



# THE FIELD NATURALIST

*Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*

April – June 2013

Issue No: 2/2013



“El Cerro del Aripo Sunday 6th October 1974”

## MISSING ON HIKE

*Report by Bruce Lauckner*



The above title was the main headline in the Trinidad  
“Evening News” on October 8 1974.

*(Continued on page 3)*



Fast forward to Sunday April 28, 2013 TTFNC Field Trip to El Cerro del Aripo  
**A colony of crested oropendola, *Psarocolius decumanus* with more than fifty nests.**

*Photo: Eddison Baptiste (full story page 8)*

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Many thanks to all who contributed and assisted



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# THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists'

**April - June 2013**

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## **“MISSING ON HIKE”**

*(Continued from page 1)*

***The same morning listeners to both the local radio stations had heard the same dramatic news plus reports that a Defence Force helicopter had been sent up to assist in a search.***

When I related this story to those gathered at the

start of the TTFNC Field Trip to El Cerro del Aripo on April 28, 2013, the same peak where three persons (including myself) were lost nearly 40 years ago, I was quite surprised at the interest and the request by Edison Baptiste to write it up and submit to this newsletter.

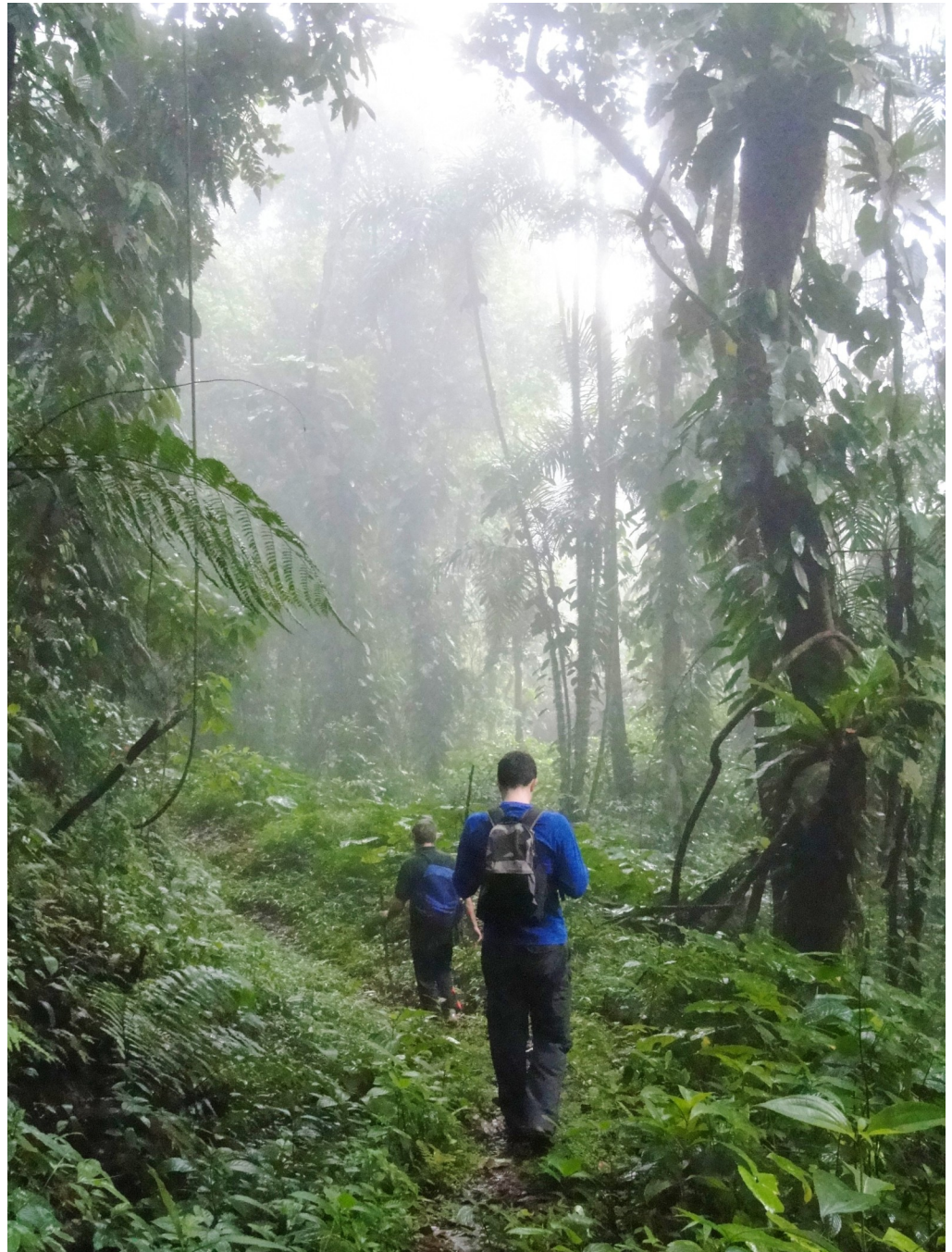
To be quite honest my memories were a little faded, but I managed to find the old newspaper clippings and these helped to jog my recollections.

**Bruce Lauckner**  
(front on trail) and  
**Francis Jones**  
(back on trail)

two of the  
Club Members  
hiking on the cool  
misty morning of the  
Sunday April 28 2013  
TTFNC Field Trip to  
El Cerro del Aripo

**(40 years ago)**  
**In 1974 when**  
**Bruce Lauckner,**  
**Brian Cooper**  
**And**  
**David Simons,**  
**were missing for**  
**3 days this part**  
**of trail to**  
**El Cerro del Aripo**  
**did not exist**

*Photo: Eddison Baptiste*



For some reason in the 1970s Trinidad's highest peak, El Cerro del Aripo, was rarely visited. There were no hiking clubs then and the monthly TTFNC Field Trips did not seem to include El Cerro del Aripo. El Tucuche, on the other hand, was a very popular hike; TTFNC went there almost every other year and so did a lot of others who got together in groups to tackle what many people then seemed to think was Trinidad's highest peak. The usually reliable 1:25,000 series (sheets 13, 1970 and 15, 1971) of Trinidad produced by the British Ordnance Survey helped this misconception. El Tucuche was clearly marked at 3,075 feet, but El Cerro del Aripo, although marked, was not given an altitude and contours showing that this peak was also above 3,000 feet were very difficult to decipher.

However a few of us newly arrived Brits, all members of TTFNC, had seen evidence that El Cerro del Aripo was highest in Trinidad at 3,085 feet and we wondered about the possibility of climbing it. We made some enquiries about how to tackle this and did not get too much help. Somebody spoke about a British husband and wife team who had spent a few years in Trinidad and who were keen hikers. They had scaled Chaguaramal (just south of El Cerro del Aripo) and then tried to go on to the highest peak. They found themselves in very dense trackless jungle with precipitous slopes and had to give up. Those familiar with the area will not be surprised by this.

However an examination of the 1:25,000 map suggested a possible route as following the La Laja – Brasso Seco bench trail (then in excellent condition and regularly maintained) to the top of the ridge east of Morne Bleu and then striking out along the ridge to the top of the mountain.

