



THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

October – December 2012

Issue No: 4/2012



Tucker Valley BioBlitz 2012

Saturday 17th November to Sunday 18th November 2012

Below - **BioBlitz 2012** members of the **Bird Group** on **Morne Catherine**

photo: Sanjiv Parasram



front: Feroze Omardeen (squatting)

back L-R: Clayton Hull, Faraaz Abdool, Cyril Coomansingh, Kathleen Hinkson

background: L-R: Vicky Christopher, Catherine Christopher

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Editor's note

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



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October - December 2012

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LIVING WORLD



Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

**An important source of info on Trinidad and Tobago's biota
and the future of TTFNC publications**

Commentary by Eddison Baptiste

The membership of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC) are rightfully proud of their flagship publication, LIVING WORLD (LW). Not only is the journal produced and published in accordance to international scientific standards and full of

original research papers relevant to Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean Region as a whole, but a lot of the research papers published are written by members of the local and regional scientific community. The LW



**Elisha Tikasingh (left), current editor of LW and Victor Quesnel (right)
past editor at Victor's brother's home in Talparo discussing
a paper by Victor and Dave Straddling,
which subsequently appeared in the 2012 LW journal**

Photo taken 11th January 2012 by Graham White

not only provides a valuable outlet for our young and gifted scientist but is an increasingly valuable natural history data base that is already being tapped locally and internationally by researchers. The international recognition of the LW grows annually.

The publications committee of TTFNC is responsible for all publications produced by the Club, is made up of dedicated Club Members who are professionals in relevant fields and is done on a completely voluntary bases. The Club rely heavily on donations from organizations with an interest in the natural environment and who wish to encourage this type of publication. In 2012, the TTFNC started publishing an annual calendar with the objective of funding the LW and is thankful that First Citizens sponsored our 2013 calendar effectively funding the 2013 edition of the LIVING WORLD.

ORIGINS OF THE LIVING WORLD

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club started in July, 1891 as Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club. It was later in the 1970s that Tobago was added to the Club's name. The Club started publishing a bi-monthly journal in 1892. The objective of the journal was one "of keeping those of its members who are in Europe, America and Venezuela, and also those resident in the Colony but at a distance from its seat of operation, en rapport with what is being accomplished." Consequently, the Journal consisted of a variety of papers which included reports of meetings and field trips, elementary information on a

variety of subjects as well as scientific papers which included descriptions of new species. The journal ceased publication in 1896. That journal is now available in CD format from the Club.

The Journal was restarted in 1956 mainly as an avenue for the publication of results of scientific research and observations on local natural history by its members. In 1973, it changed its name from the Journal of the Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club to the Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club to be consistent with the name change of the Club. There was a further name change in 1977 when it became "Living World, Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club. From 1956 to 2000 it was published generally on a biennial basis, but from 2001 it became an annual journal. It now publishes articles on studies and observations on natural history carried out in Trinidad and Tobago, and in countries in the Caribbean Basin. Contributors to the journal are not limited to members of the Club.

OTHER TTFNC PUBLICATIONS

Members of the Club have also independently published books such as: A Guide to The Birds of Trinidad and Tobago, The Snakes of Trinidad and Tobago, The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club Trail Guide, Native Trees of Trinidad and Tobago and field guides on the flora and fauna of Trinidad and Tobago.

FUTURE OF TTFNC PUBLICATIONS

The Club's Mission Statement:

"To foster education and knowledge of natural history and to encourage and promote activities that lead to the appreciation, preservation and conservation of our natural heritage."

The Club's objectives further state:

"To bring together persons interested in the study of natural history, the diffusion of knowledge thereof and the conservation of nature and natural resources."

It is no wonder that publications have become such an important activity of the Club since it clearly support our Mission Statement and Objectives. As such TTFNC will continue to encourage independent natural history publications by it's individual members and ensure that the standards of our established publication are maintained and improved over time.

