He looked. He was closer now. He should be able to see the snake. The shaking of the tree due to the climbing usually woke them; then they uncoiled from their sleeping ball and either waited to bite blindly at any threat, or began to move off, seeking a safer haven from the disturbance. No snake, yet.

"This side, or that side?" "This branch or that branch?" Choices for direction, all affirmed by the pointing, fat boy below. "Ah see it! Ah see it!" Soon it was obvious to Julius that either the snake was a very small one, a juvenile, and not much a prize at this time, and that the boy's eyesight was extremely acute, or that he was totally blind, or the obvious — there was no snake. The boy was mistaken. He had seen an old breadfruit pod, a cigar-shaped object that could be mistaken for a snake by an over-eager half-blind boy. A piece of vine, maybe? But the exact branch, on which by elimination the boy said, with certainty, that he "see" the snake, was bare. There was no snake there. "Here? Here?" shouted down. "Yeh," replied the pointing boy. "But it ent have no snake here," shouted Julius, clinging precariously to his swaying perch. "Nah," answered the boy.

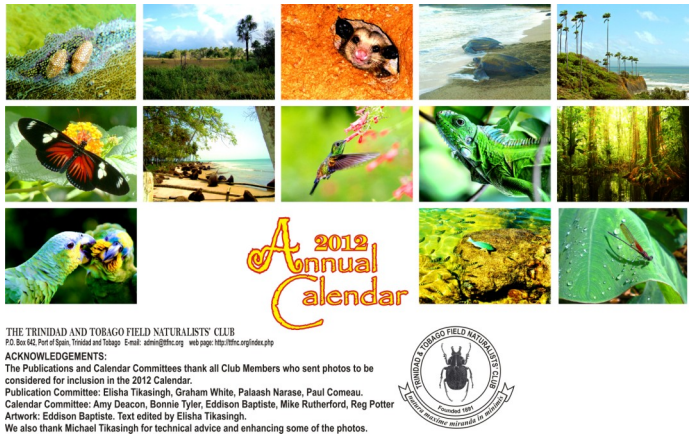
"So, way you see it?" shouted Julius, baffled. In Grenada, where the standard English grammar is mauled beyond normal, standard English speaking compensation compresses the verbs into one tense. Place and time can be casually blended into one word. Julius meant, "Where do you see it?" meaning, without adding, "now." However, the boy interpreted Julius' attempt to speak to him in Grenadianese as, not "where" but "when." And he answered, reasonably, "Yesterday."

(to be continued in QB1 2012)

This year's TTFNC Christmas lunch was On Sunday 11th December at the Horticultural Society

The Management of TTFNC Wishes all A Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year

2012 Calendar front cover



2012 Calendar back cover

Management wishes to thank all who were instrumental in the production of our 1st Annual Calendar.

We still have some calendars available from Selwyn and Mike Rutherford. They are also available at Mode Alive, Ishmael Khan Bookstore and UWI Bookstore.

Management Notices

New members; Volunteers; Publications

Management Notices

New Members

The Club warmly welcomes the following new members:

Ordinary member:

Sally Samla, Richard Acosta, Marc de Verteuil, Sharmila Maharaj

New life members:

New Website

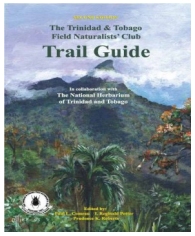
The Club has transferred to a new domain name and email address. The change allows us more space and greater control to reach out to the public and stay in touch with members.

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

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

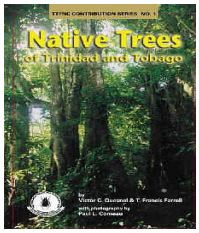
PUBLICATIONS

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

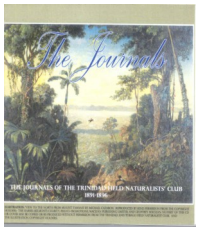


The TTFNC Trail Guide

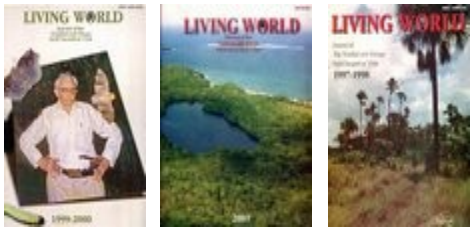
Members = TT$200.00



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

Living World 2011 supplement

Due to limited supply Living World 2011 supplements are $20.00 each.

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 2012 Annual Membership Fees are Due:

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

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. 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 1st Quarter 2012 issue is February 31st 2012.**
11. **Electronic copies can be submitted to the 'Editor' at: admin@ttfnc.org Please include the code QB2012-1 in the email subject label.**
12. Hard copies along with CD softcopy can be delivered to the editor or any member of Management.