So on Sunday October 6, 1974 five persons drove up the rough La Laja Road (a little less rough than today), parked at the foot of the La Laja Brasso Seco Road (marked clearly as such with a County Council sign) and began to walk.

Besides myself the party comprised Dr Brian Cooper, David Simons, Dr David Wood and his son

who was 10 years old. Brian, now resident in Antigua, visits Trinidad from time to time: I haven't heard anything about my other companions (David Simons and the two Woods) for at least 35 years.

We reached the top of the ridge easily enough where another road sign marked the onward trail down to Brasso Seco. The post which held up that sign can be seen today, but it has fallen to the ground. The sign itself has disappeared.

From this point we had to blaze a trail. We had carefully examined the contours on the map and noted the number of separate climbs before the summit was reached: without this information we were well aware that when we did get to the top it might be difficult to realise that we were there.

There was no sign of any trail and we had to use our cutlasses from time to time, but we always kept close to the steep drop on the northern side of the ridge, so navigation was fairly easy. However, before very long (perhaps after the first steep climb encountered along the ridge?), Dave decided that the going was a bit tough for his young son and decided to turn back. We agreed to meet later at the parking spot.

The other three of us continued until we reached what we suspected was the final climb and topping this we emerged into a wonderful fern forest. This seemed to confirm that we had reached our goal as we had heard of vague reports that the summit was covered with impressive ferns.

Fast forwarding to this year's TTFNC trip, it was very depressing to reach the summit and see that some misguided person or persons had tried (and mostly succeeded) to clear the summit of trees. As the fern tree trunks do not have the size or consistency of the more common forest trees this was probably a fairly easy task. But it has destroyed a very interesting effect of the micro climate on the peak.

Back to 1974, we trekked to the edges of the summit plateau to peer through the vegetation and con-



firm that there was nothing higher around. We looked for the trig mark that somebody told us might exist – even though it was not marked on the map. We could not find it.

Although we had not found the climb very arduous the going had been slow because of the trail blazing and we realized that the descent would need to be quicker to avoid darkness – although getting to the La Laja Brasso Seco bench trail before losing too much daylight would probably mean safety. So we began the downward hike thinking that navigation would be as easy as on the way up. Those who know the area today know that, even though a relatively clear trail now exists, the downward journey can be difficult.

Before too long we realised that we did not appear to be on a ridge so we circled to try to regain our bearings. We soon stumbled upon a small stream emphasising that we were some way off course. Somehow we thought that we had strayed onto the steep northern slope, although in fact we had veered south of the main ridge. Anyway we were lost, it was after 4.00 pm and the sun sets early in October.

We felt that the only sensible thing to do was to follow the stream into a valley, which is the classic thing to do when lost on a mountain. So we gingerly edged our way down at the side of the stream, but all too soon the light faded. We came to a somewhat level area and decided to stop for the night. We built a rough shelter and tried to settle down.

We had not expected to need food for more than a picnic lunch and all we had left between us was one hardboiled egg. At some stage, I can't remember when, we shared that between us. On the other hand water was obviously not a problem. We settled down for an uncomfortable night. Somebody knew that the moon was on the wane, so we would not get much moonlight until after midnight. We were camped in a bit of a forest clearing and did get a bit of moonlight for a couple of hours towards dawn. There was some apprehension about snakes; again somebody had some advice – keep banging the

ground with a stick and they will keep away. So we agreed on 2 hour shifts throughout the night. During each shift one of us would bang a stick. We each did two such shifts.

There were occasional showers during the night from which the shelter did not really protect us. We sat with our backs against each other to try to heat each other up. This worked to some extent, but we did shiver somewhat in the damp.

In the morning another horror. One of my contact lenses had either become dislodged or had fallen out of the eye. So for the rest of the adventure I had only one good eye.

On Monday October 7, 1974 we continued down the stream. The going was slow as the forest was very thick and the slope precipitous. We came upon massive waterfalls. These were unknown to us, but they were in fact Sombasson and Lalaha Falls. Hikers did not trek much to those falls in the 1970s and we certainly saw no evidence of trails to them. We edged our way very slowly on the right side of the stream; today we know that the less precipitous side is on the left. We were now beginning to realise that we were on the south (not north) side of the main ridge. Through the occasional gaps in the forest cover the valley ahead looked at bit like the Guanapo Valley below La Laja.

Our stream was now a fast moving mini river and we came upon a junction to the right with another river. At the head of the other river there was some sort of structure which looked disused, but may have been originally built by WASA. So we may have been close to some sort of road. After a short debate we decided against spending time searching around for a road or trail and stay with the downward stream.

By now we were on flatter land and the river was quite easy to walk along. But the earlier slow going had almost used up another 12 hours of daylight, so we had to stop and build another rough shelter. The second night was much like the first: we tried to keep warm, but the occasional heavy downpours

ensured discomfort.

Next morning at first light we started again and soon came to what I now know was Guanapo Gorge. In 1974, that was yet another feature not as well known as today. We spent some time pondering how to proceed. We had backpacks and cutlasses and attempting to swim through was risky as we did not know whether the current would sweep us helplessly into danger. So we clambered around the side of the gorge and rejoined the Guanapo River at the point where the Tumbason River joins. This was confirmed a couple of days later when we reviewed our "trip" with Dr Julien Kenny and the 1:25,000 map. Just past this junction we saw one of those County Council road signs at the side of the river with a well-defined trail leading away. Naturally we decided to follow this trail in the direction of the sign in the assumption that it must have led somewhere.

The trail began to climb. For the first time during our ordeal we began to quarrel as there was the view that going uphill might not lead us to civilisation. But then we saw some cocoa trees and we eagerly broke open some husks to eat the rather bitter pods inside. Then a little later some grapefruit and we had our fill. So with our stomachs filled our moods improved and we plodded uphill. Soon we encountered a couple of farmers going the other way. They indicated how pleased they were to see us as they had heard on the radio that we were missing and search parties were out, including a helicopter. They further advised that we should continue uphill as someone with a car was waiting for us. So on we went, passing another farmer who was listening to his radio to hear any news of us. Then we heard the helicopter overhead; we tried to wave at it, but there was no way that we were going to be seen from the air.

Soon after we emerged at the same point where we had begun our adventure over 48 hours previously. There waiting for us was Dr Geoff Gibbs (another TTFNC member) who roared with delight on seeing us. We had emerged from the Guanapo La Laja bench trail. Geoff informed us that others were waiting at the end of the motorable Guanapo Road and also in Brasso Seco.

We bundled into his car and drove back to St Augustine, stopping in Arima at a pay phone where Geoff called to break the news that we were found and the search could be called off. Getting home I discovered my contact lens in the corner of my eye, so I was able to restore two-eyed sight.

The event caught the interest of the media with the radio stations leading their news bulletins with it and the newspapers putting us on the front page. For a few days we were brave, but somewhat infamous, celebrities. Then as with most news in TT everybody forgot.