Since the LW journal in its current form functions effectively as a scientific account of observations and research on the natural history of T&T and the Caribbean, there have been suggestions that there is a need to produce a less technical publication. Therefore one of the Club's greatest ambitions is to reintroduce a popular natural history magazine to increase the reach of our message of conservation, wonder and importance of nature and the natural world. The need for this has increased with the increasing scientific standard of the LW. **In its present form the LW fills an important function. (not only for researchers in**

T&T, but also for the Caribbean and the world). It will be inappropriate to change the current journal to become more popular or attractive to members of the club, members of the public and secondary school students.

Therefore there is a place for a popular magazine that celebrates the value of our natural history and addresses the issues of conservation. TTFNC would like to introduce a popular natural history magazine. The Club's publications committee thinks that this would be a powerful tool for furthering the objectives of the club. It would engender an interest in our natural history and in TTFNC. The magazine becoming another mouthpiece of the club potentially benefiting members as well as helping to showcase the club to the general public. This proposed magazine will lean on the club for some of its content and contributors and extent TTFNC's influence thereby benefiting the general community of Trinidad and Tobago by increasing the awareness and appreciation of the natural environment.





Tucker Valley BioBlitz 2012 Summary

Saturday 17th November to Sunday 18th November 2012
Report by Mike G. Rutherford



From 3:15pm on Saturday 17th November to 3:15pm on Sunday 18th November 2012 the first ever BioBlitz in Trinidad and Tobago, and possibly the Caribbean, took place in Tucker Valley, Chaguaramas. There are two main purposes of a BioBlitz – to see what is living in a chosen site and then to educate the public about what is there.

Over 80 scientists, experts and nature enthusiasts turned up over the weekend to record as many different species of plants and animals as possible in 24 hours. On the Sunday over 200 members of the public came along to go on guided walks, to watch the scientists at work and to learn something from the various organisations participating.



Busy Identifying specimens at base camp
centre: **Mike Rutherford** (BioBlitz Organizer) right: **Dan Jaggernaut**
left: **Unknown UWI Students** Photo: *Esperanza Luengo*

The event was organised by Mike Rutherford, the curator of the University of the West Indies Zoology Museum (UWIZM), with help from members of the Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC) and the UWI Department of Life Sciences. First Citizens very generously sponsored the event through the TTFNC, which allowed the setting up of a base camp in the overflow car park of the Macqueripe Bay Beach Facility. Here there were lights, tables, microscopes, guide books, computers and collecting and processing equipment which allowed the scientists to do their work. The Chaguaramas Development Authority gave permission for the event and provided the security who kept an eye on the base camp through the night.

The experts and their helpers had been organised into seven groups, each focusing on different species or habitats – Birds, Mammals, Reptiles & Amphibians, Terrestrial Invertebrates, Plants, Marine and Freshwater. Each group had previously planned how to find and record their target species or survey their chosen habitat. They also had to engage with the public and this was done by either interacting with them at the base camp or by taking them on guided walks. There were also information stands by the Asa Wright Nature Centre, the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) Youth Ambassadors, the Ministry of Food Production/CAB International and the TTFNC to inform the public about various environmental issues. The Zoological Society of Trinidad and Tobago were also there with their mobile zoo called the Zoo To You programme which allowed people to get up close to a blue-and-yellow macaw, a tree porcupine, a wild hog, a Mani-

cou and several rabbits and tortoises amongst others.

The Bird group included members of the TTFNC Bird Group, Asa Wright Nature Centre staff, and independent wildlife tour guides. Although spotting was started on the Saturday, with some good records of night birds including a Barn Owl, the majority of the birding was conducted on Sunday morning. One group headed up Morne Catherine on the western side of Tucker Valley and had a very productive time whilst another group, led by Courtenay Rooks and Kayman Sagar, took the eastern side of the valley. They headed up to the Tracking Station and back down through the Bamboo Cathedral along with the members of the public who had signed up for the guided walk. In total 97 different species of birds were seen or heard including parrots, toucans, owls, hawks, hummingbirds, tanagers, trogons and manakins.

The Mammal group, including Howard Nelson, Ellie Nelson, Luke Rostant and Darshan Narang, headed into the forests and set up mist nets to trap bats and Sherman traps to trap small mammals. Both types of traps leave the animals unharmed. The mist nets weren't too successful and so the bat numbers were low, but by checking the abandoned houses and bunkers in the valley they did manage to add a few species. They also heard and saw monkeys and agoutis and found signs of armadillo but the highlight was the temporary capture of a Robinson's Mouse Opossum in one of the Sherman Traps. 12 different mammals were seen in total.

The Reptile & Amphibian group, which in-

cluded American expert John Murphy and local expert Adrian Hailey, started surveying on the Saturday afternoon and went on through the night using torches to spot snakes, lizards and frogs. They also had much success totalling 17 reptiles and 12 frogs although one of the reptile highlights was actually provided by another group with the Birders finding a dead bushmaster or mapepire zanana snake that had been run over on the road up to Morne Catherine. This provoked much interest when it was displayed at the base camp with many mem-

bers of the public very curious to see the rarest venomous snake in Trinidad.

John Murphy and Howard Nelson led a combined Mammal, Reptile & Amphibian walk along the Edith Falls trail on the Sunday where they saw some capuchin monkeys and a racer snake along with some small frogs and lizards.

The Terrestrial Invertebrate group had several sub groups: Chris Starr looked for wasps, bee, ants and termites; Jo-Anne Sewlal



Bushmaster/Mapepire Zanas, *Lachesis muta* found dead on road

photo: Feroze Omardeen

did the spiders; Rakesh Bhukal had a large group of UWI students looking for scorpions at night-time using UV lights; Imran Khan and Kris Sookdeo noted the butterflies they saw and Mike Rutherford did the land snails. Chris Starr led the public walk along the trail from Macqueripe Bay to the golf course and showed people the variety of insects that can be found in the forest. Overall they found 125 species although there are still some that need further identification including a possible new species of orb-weaving spider found by Jo-Anne.

The Freshwater group included Amy Deacon,

Dawn Phillip, Raj Mahabir and Erin Mangal all involved with the UWI Department of Life Sciences. They focused mainly on the Cuesa River and used a variety of nets to sample for the fish, crustaceans, insects and worms that can be found in freshwater. The conditions weren't ideal as the heavy rains from the week before mean the river was murky and flowing high making it harder to sample. However, by the Sunday the levels had dropped and Amy was able to lead a guided walk along the river showing the public many different plants and animals. In total they found 43 different species including guppies, damselflies, crayfish and freshwater snails.



Yellow Treefrog, *Dendropsophus microcephalus*

photo: John Murphy

The Marine group was led by Jahson Alemu with help from members of the Trinidad and Tobago Eco Divers Club as well as many students from UWI. They dove and snorkelled in Macqueripe Bay during both daytime and night time and so managed to find a wide range of sea creatures. One of the highlights for some of the snorkelers was seeing a green turtle in the bay on the Sunday. As the Marine group couldn't do guided tours for the public due to safety reasons it was better to bring the animals to them so some of the

smaller animals found by the group were temporarily brought up to the base camp to be displayed in an aquarium. These included a juvenile French Angelfish, a scorpionfish and several sea urchins and brittle stars. Despite the rather poor visibility underwater they recorded 138 species of fish, corals, sponges, crustaceans and other invertebrates.

The Plant group was coordinated by Mike Oatham from UWI and had help from the National Herbarium of Trinidad and Tobago.



Mark Charran talking about marine specimens

photo: John Murphy

They headed out into the forests and collected samples of as many plants as they could carry before returning to the base camp and processing them late into Saturday night. Members of the Trinidad and Tobago Orchid Society came early on Sunday morning and recorded several species of orchids in the forests between Macqueripe Bay and the golf course. The rest of the day was taken up with the identification of the collected specimens, with the help of local plant expert Winston Johnson, and the guided walk. This was led by Mike and he took people on

the trail to the old bunker behind the Samaan Park. At the end of the 24 hour period 211 species of trees, shrubs, ferns and orchids had been identified.