That is everybody except some of our close friends. One group of my friends asked me to take them "up the hill". Being a little wary of El Cerro del Aripo, I agreed to take them up El Tucuche. This they enjoyed so much that they begged me to take them to the even higher summit. Eventually I gave way and a group of about six of us tackled El Cerro del Aripo in the dry season of 1975. The going was much easier and cutlasses were not needed. Coming down, however, we briefly went off the ridge again (probably at the same point, at one of the saddles near to the summit). This time I quickly realised the problem and regained the ridge. Not without a few missed heartbeats!

Later speaking to Derek Simons he reported that he had also ventured back in the 1975 dry season and had also found the going much easier. In fact my party was quite disappointed; they said that compared with El Tucuche it did not feel as if they had been up a hill at all.

That was the end of my hikes up El Cerro del Aripo until about 5 years ago when I ascended the mountain with a TTFNC monthly field trip. There was now a visible trail marked with red ribbons. The steep sections were very slippery with use – certainly not a problem 35 years earlier. The summit was still pristine with the fern forest; those with cell phones could not get them to work in La Laja let alone at the summit.

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The hike possibly became popular as a result of its publication in the TTFNC Trail Guide in 1992. Now a Google search brings up contact details of organisations in TT who escort visitors to the country and others to the top of El Cerro del Aripo (as well as other hiking venues) at some considerable cost.

My fourth ascent of El Cerro del Aripo was with the TTFNC on April 28 2013. Some of the trail marking ribbons had fallen, although many were in place. The missing ribbons made way finding a little tricky on the downward journey. A couple of times the group had to pause and look around to find the way. No surprise that in 1974 with no visible trail and no ribbons it was difficult to stay on course. I found the

2013 ascent difficult and tiring, indicating that I have lost a lot of stamina over a 39 year period. Progress has begun to change the summit. A cell phone call can now be made at the top. Vegetation around the old trig point (which is not marked on the 1971 1:25,000 map) has been cleared. The slaughter of the fern forest may be somebody's idea of progress, but I am sure that many will be upset at what is certainly the first serious human intervention at the top of El Cerro del Aripo. 🐜

**Bruce Lauckner** (*center*)  
**Dan Jaggernaut** (*left*)  
and  
**Bobby Oumdath** (*right*)  
on the  
**El Cerro del Aripo field trip**  
**Sunday April 28, 2013**

*Photo: Eddison Baptiste*







Field Trip Report, Sunday April 28, 2013  
**El Cerro del Aripo 2013**  
*Report by Reg Potter*



Nine persons turned out on the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> April for the monthly field trip, this time to **El Cerro del Aripo**. The Club has been there many times

before but it's always nice to return.

The first rains of the season had started the day be-



**Dan Jaggernaut (green jersey) briefing members of TTFNC at the beginning of the trail to El Cerro del Aripo - April 2013**

Front (L - R): **Jobe Millington, Denise Etienne, Reg Potter, Francis Jones, Stanley Araujo (Nike backpack)**, back (L - R): **Brue Laucher, Dan Jaggernaut and Bobby Oumdath (far back)**  
*photo: Eddison Baptiste*



fore and from the junction of La Laja road it was evident that rain had fallen throughout the night. The weather forecast had predicted rain, which must have put off many members. At the junction we picked up Jobe Millington and Denise Etienne who work at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, and when the rest of the convoy arrived we drove on along the La Laja road which was a narrow paved road with just a few pot holes. Parking location was decided by Dan just before the last steep incline, because of the damage to the road beyond that point that made it obviously impassable to ordinary vehicles. Parking at this point means one gets an advantage of 1600 ft above sea level which is important when climbing Trinidad's highest mountain (3085 feet).

After the introductory talk by Dan we set off at about 9.00 am along what was still a drivable road for 4-wheel drive SUVs. This did not last long past the first incline where we entered forest. Along the way we heard Bruce Lauckner's description of the occasion back in the 70s when he and his party got lost on the return from the summit and spent 2 nights in the bush. Helicopters were deployed for the search but they managed to get out on their own in the end.

Curiously the forest in this area is not designated as a forest reserve as one would expect. How or why it escaped such protection I do not know, but we noted some squatting properties. The trail soon enters what certainly appears to be forest reserve as it snakes generally northwards toward the ridge which includes Morne Bleu and El Cerro del Aripo. At the ridge the trail continues through a pass, down into Brasso Seco, but our route was to the right where we would follow the east-west ridge.

The ridge trail is generally not difficult, having only about three steep sections, and keeping to the ridge is simple since any deviation will result in leaving the ridge and descending. Only occasionally does the ridge widen and the trail may be lost to such obstacles as a fallen tree. All the ridge area and surrounding slopes are covered with lower montane and montane forest. Views are possible looking north

into and across the Brasso Seco valley and to the sea, but on the ascent these were obscured by mist. A glimpse of Chagral to the south was had but it quickly disappeared in the mist. We passed the well-known "nursery log" – a fallen Bois Bande, *Richeria grandis* tree that continues to send up new vertical growth from its trunk. Higher up we encountered prolific bamboo grass, *Arthrostyidium* sp., and wild anthurium and as we neared the summit the Anare palm *Genoma* is very common. Manac, Euterpe and Gris-gris palms and tree ferns are also present in abundance. Sightings of birds included Tropical Mocking birds, Cocoa Thrush, Rufous-breasted Wren, Trogans, Black-faced Ant Thrush, Little Tinamou, and 'Yellow-tail Cornbirds' *Orependola*, mainly at lower levels in the agricultural environment at the beginning of the walk.

Along the way we lost Stanley Araujo who after struggling up the first steep incline, decided to stay behind and make his way slowly back to the cars. This was a wise decision and he was waiting safely in the car park on our return.

The first arrivals at the top, Bobby Oumdash and Denise Etienne, had a pleasant surprise when they startled a deer that, of course, ran off immediately. Some clearing of vegetation had been done by previous visitors and the growth of grasses on the exposed summit must have been the attraction to the deer, which is normally a nocturnal feeder, and which probably had decided this was a nice spot for its day time nap. The concrete survey mark with its brass plate was found to be loose in the earth which does not bode well for its continued accuracy. We had taken 3 hours to reach the top.

On the summit while eating our lunch the rain started more seriously. It became more than the canopy could retain, so we packed up and started the descent. This was uneventful, noting mainly the improved view of Brasso Seco as the mist cleared after the rain. One item of significance is the very sharp 'kink' in the trail where it turns almost NE again in its westerly descent and this spot is located at the top of a branching ridge which descends to the south, although this cannot be clearly seen in

(Continued on page 12)





**Jobe Millington looking up in wonder at the “trees” generated by the “nursery log” – a fallen Bois Bande, *Richeria grandis*, tree that continues to send up new vertical growth from its trunk.** Photo: Eddison Baptiste

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Top left and right:  
**Crested oropendola,**  
***Psarocolius decumanus***

Photo source: (Wikipedia [http://](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crested_Oropendola)

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crested\\_Oropendola](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crested_Oropendola))

Taken at Asa Wright Nature Centre Trinidad



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Below: **Close up of the nest of the crested oropendola,**  
***Psarocolius decumanus* colony seen along the trail to**  
**El Cerro del Aripo (2013)**

*photos: Eddison Baptiste*





## El Cerro del Aripo 2013

*(Continued from page 9)*

the forest. This is almost certainly where Bruce had left the trail and descended into the Guanapo/Sombasson basin when he lost his way in the 70s. I had also wrongly turned off the trail on this ridge on a previous Club trip, and only turned back when others became alarmed at the unfamiliar 'bushiness' of the trail. It is well worth being aware of this po-

tential 'loss point'.

We noted a very brazen example of squatting when off the ridge and returning on the first portion of the trail to Brasso Seco. This establishment is shielded from view by a thin fringe of trees and is located at 1186444 N, 691920 E. We found the shack and cleared garden unoccupied at the time. 🐜



**Reg Potter  
walking on the trail  
TTFNC 2013 Field Trip  
to El Cerro del Aripo 2013**

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TTFNC Bird Group Trip Sunday February 17, 2013

## Soldado Rock

*Report by Matt Kelly**All photos by Matt Kelly, unless otherwise noted*

It would have to be a special day to meet at Grand Bazaar for 4:30 am, and it was. Twenty-one club members took the day to see the faraway, alluring and enchanting Soldado Rock. I had been longing to go there ever since reading that most entertaining narrative by C. Brooke Worth (1967), many years ago.

On his third voyage, Columbus and his crew were the first Europeans to see Soldado Rock on August 2, 1498, as they rounded the point he named Point Arenal, which is now known as Icacos. There was one lone rock standing out in the straits, which Columbus named “El Gallo” (the rooster) (Irving

1831), which was later called “The Soldier” (Joseph 1838), or Soldado, as it stood sentinel over the straits. Columbus sailed into what is now the Bay of Columbus, where one of his ships lost an anchor, which now rests in the T&T National Museum in Port of Spain (<http://explorecolonumbusbay.com/history1.html>). While in the vicinity, he noted in his journal the lack of salinity of the water here, which he found fresh enough to drink.

Soldado Rock is a small limestone rock island lo-



**Rock from the south, showing the cove where we landed**

cated at the end of a line of rocks that form shoals to the west. The island is about 2 acres in area, and is 117 feet in height. It is about 6 miles from Icacos Point, and about 7 miles from Venezuela (Darlington 1990). Contrary to legend, Soldado was not traded with Venezuela for the Isle of Patos in May, 1942 in the "Anglo-Venezuelan Treaty." In the Treaty, Patos was ceded by the British Government to Venezuela, and "The Venezuelan Government have also made it clear that they have no claim on the Soldado Rock..." <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1942/may/12/anglo-venezuelan-treaty-island-of-patos>). Soldado was not expressly the property of Trinidad but that was the understanding. As oil and gas became so important to the geo-political region, there were many conflicts between the two countries around the Soldado Rock area. Many will remember the many incidents of arresting and jailing of fisherman by both countries. Further treaties in 1998 and 2002 have cleared things up. Now both nations enjoy excellent relations (Hospidales, Hayden, pers. comm.)

We parked at the T&T Coast Guard Station, near where the Cedros Jetty reaches out into the Gulf of Paria. While around the Cedros Coast Guard Station, I was able to ID the following bird species: Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Pelican, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Black Vulture, Osprey (3), Spotted Sandpiper, Laughing Gull, Common Tern (only one "hanging out" with the other terns), Royal Tern (20+ in a line on the pier), Pale-vented Pigeon, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Green-throated Mango, Yellow-headed Caracara, Great Kiskadee, Tropical Kingbird, Gray-breasted Martin, Blue-gray Tanager, Palm Tanager, and Carib Grackle. Also, many interesting jellyfish were swimming about the jetty.

Kate Hinkson collected \$100TT each to pay for the boat trip. She and Clayton Hull had organized today's trip. Our group would be split in two, so as to fit into 2 local fishing boats. I got into the first boat, and we were off. Soldado could be seen far off in the distance, with the Venezuelan coast line clearly visible on the horizon. The ride would take about 45 minutes.

As we motored along the shoreline, we saw the coast here is made of brown stone, worn smooth by the sea, with interesting whorls and carvings made by water, and standing from maybe 10' to 40' high. After we came to the end of the rocky shoreline point, we passed three prominent sentinel rocks, which are called "The Three Sisters" or "Los Gallos". On the first Sister, there were many sea-birds; Magnificent Frigates and Brown Pelicans. (We saw a Black Vulture on the second rock on the return trip.) After the Three Sisters, we veered out to sea into the Gulf of Paria, heading for Soldado, while the coastline dipped inland, to form the Bay of Columbus. Icacos Point was visible in the distance, covered with coconut trees.

About 15 minutes out from the point, Kris Sookdeo pointed out a huge flock of Scarlet Ibis, maybe up to 75 individuals, flying away from the Trinidad coast, and over to Venezuela.

The boat ride out was choppy and bumpy. You really had to hold on. There was so much wind, and with the sound of the motor, conversation with anyone but the person next to you was quite impossible. With a constant threat of sea spray, it was too risky to keep the camera out. In a previous conversation, Graham White had told me to watch for Parasitic Jaeger and Brown Noddy on the way. We didn't see any. (Quesnel) reported 5 species of tern, a petrel, and an Arctic Skua on the TTFNC 1982 trip to and from Soldado. We didn't see any of those. The Coast Guard chief told us to watch for cetaceans. He said dolphins and some whales had been seen recently. We didn't see any.

The boatman approached the island from the southern side. As we approached close, there were a large flock of Brown Pelicans and Magnificent Frigate Birds just sitting there, liming. Our boat scared them all in to flight. The frigate birds coasted around and around, all the while we were there, while the pelicans flew down as a flock, and rested on the water for most of the time. As we came into the only possible landing area, which was a small cove inside shear rock, the boatman brought the boat right up on the rocks, and we had to jump out

quickly in between waves.

The island is divided into two wings, with a depression, or saddle in between. We landed in the centre of the saddle. Stuart Millar was the first out, and he scrambled right up. I scrambled up right behind him. Our boatman, who I was told was some kind of island watchman, came up quickly behind, and kept everyone away from the far left (west side), and away from the cliff edges. On that westerly side, the elevation was higher than at the easterly wing. The west side had a small beacon (for boats at night, I presume) powered by a small solar panel. The coastline of Venezuela was to the west and south, while Columbus Bay and Iacos Point were to the east, beyond a line of rocky shoals. Mostly made of soft limestone, I wonder how fast Soldado is wearing away? A photo from 1965 (Goodwin) shows rocks in the saddle of the island that are not there now. We saw a Peregrine Falcon zoom by us, coming from somewhere on the island. Everyone from our boat was up to the top in a few minutes. There was a stiff breeze blowing, with beautiful views.

The vegetation was sparse and windblown, of which, much was dried out. I did not see a large variety of plant life. There have been only five species of plant life recorded here (French 1990). The air smelled heavily of bird guano. I'll bet it smells a whole lot heavier during the nesting season. The soil that was there has to be quite fertile with the amount of bird guano put down over the centuries.

While looking over the northerly side, we saw a sea turtle. He popped up for air now and then. We asked the "watchman" if he knew what kind of turtle it was. He said he did indeed. He said it was "The best kind to eat! Oxbill." While we were there, I saw four different sea turtles, two large ones, and two smaller ones. The views of the turtles were not optimal for identification sake (at least by me). I and several others thought the smaller ones may have been Olive Ridleys. There was some question as to what we actually did see. One of the larger turtles was later thought to be a Loggerhead.