The BioBlitz was also used as an opportunity to launch some brand new publications. The TTFNC had their 2013 calendar, sponsored by First Citizens, which contained many beautiful photos of the wildlife and scenery of Trinidad and Tobago and they also had the *Trinidad and Tobago Wildflower Guide*. Mike Rutherford launched his *Trinidad and Tobago*



**Dan Jaggernaut showing Mike Rutherford's
Trinidad and Tobago Wildlife Guide**

Background L-R: Fraser Higgins, Alesha Naranjit and Selwyn Gomes

Photo: Esperanza Luengo

Wildlife Guide which contains detailed drawings of over 200 mammals, birds, reptiles, frogs and insects. Both of the guides are pocket sized and laminated and therefore perfect to take out on walks.

Following the success of this first national BioBlitz plans are already being formed for a follow up next year, possible sites include Arima Valley, Maracas Bay to El Tucuche, Aripo Savannas and Charlotteville in Tobago.

Event in Numbers and Facts

Time to record species – 24 hours

Number of scientists and volunteers – 80

Number of members of the public taken on

Guided Walks – 140

Number of animals recorded – 443

Number of plants recorded – 211

Total number of living organisms recorded - 654

Biggest recorded organism – Samaan Tree

Smallest recorded organism – Diatom (a type of algae)

Number of species recorded by group:

Birds – 97

Mammals - 12

Reptile and Amphibian – 28

Freshwater – 43

Marine – 138

Terrestrial Invertebrates – 125

Plants – 211

(Disclaimer)

Total species numbers as reported at the end of the BioBlitz, this may be different from group totals in reports due to later identifications.



John Murphy photographing a lizard

photo: Renoir Auguste



left:
**Robinson's
Mouse Opossum,
Marmosa robinsoni,**
An unwilling guest on
display at the BioBlitz
2012 base camp for
only about one hour
after which it was
returned to the trail
where it was trapped.

Photo: Ellie Devenish Nelson



**BioBlitz 2012 - The Base Camp, First Citizens
sponsored BioBlitz 2012 and TTFNC's 2013 calendar**

Photo: Esperanza Luengo



Below:

Mike Rutherford announcing the final flora and fauna specimens count at the official close of the Tucker Valley BioBlitz on Sunday 18th November 2012 at 3:15 p.m

Photo: Eddison Baptiste



**The Trinidad and Tobago
Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC)
thanks**

First Citizens

**For its generous support of the Club
in the form of sponsorship of our
First ever BioBlitz (Tucker Valley 2012)
and our
2013 TTFNC Annual Calendar**



First Citizens



Tucker Valley Bioblitz, Saturday 17th November 2012 Small Mammal Trapping

by Ellie Devenish Nelson



On Saturday evening of the 2012 Bioblitz, the mammal group - Eddison Baptiste, Darshan Narang, Luke Rostant, Imran Khan and Ellie Devenish-Nelson - led by Howard Nelson, hiked up to the ridgetop above Macqueripe Bay to set small mammal traps. We used

small Sherman traps, a collapsible aluminium box structure about 30cm long. Since only 11 traps were available, one trap was placed at 20m intervals, alternating with one on the ground and one tied to a vine or branch



Setting a small mammal trap

L-R: Howard Nelson with trap, Ellie Devenish Nelson with prepared bait and Imran Khan

Photo: Eddison Baptiste

about a metre high. In long term studies typically 100s of traps are used, with two at each interval. With capture rates in the tropics as low as 1 in 100 trap nights, due in part to low population densities and the complex dimensionality of the habitat, the team were cautiously optimistic about the chances of catching anything.

The next morning, three of the team – Howard, Ellie and Eddy - set off at first light to check the traps, while the others mist-netted for bats. Mammal traps need to be checked twice a day to reduce the chance of injuries or fatalities due to overheating or insects entering the traps. As we progressed along the trap line, our hopes were dashed as each trap we came to remained open. We were beginning to think that not even a *Bufo* had wandered into our traps. By the eighth trap we suspected that luck wasn't on our side....until we heard Howard exclaim with delight that the trap was closed. We waited as he untied the trap from the tangle of vines that it was attached to, and when we peeked into the trap, we were rewarded by the sight of a small mammal curled at the bottom!