To clear the matter up, I sent a collection of photos,

and put the question, to turtle experts Karen and Scott Eckert of "Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network" (WIDECAST), and was told that what we saw were:

"...juvenile Green Turtles... and Hawksbills (probably adults based on their apparent size). Key to telling these two species apart is that both have 4 costal scutes (the large scales/plates on either side of the midline), compared to Olive Ridleys with have 5 – 9 costal scutes, and most diagnostic for separating greens from Hawksbills is that Hawksbills have 4 scutes (divided by a cross) between the eyes and Green Turtles have two scutes. This latter characteristic shows up very clearly in many of the photos. Of a more general nature in identification is that the Hawksbill has a very narrow beak with a strong overbite, distinctive notched edges to the trailing edge of the carapace and the scutes on the carapace overlap, like shingles on a roof. The Green Turtle has a round dome-like head and beak, the scutes do not overlap and only young Green Turtles have notched carapace edges. Besides the scute count, what also separates the Olive Ridley from these turtles is that the Olive Ridley has a distinctly tall and flat topped carapace." (Eckert, Dr. Karen L. and Scott, 2013, pers. comm.)

Too bad, I was hoping to have seen Loggerhead and Olive Ridley's, but I am always glad to see any kind of sea turtles.

We found several large grasshoppers and at least two orb-weaving spiders. I also found a species of a funnel-web spider. There was a species of large grasshoppers, which must have an interesting historical life history involving the orb-weavers. I saw a small white butterfly, with a wingspan of about 2.5 cm. There were also large gray-brown dragonflies, which I thought unusual. They were too quick for me to get a photo. As members of the taxonomic Order of *Odonata*, dragonflies must lay their eggs in fresh water. The larvae will grow and typically lead an aquatic predatory life in fresh water, before pupating and emerging as an adult. There is a species of dragonfly in the Northeast USA, which must spend 7 years as a nymph in fresh water as part of

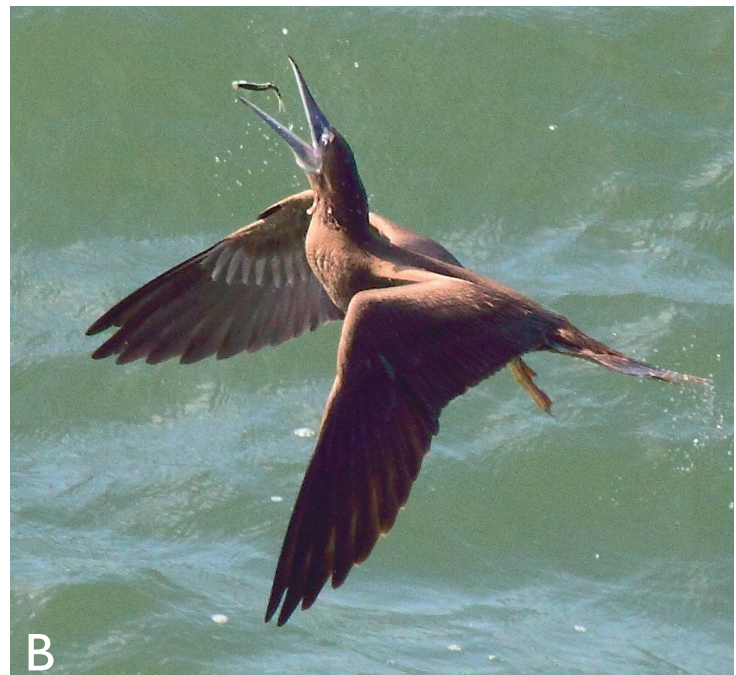


its life cycle. The strange thing about the Soldado dragonflies is that I did not see any source of fresh water here. I know of no one finding ticks or other bird parasites as noted in Worth (1967). There also have been many more species of insects previously recorded here (Darlington 1990, Quesnel 1982).

We found a fish skeleton on top of the island, which Imran Kahn identified as a “Cutlass Fish” which would have measured about 50 cm. long. I thought it strange that a fish would be carried up here by a bird, as there was no other explanation as to how it got there and then was not consumed. It was now being consumed by a tiny species of ant.

I found a large female iguana, resting in a nook on a cliff. Later in conversation with Hayden Hospidales, of the T&T Coast Guard Station at Cedros, I was told it was surprising that we did not see more iguanas, as numbers of them are seen quite regularly there. He also said he has seen marine iguanas at Soldado (I doubt if they were true marine iguanas), which could bolster the speculations (Boos) that the hungry iguanas may swim after greenery floating by from the Orinoco. Boos (1983) reported the finding of an iguana in the belly of a fish caught off Soldado in the 1950's. The iguanas here were also thought to take bird eggs (ffrench 1990). Initially, I wondered if this iguana would be of the species *Iguana iguana*, or if there could be any adaptive radiation of the species on this island. The very large and most northerly branch of the Orinoco River, the Cano Manamo flows into the Gulf of Paria not many miles away. But it appears that during the rainy season, with river flooding causing numerous rafting episodes from the Orinoco floods, there must be a continuous, but sporadic, introduction of *Iguana iguana* and numerous other surprises from mainland South America, many probably only temporary to Soldado. A deer was once found floating by (Hospidales, pers. comm.). I had also heard of a Capybara being rafted ashore to Trinidad some time ago, which was promptly dispatched by local hunters. I assume that Soldado is subject to a bio-rafting sweepstakes, with many surprises.

Our boatman/“watchman” also told us that there were snakes and “plenty iguanas” on the island. He



(Continued on page 18)



**Page 18****A: One of four sea turtles seen****B: Brown Booby tosses a fish***Photos A&B by Fayard Mohammed***C: Orb-weaving spider****Page 19****Right:****TTFNC group on Soldado Rock****Bottom:****Group shot Cedros Jetty***Photos Courtesy of the T&T Coast Guard*

Front L to R: Darshanjit Narang, Sanjiv Parasram, Dan Jaggernaut, Paul Christopher, Clayton Hull

Middle Row: Veynu Siewrattan, Lester Doodnath, Kathleen Hinkson Top Row: Dereck Johnson, Yves Johnson, Selwyn Gomes, Imran Khan, Fayard Mohammed, Ann Williams, Kris Sookdeo,

Matt Kelly, Cornelius Felician, Jalaludin Khan, Feroze Omardeen, Faraaz Abdool

Absent: Stuart Millar

*Photo Courtesy of the T&T Coast Guard*



## Soldado Rock

(Continued from page 16)

said that up till recently, there was a caiman living here as well, but fisherman landed on the island and took it. Boos (1983) only found one other reptile on Soldado, which was a gecko.

As for birds, we did not see a big variety here. There were two large groups of at least 275 Brown Pelicans, and another smaller group of around 45 Magnificent Frigatebirds resting on the island when we arrived. Both groups took to the air as soon as we approached the island. There were also several Grey-breasted Martin there. We saw one Peregrine Falcon and one Brown Booby. Darshanjit Narang found the skull of a Magnificent Frigate. Worth (1967) also noted the finding of a frigate skeleton, while Quesnel (1982) noted finding several dead pelicans. Had the trip taken place in two more months, we would have arrived during the breeding season (March through August) of several sea birds (ffrench 1990). There most probably would have been a lot more birds present. We must take that into account for the next trip here. Care should always be taken not to disturb nesting birds on these rare bird islands, so as not to drive them away. That is the reason Soldado Rock is closed to the public and has been designated a Wildlife Sanctuary since 1934 (ffrench 1990).

ffrench, with at least 29 visits to Soldado, from 1960 to 1982, with most visits overnight, reported five seabird species regularly nesting here. He saw Magnificent Frigatebirds (with numbers up to 500), Sooty Tern (with numbers up to 5000), and Brown Noddy (with numbers up to 3000 to 5000) (ffrench 1990). I wonder if the birds still come here in such large numbers? Many other seabirds, and other birds have been recorded here.

We stayed on the island for about an hour and a half. Most of us would have liked to stay longer. On the way out, Ann Williams carried out a bag of trash she collected. We had a rocking and rolling boat trip back. Near the shore, we saw 3 Osprey and 7 Neotropical Cormorants. It was really a tremendous trip. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed it. We


Below

**D: Grasshopper**

**E: Cutlass Fish skeleton with ants**

**F: Female Iguana in the rocks**



all look forward to the next visit. 

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## SOUGHT: REALLY BIG ACTIVE MARIBON NESTS

Christopher K. Starr

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Some of us recently came upon a healthy colony of the social wasp *Polybia striata* in the Arena Forest Reserve. We were able to collect the colony intact and have drafted a short paper on the nest and colony composition for the *Living World*, only the second colony of this species to be analyzed in the literature.

However, submissions to next year's issue aren't due for more than half a year, so maybe we can add data from further colonies.

*P. striata* is evidently quite rare in Trinidad and quite possibly throughout its broad range in South America. The nest, as you see, is much the same in form as that of our commonest maribon, *P. occidentalis*, as well as the somewhat less common *P. rejecta*. The best way to distinguish it from these commoner species is by the much greater size of the wasps and the nest. If you see a nest like this that is much bigger than any *P. occidentalis* nest you have seen and distinctly broader (about 15 cm across the bottom) than any *P. rejecta* nest, it might be *P. striata*. If it is nesting so high that you cannot see the wasps plainly, it is unlikely to be *P. striata*. Any wasp with yellow markings on the thorax whose nest fits this description is almost certainly our baby, and we want to hear from you. If you get pictures, so much the better.

If the nest is within three metres of the ground, I don't suggest that you get closer than about two metres from it, and move

about slowly and smoothly. Their stings are not in the class of the notorious djep-tatu (*Synoeca surinama*), but they are definitely painful. 



**Paper wasp hive, of *Polybia striata***



## WHAT'S GOING ON WITH MY GECKOS?

Christopher K. Starr

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Like any number of rural or semi-rural houses in Trinidad, mine in the Caura valley is home to a variety of gekkonid lizards. The largest of these are the familiar *Hemidactylus mabouia* and *Thecadactylus rapicauda*, the former much more abundant. They are about the same size, mostly nocturnal, and one could be forgiven for mistaking one for the other; the best distinguishing feature when they are alive on the wall, I find, is the swollen-based "turnip tail" of most *T. rapicauda*. These are fairly noisy, aggressive lizards that get into a lot of fights among themselves.

The smallest is the slow-moving, mostly diurnal *Sphaerodactylus molei*. I have never seen a *Hemidactylus* or *Thecadactylus* eat one of these, but I'm fairly sure it would if it could and that *Sphaerodactylus* take care to avoid them.

Intermediate in size is the streak lizard, *Gonatodes vittatus*, found on the outside of the house at least as much as the inside.

The other day it occurred to me that I was seeing *Sphaerodactylus* much more commonly than before. In the kitchen I am almost sure of seeing one or maybe two, while in the past this happened maybe once a week. That caused me to wonder if they were under less pressure now from the big lizards, and then it struck me that I had not been seeing and

hearing *Hemidactylus* and *Thecadactylus* lately. When was the last time that they woke me up with their chirping and tussling? It might have been weeks. So I went and looked where I would normally expect to find them. I didn't find even one. *Gonatodes*, in contrast, seems neither more nor less abundant than earlier.

My working hypothesis is that there has been a *Hemidactylus/Thecadactylus* population crash in and around my house and that this has allowed the *Sphaerodactylus* to be more exposed and perhaps in time to become more abundant. But the cause of the putative population crash? I have no idea. 



***Thecadactylus rapicauda***

Photo source: ([http://ceb.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thecadactylus\\_rapicauda](http://ceb.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thecadactylus_rapicauda))  
Taken in Dominica





# We Go To Grenada 1975

*Feature Serial by Hans Boos*  
(Part 4 final)



"You cyan have dat," he shouted. Julius paused, one foot on the first fork of the low tree trunk. "Dat is we sarpint," the man insisted.

"Arright," said Julius, abandoning his attempt to climb the mimosa, "It go stay dere. You could eat it. We have enough already." And he made a great show of taking his wallet out of one pocket, checking the contents, and putting it back.

"Na! Na! Na! Na!" the crowd began to chant, shouting down the snake's "owner." "Take it," they cried, seeing the possibility of some money, any money, slipping through their fingers. They had probably jumped into the filthy pool all morning with no tourists to bleed.

"But he say is he sarpint," Julius reasoned.

"Doh worry he," the boy who had spotted the snake, said. "I is ee see it. You could pay me. It eh he own."

Losing face, the "owner" blustered, "Ee cyah hole eet. It go ting ee."

Ignoring him, Julius walked back to the tree and purposely began to climb. As usual, the shaking of the branches as he approached the sleeping roost awoke the snake and it uncoiled and began to inch away. A vigorous shaking soon loosened the coils and it hung below the branch, only the last few inches of its prehensile tail anchoring it to its violently tossing perch. The fall was imminent, and Terry and I moved into position below it to catch it and prevent it from hitting the hard asphalt surface of the car park. As we got closer under the snake the crowd backed away.

Directly below the snake was a twin strand of electric cables, or perhaps telephone wires. As the snake finally loosened its hold and fell, the crowd gave a collective shout, as the falling, flailing, snake briefly was draped over the cables and then cart-wheeled like a crooked baton downwards and into my waiting hands. The "owner" had been standing on the perimeter of the crowd, on top of a mound overlooking a steep brush-covered hillside that led downwards, almost precipitously, to the path that led from the car park to the pool. As I caught the snake and tried to grab its wildly flailing and biting head, I turned to show the "owner" that not only had I "hole it," but that he had also been right that it not only would, but did, "ting me," for I had been bitten several times before smothering the head in a bag I had pulled from my pocket; on top of that, I was nevertheless unharmed. He must have thought I was going to threaten him, or repay him for his bluster or whatever he was thinking—I could not hazard a guess—but he, heedless of his peril, leaped off his mound and disappeared down the cliff-like slope, screaming and cussing. His descent to the path

below, mowing down the bush and small trees in his fall was marked by his screams and obscenities, and the rolling-on-the-ground laughter of the other gathered men and boys. Julius, too, doubled up with laughter, descended the tree and, with a flourish, paid the grinning discoverer and, as a gesture of goodwill, making sure that the "owner" got a small reward as well. As we drove off, the boys ran alongside the car for a few yards laughing and slapping the back and fenders, sending us gleefully on our way. But we still needed a bath.