The remaining traps were open, and so we proceeded to take the mammal, still in the trap, back down to the base camp. Here, we processed the mammal by taking measurements to the best of our ability given that we had no drugs with which to anesthetize it. We identified our capture as a Robinson's mouse opossum, *Marmosa robinsoni*, a marsupial mouse that is found through northern South America and into Central America. This mammal is common in forested habitats in Trinidad, although it was Howard and the team's first capture for Chaguaramas.

We noticed that the individual had a bright orange patch on its underbelly. According to Emmons' Field Guide to Neotropical Rainforest Mammals, this indicates that a female is parous, i.e. it has recently given birth. As this was the first time that we had observed this, we were excited and noted breeding for this species in November. Though we wanted to keep this mouse opossum at the camp for members of the public to see, we decided it was better for her and her babies if we released her. So, another hike up the



**Howard Nelson preparing
a camera trap**

Photo: Eddison Baptiste

trail back to where we caught her. She seemed none the worse for her experience as we watched her running back into the vines.

Although catching one individual may not sound like a lot, it was a great capture rate of small mammals for Trinidad's first ever Bioblitz. Perhaps our success was down to luck...but perhaps the bait recipe – a mixture of peanut butter, oats, sardines and bacon fat - that two team members, Howard Nelson and Ellie Devenish-Nelson, have per-

fectured over the years was just too tempting for our mouse opossum to resist!



**Robinson's Mouse Opossum, *Marmosa robinsoni*,
released where it was trapped.**

Photo: Ellie Devenish Nelson

Tucker Valley Bioblitz, 17-18th November 2012



Muddy waters: Seeking Out Tucker Valley's Freshwater Fauna



by Amy Deacon

In contrast to our idyllic reconnaissance visit two weeks earlier, recent heavy rains in Tucker Valley meant that the BioBlitz Freshwater Group, consisting of experts from UWI alongside some keen volunteers, faced quite a challenge!

Undeterred, we spent Saturday focusing our sampling efforts on the fish fauna, as we had fishing experts Dawn Phillip and Raj Mahabir for one day only. Deep, fast flowing, turbid water forced us to restrict our seining to the



BioBlitz 2012 - an enthusiastic Fresh Water Group
L-R: Yannick Weekes, Mark-Ché Devonish, Danielle Morong,
Kasey Gordon, Amy Deacon, Raj Mahabir.

Photo: Dawn Phillip

smaller tributaries of the Cuesa River, as we found fishing almost impossible in the lower portions of the main river due to difficulties moving through the soft, unconsolidated mud.

Using a hand seine, we sampled the river near the bridge where the main track branched off to the Golf Course. We then sampled a stretch of river alongside a road, commonly used as a fitness trail, which branched to the right of the main Golf Course road. We used a combination of dip netting, visual searches and surber sampling in order to find smaller fish and invertebrates, such as freshwater crayfish (e.g. *Macrobrachium* spp.) and the predatory larvae of dragonflies and damselflies.

The high water levels certainly had an impact on the diversity and abundance of the freshwater fauna that we found. Many fish and invertebrates would have been swept downstream after the heavy rains; others may have retreated to hiding places such as holes, crevices and thick vegetation. There was still evidence of this in the terrestrial vegetation that had been damaged by the strong flows, and in the water, which was still very turbid in most places. These difficult conditions meant that we recorded just 3 of the 8 fish species that Dawn's previous work suggested were present in the Cuesa; *Poecilia reticulata* (guppy), *Aneblepsoides hartii* (jumping guabine) and *Hoplias malabaricus* (guabine).

The following day we explored an area where the river meets William's Bay. The bank vegetation here was dominated by mangroves which proved excellent habitat for several species of crab, which we suc-

cessfully captured for identification purposes. As we walked across the main road towards the sea, we spotted three spectacled caiman basking on the river bank. Sensing our approach, one by one they slid down the bank and disappeared into the murky water.