We turned up another valley road and luckily we soon saw, down a shallow gorge, a swift, rock-filled stream that seemed acceptable. We pulled up and locked the car, securing the bags of snakes under the body to protect them from the stifling heat inside the locked car interior. We picked our way through the bush, down what appeared to be an overgrown path to a small basin between huge rounded and worn-smooth boulders. We stripped off our pungent clothes and tentatively immersed ourselves into the swift-running, icy-cold water. After the initial shock of the cold water, it was heaven to lie back against the current and be surrounded by the stillness and the sounds of the rushing waters and the insect noises of the jungle overhead.

As Terry took this opportunity to unbandage his foot (another story) and began to wash out the bandages, we heard giggles and talking up on the roadside above us. Looking up we saw two shiny, dark faces peering down at us from the bushes that lined the road next to where the car was conspicuously parked. Pulling towels from the rocks on the side of the river, Julius and I, wrapping them around our loins, scooped up our clothes and climbed back up to the car. The two faces, which we now discovered belonged to two young girls, were staring wide-eyed, and somewhat apprehensively, at us as we smiled back and greeted them with polite "Good mornings."

They hesitatingly returned our greetings, for they had retreated to the centre of the road, a little way up the slope from the car and, with one hand over their mouth and the other hand clutching their prayer books, they watched us get dressed in fresh clothes that we took from our packs in the car. Terry, still sitting in the river down below, had begun to sing as he slopped his bandages and a tee-shirt on the rocks in a ritual known to washer-persons since time began.

The girls were drawn to the edge of the road by his singing, and their giggles increased as they looked down at Terry's pale figure, sitting naked in the shallow jungle pool, washing his clothes and singing at the top of his voice. We enquired of them what was so amusing and they matter-of-factly told us that "white people doh bade in de riva" and that we should have bathed in the sea instead.

"Why is that?" Julius asked.

"Only ligaroo does bade in de riva," they told us. Just as matter of factly, we replied as one, "Well, we is ligaroo." We could see that this gave them pause, for their giggles stopped, as though switched off, and they began to back off, retreating up the road from whence they had come, doubtlessly on their way to church that Sunday morning. To them, it seemed, maybe we were ligaroo.

"Ligaroo" is the Grenadian version of the Trinidadian "lagahoo" which in its turn is a creole adaption of the French "loup garou" or "werewolf." Ligarooos or lagahoos are only one of the bogeymen used to frighten village children, and the existence of these spirits is sworn to by the elders who, in their turn, may leave space in their belief systems to explain the unexplainable phenomena that populate the dark nights and their fears. To these simple village girls on their way to church that Sunday morning, the presence at the side of the road, and bathing in the river, of a "ligaroo"—or in our case three "lagahoos"—was only a confirmation of what they had been assured was a fact of everyday or every night life in the remote hills of Grenada. Especially ones who confirmed their identity so matter of factly by their alien appearance and actions.

At this point, a troop of young men came around a bend in the road and joined the two girls, who still stood in indecision in the middle of the road. We could hear the muttered and excited exchange between them in which we picked out the word "ligaroo" several times. There was a lot of animated waving of arms and pointing towards the river, from which, as if to confirm what the girls were saying, Terry emerged, naked except for a towel wrapped around his waist.

"Dem cyah be Ligaroo. Ligaroo does walk in de night," said one brave fellow. "All you too chupid," said another and began to walk towards us, but keeping to the far side of the road, just in case, as he edged past. The others followed, and the girls dashed behind the boys, not wanting to be left behind.

Julius said in his most convincing, wheedling voice, "Yes, we is Ligaroo." They all stopped in a huddled bunch opposite the car. "We bade orf after a night of holing sarpint." A rustle of consternation ran through the group as Julius, reaching under the car, pulled out, as if by magic, one of the snake-bags, and began to open it.

"Doh be frighten," he coaxed. "We ent go hurt you. Is only sarpint," and offered the open-mouthed sack to anyone brave enough to come forward and look into it. He walked halfway across the road towards them, and they huddled closer together, undecided whether to be afraid or to dispel their fears by the enigma presented them.

One tall fellow, their leader, stepped forward, and inching, one step at a time, all the while tense and poised for flight, peered into the open sack. I could see his wide eyes swell even wider, as he saw the multicoloured tangled mass of several of the


large tree-boas in the bottom of the bag.

"Oh Gad!" he shouted, as he literally leapt backwards. His ejaculation acted on the others like a starter's pistol and in a flash they were off running, pelting down the hill, their Sunday shoes slapping and clattering on the asphalt, and cries and hootings intermingled with laughter; the calls of "Ligaroo! Ligaroo!" came floating back up to us. We too were shaking with laughter, somewhat abashed and ashamed at having played the joke on the village young people, but with typical West Indian humour; we knew they would eventually enjoy the joke as much as we had and, in the brightness of day, would banish the night-time fears that maybe the ligaroos of their uneducated elders were more spirit-like than the three pale tourists who were strange enough to bathe in the rivers when the more beautiful sea was available, and who were crazy enough to value a sack full of sarpints.

We passed them further down the road as they walked to church, and we waved at them. They waved back, their eyes shining, and their faces animated with enjoyment as they shouted, "Ligaroo, Ligaroo, Ligaroooo," sending us on our way.

St George's lay sleepily in the after-lunch Sunday doze, as we collected the single Mona monkey, "Pressy," and drove down to the dock where the "Starlight V" was being loaded up for the return voyage. I made sure to reserve a place on top of the hatch over the engine in the stern, by spreading our packs and unrolling sleeping pallets there. One of us stayed there on guard throughout the rest of the day, while the others went for food and returned the car to the rental agency. As four o'clock, sailing time, came and went, there was still no sign of Doon-Dan.

I took two of the motion-sickness pills and lay on the pallet of foam rubber, and was dimly aware of the continued activity on board as final preparations were made to cast off. With only seconds to spare, the smoking and banging Jitney, with Dr Bones at the wheel, pulled up to the dock and Doon-Dan leapt out, still stumbling drunk, and joined us aboard. I was too exhausted and feeling the effects of the tablets to take him to task for any of his failings, really only too happy to have been rid of him for the three days.

I fell asleep to the steady throbbing of the diesel engine beneath the hatch and knew nothing more until the dawn sun glinted through the rigging as the sails were pulled down and the engine took up the beat again as we motored through the calm swells of the First Boca, and passing the sleeping villages dotting the north west peninsula of Trinidad, we docked in Port of Spain. We were home. 