Despite finding fewer aquatic species than we hoped, we nevertheless recorded a total of 43 species, and were extremely pleased with the huge variety of taxa that we found within the freshwater habitats. We are proud to claim sightings of both the largest animal – the aforementioned spectacled caiman, and the very smallest organisms – 8 species of microscopic diatoms found on the rocky substrate of the streams.

On Sunday afternoon, we shared our enthusiasm for Tucker Valley's freshwater biodiversity by leading a group of 30 members of the public on a river walk to spread the word that it's not only fish that live in and around streams and rivers! By now, the water levels had returned to normal and visibility was much better. Everyone had a go at using a dip net and surber sampler to catch guppies and sample aquatic invertebrates, and everyone was fascinated to hear about the hidden diversity and enormous variety of creatures inhabiting Trinidad's rivers.



Saturday 17th November to Sunday 18th November 2012
Underwater wonders of Macquarie Bay

Tucker Valley 2012 BioBlitz Marine Group

by Mark Charran



The marine team was coordinated by Jahson Alemu and consisted of both experts as well as a number of keen volunteers who took part in a combination of dive and snorkel surveys. Armed with identification keys, underwater writing slates and cameras the

group set out to explore the bay.

Though visibility was less than ideal, feather duster worms, soft corals, damselfishes, and various other forms of marine fauna and



Flame Scallop, *Ctenoides scabra*

Photo: Jahson Dass

flora (sessile and free swimming) could be seen as one ventured closer to the sea floor. The bay's western edge yielded a variety of algae and numerous rock boring urchins, *Echinometra lucunter* closer to the surface. However, as one ventured deeper and further into the bay, gorgonians, zoanthids and sponges were in greater abundance and could be seen decorating the sea floor as parrotfish, Spanish hogfishes and various other fish species swam among them.

As the snorkel team made their way along the eastern edge of the bay, soft corals appeared to be less abundant as compared to the western edge, although algae and urchins appeared to be evenly distributed throughout. Duck diving and overturning of rocks by hand revealed a closer look at the benthic life, which included brittle stars, crabs, sponges, tunicates and various other more cryptic macroinvertebrates. Some of these organisms (mainly brittle stars and urchins) were collected for public display and interaction on Sunday. The group engaged in discussion after their first expedition to tally their findings and plan for a night survey.

Volunteers re-grouped later that evening, armed with dive lights to have a second look at the bay under the cover of darkness. Both divers and snorkelers set out toward the middle of the bay before splitting left and right respectively. As the snorkellers came in line with the platform to the east of the bay, a lone tarpon, *Megalopus atlanticus* cruised in front of the group, possibly searching the bay for prey. Venturing a bit further we spotted a relatively large porcupinefish, *Diodon holocanthus*, perusing the edge of a boulder. Subsequently the group split to investigate either

edge. The sea floor was not immediately visible, due to water, revealing sleeping parrotfish in their mucous cocoons as well as surgeonfish sleeping along on the edges of rocks. Flamefishes, *Apogon maculatus* appeared to be a bit more active as well, venturing out of their small caves and crevices. As the snorkel team made their way up the eastern edge, currents exiting the bay became quite strong, proving unsafe for the group to venture further onwards. We gradually made our way back to shore, continuing their search along the way. Upon returning to camp, various invertebrates in the display tank, along with a spotted scorpionfish, *Scorpaena plumieri*, were identified using books, keys and microscopes.

During the Sunday morning, adjustments were made to the display tank as volunteers added more specimens collected in the bay for the public display; a juvenile French angel, *Pomacanthus paru*, Flamefish, *Apogon maculatus*, dusky damsel, *Stegastes adustus* along with the brittle stars (order: Ophiurida) and two species of urchins, *Echinometra lucunter*



**Rock-boring Urchin,
*Echinometra lucunter***

Photo: Renuka Dass

and *Lytechinus variegatus* from the previous day. The scorpionfish was kept separate in a tub due to its size and predatory instinct. Both children and adults were intrigued at some of the organisms found in the bay, unaware that such wonders exist in the very bay in which some had just been bathing. Children were particularly fond of interacting with the brittlestars and urchins which, under supervision, they would hold in the palms of their hands as volunteers explained their importance in the ecosystem.

Though the abundance of fishes and other marine life were not as high as in previous visits, and visibility in the bay was relatively poor, the combined efforts of the team managed to capture a wide scope of organisms tallying up to an impressive 141 species.



Long-spine Porcupinefish, *Diodon holocanthus*

Photo: Jahson Dass



(left)

Variegated Urchin,
Lytechinus variegatus

Photos: Renuka Dass



(above left) **Flamefish, *Apogon maculatus***
and (right) **French Angel, *Pomacanthus paru***

(part of marine display - all specimens were later released where captured)

Saturday 17th November to Sunday 18th November 2012

You Don't Realize How Many Until You "Look".

Plants at the Tucker Valley BioBlitz

by Mike Oatham and Doreen Jodhan



While some groups have the challenge of searching and not finding many species, with plants the challenge, strange as it may seem, is dealing with an overwhelming amount of species. Where do you start? How do you approach recording so many species in 24 hours? These were questions that faced us as we gathered at Macqueripe Bay car park for the start of the Tucker Valley BioBlitz.

We were a group of experts and volunteers from the University of the West Indies, the Orchid Society and other interested individuals. It was agreed that we should all tackle different ecosystems that are found in the Tucker Valley such as the dry forest near the mouth of the valley, the Lower Montane forest on the peaks of the mountains surrounding the valley and the human modified forests and grasslands on the floor of the valley. So, one UWI group headed off to botanize the Morne St Catherine road while a second UWI group tackled the mix of recovering plantation and native forest behind the Samaan Park. The National Herbarium crew collected on the Edith Falls trail and the Orchid Society surveyed for orchids along the Golf Course trail on the Sunday morning. Because the Bioblitz started at 3:00 pm in the afternoon on Saturday,

there was a mad scramble to collect as many specimens of different plant species as possible before nightfall. Many specimens were collected and capturing them into plant presses back at the Bioblitz Base camp took until close to midnight.

The next morning we were joined by retired parataxonomist and plant ID guru, Mr Winston Johnson and we began the task of identifying all the specimens collected in the mad rush of the previous evening. It soon became apparent that we had enough material to keep us busy identifying for several days and sure enough we failed to make it through the entire collection by the deadline of 3pm. Especially with reinforcements from the UWI team arriving and walking the Macqueripe 'to Golf Course trail as well as scouting around the Bioblitz basecamp.

In the end we identified 222 plant species with many more species collected but not identified and other species spotted but not actually collected. Of the species identified, 88 were trees, 24 shrubs, 73 were herb species, 31 were vines and 6 species were epiphytes.

Some highlights included Purpleheart, a

large, dry forest timber tree that has been severely overexploited because of its beautiful timber.

Sad to see *Acacia mangium*, a potentially invasive introduced plant species, planted as part of a reforestation project and now regenerating by itself at the top of Morne St. Catherine. However it may not

be a problem in the forest context as it gives way to primary stage forest trees later in succession.

Nice to see *Roupala montana* (Beefwood) found near Macquarie beach. This species occurs widely across the Northern Range but infrequently. Over-exploited for its medicinal properties, it belongs to the



BioBlitz 2012 - Plant Group processing specimens
Mike Oatham (second from right) with UWI students and other volunteers

Photo: Mike Rutherford

Family Proteaceae which is common in Southern Africa and Australia but rare in the Neotropics. It is clear a more detailed survey is called for in the Tucker Valley over a longer period of time to get a more accurate picture of the plant biodiversity but the Bioblitz was an important tool to get a feel for the levels of diversity and to sensitize the public to what can be found here.

Important lessons were learned in this Bioblitz that will be carried over into the next event. There is scope for a team identifying the more common species from the roadside in a series of rapid ve-

hicle transects without collecting specimens. Pressing of collected specimens took a lot of time and was ultimately not necessary. In the future pressing will be restricted to only those new and usual specimens that could not be immediately identified. There needs to be more sorting into morphotypes using volunteers unskilled in plant identification. A massive constraint is the lack of skilled parataxonomists that can quickly identify a large number of species in a short period of time. We need to develop a cadre of parataxonomists in Trinidad and Tobago to support biodiversity investigations in the future.



**The trail along the
north coast connecting
the Golf Course and
Macqueripe.**

**It was along this trail
that the
Robinson's Mouse Opossum,
Marmosa robinsoni,
was trapped
and later released.**

Photo: Eddison Baptiste

TTFNC 2013 Annual Calendars - available



THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

P.O. Box 642, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago e-mail: admin@ttnfc.org web page: <http://ttnfc.org/index.php>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The Publications and Calendar Committees thank all Club Members who sent photos to be considered for inclusion in the 2013 Calendar.

Publication Committee: Elisha Tikasingh, Graham White, Palaash Narase, Paul Comeau.

Calendar Committee: Amy Deacon, Bonnie Tyler, Eddison Baptiste, Mike Rutherford, Reg Potter

Artwork: Eddison Baptiste. Text edited by Elisha Tikasingh.

We also thank Michael Tikasingh for technical advice and enhancing of the photos.



above: the back cover

The TTFNC 2013 Annual Calendar was sponsored by
First Citizens

Management Notices

New members; Volunteers; Publications



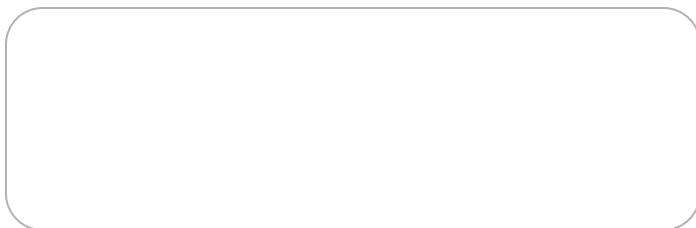
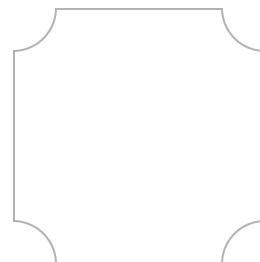
New Members

The Club warmly welcomes the following new members:

Junior members: **Simone Ho, Shane Manchauck**

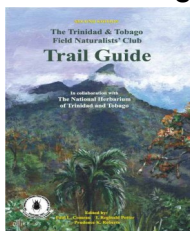
Ordinary members: **Annetta Nurse, Jessica Oura,**

New life members: **Rondell Bailey** (change from ordinary member)



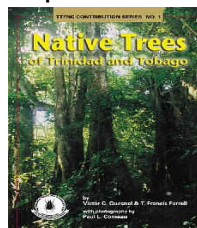
PUBLICATIONS

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



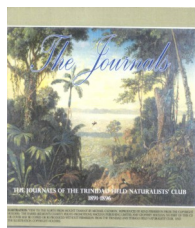
The TTFNC
Trail Guide

Members :
TT\$200.00



The Native
Trees of T&T

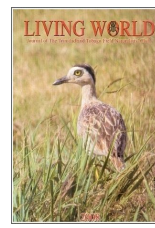
2nd Edition
Members :
TT\$100.00



Living World
Journal 1892-
1896 CD
Members :
TT\$175.00



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



Living World 2012 supplement

Due to limited supply Living World 2012 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 2013 Annual Membership Fees are Due:

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

Submission of articles and field trip reports:

1. All articles must reach the editor by the eighth week of each quarter.
Submission deadline for the 1st Quarter 2013 issue is February 28th 2013.
2. Electronic copies can be submitted to the 'Editor' at: admin@ttfnc.org
or directly to the editor or any member of Management. Please include the code QB2013-1 in the email subject label.