## Letter to the Editor

# Where have our Callaloo Crabs gone ?

- by Ian Lambie -

*(These are the views of the authors and may not represent the views of all members of the Club )*



Most of us Trinis and Tobagonians enjoy our "Crab and Callaloo" and our "Crab and Dumplin", but due to continuing over-hunting, continuing loss of habitat and an ever increasing demand for our "Blue Crabs" the population is rapidly declining. There is urgent need for legal protection and sustainable management programmes for our crabs, lobsters, conch, cascadura, crayfish and Black Conch, etc. to ensure that generations yet unborn will have crab, lobsters, conch, cascadura, crayfish, Black Conch and other crustaceans to enjoy as we do today.

During the past four to five years market shoppers can often hear the question being asked "Where have all the big crabs gone?" or "Dey asking so much for dem little crab!" Crabs are becoming scarce. This is a fact known to all market shoppers whether in Trinidad or in Tobago. The demand for crabs has increased, while the crab habitat has gradually been reduced. In addition, there has been uncontrolled hunting of our crabs.

There is an urgent need for a management programme with the emphasis being placed on sustainability of our "Blue Crab" resources otherwise it can be predicted that within the next 20 to 30 years "Crab and Callaloo" and "Crab and Dumplins," our Tobago specialty, will be delicacies of the past.

In Trinidad and Tobago, we do not have a "closed season" for the taking of crabs, neither is there a size limit, daily bag limit or sanctuary or "no hunting areas" in either Trinidad or Tobago. The "open season" for crab hunting is 24 hours on each of the 365 days in the year, and crabs of any size and in any quantity may be taken.

It does not take scientific research to determine that there is "over hunting" of this valuable resource, and the law makers must accept this fact

and take urgent action to end this continuing destruction. Yes, I like my "Crab and Callaloo" and my "Crab and Dumplin" but we must take the necessary steps now to ensure that generations yet unborn will also enjoy these delicacies.

To compound the issue, is the continuing loss of crab habitat: our wetlands that are being reclaimed for building development. In Trinidad, over the past sixty years, the wetlands at Mucurapo, Westmoorings, Bayshore, Point Lisas and elsewhere—"Blue Crab"—habitat, have been lost forever to housing and industrial development. Similarly, in Tobago most of the "Blue Crab" habitat at Lowlands, Bon Accord, Golden Grove, Buccoo, Bacolet, Roxborough and elsewhere has been lost forever to housing development.

In the absence of enforced legislation that provides for the protection of what remains of our crab population, combined with a vigorous conservation education programme to sensitize our people to the benefits to be derived from the sustainable management of this population, one can predict within the not too distant future the extirpation of the crabs for our favourite crab dishes.

The Government must act NOW to prevent this from happening.

While the above appeal is for immediate action to protect what is left of our crab populations, we must recognise that, in addition to crabs, our lobsters and Queen Conch in Tobago, and our Cascadura and Black Conch in Trinidad are under similar threat of extinction, due to the absence of legal protection and the continuing daily "over hunting."

The Caribbean Spiny Lobster - *Panulirus argus*: The governments of most Caribbean and Central American countries (except Trinidad and Tobago) have

*(Continued on page 26)*



## Letter to the Editor

# Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill it. Kill it quick!

- by Hans Boos -



(These are the views of the authors and may not represent the views of all members of the Club )

Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill it. Kill it quick!. We are a nation of killers.

Lick it down! Hit it a lash! Buss its head! Cut the throat! Stone it! Beat it! Chop it! Shoot it dead! From infancy we mistreat our pets. Let them die. Tie them up on a chain for their miserable lifetime. Take them to a lonely road or to Maracas Bay and shove them out the car. Leave a litter of kittens or puppies at the side of the road in a cardboard box. We have all witnessed this. We hunt our diminishing wildlife almost to the point of extinction. How can a nation of a little over a million people, issue hunting licences in the tens of thousands.

We have trapped at least four species of whistling finches, the picoplat (*Sporophila intermedia*), the twa-twa (*Oryzoborus crassirostris*), the chicki-chong (*Oryzoborus angolensis*), and the silver-beak, (*Sporophila nigricollis*) into extinction in Trinidad, with the result that thousands are imported both legally and illegally from Venezuela to satisfy this male, macho, so called hobby, of "mining bud."

When the pod of whales beached themselves on north Manzanilla beach in 1998, concerned conservationists, trying to get them back out to sea, had as much trouble from the locals who wanted to chop them up for food and profit.

Up to the time when international pressure and the realization that looking at them could be profitable, the slaughter of the Leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) on all our beaches had reached a breaking point for the species attempting to nest at their ancestral beaches.

And despite all the bans and publicity, they are still occasionally killed, both on the beach where the breeding core of the species, the gravid female, are the victims, but the males too fall prey in the nets of fishermen waiting offshore. With no turtle extract-

ing devices, TEDS, (mandatory in other fishing nations) on their nets, they drown these huge creatures in the hundreds. And they are not the only species targeted. All the other marine species are equally endangered and need protection.

Reptiles are especially vulnerable. No morocoy (*Geochelone denticulata*) is safe in the forest, no matter where they may slowly plod their ancient way. They are all picked up by hunter and just casual walker and taken home to become a zoological dead end in some backyard or boarded up pen, to be fattened up for Easter to be a part of special wild meat that is reputed to have aphrodisiacal properties, or to be sold to the local "Chinee Shop", where it is known that these shopkeepers have a special liking for this wild meat or can sell it to people who do, or need it as a sacrifice in some archaic religious ceremony that demands a blood offering.

But these are not the only reptiles that suffer from being eaten. It is well known that the meat of the Macajuel, (*Boa constrictor*), and the Caiman, (*Caiman crocodilurus*), is regularly on the menu of certain restaurants in Sangre Grande. In the 1960s the shortage of this reptile was so acute that thousands of a sister species, (*Geochelone carbonaria*), were imported from some of the islands of the Grenadines, shipped in like so many rocks, in huge crates, and sold in the market by Sea Lots.

Few people seemed to grasp the fact that the catching and killing of the largest game fish reported in the newspapers recently, was another example of removing the larger and thus the breeding potential of a species. When last have any of us seen large Blue Crabs, (*Cardisoma guanhumi*), offered for sale in the local markets.

Why? They have been trapped in growing numbers, dwindling in size as more and more are taken out of



their holes, until we as usual turn to a larger and more abundant habitat for these free-bounty-from-the-wild-countries, viz, Venezuela and Guyana.


So when we see—and I mean the majority of our population—a picture of members of our protective services, posing and smiling with their booty, a dead mapepire, (*Bothrops atrox*), which they used four bullets to kill, few question as to whether they were right or justified in killing and displaying an animal they had killed illegally, and no other policeman or member of the protective services or the judiciary will do anything to redress this crime or prosecute the felons.

Mapepires are venomous, and, yes, can pose a threat to the unwary, but they too need the protect

tion given them under the law. A large specimen that recently came to the attention of the Club, was

killed in Tucker Valley. It was a large Mapepire Zanana, (*Lachesis muta*), probably a female, as the females of these vipers grow to a large size, whereas the males are smaller and thinner. This snake is unique for Trinidad, in that it is the only place it occurs outside of the South American continent, it is the largest of the pit-vipers in the world, it is rare, and it is the only one of two of its kind that lays eggs.

But in our common parlance, “Snake is Snake,” and therefore warrants killing, despite the laws or any bleeding heart conservationists.

It's time for this killing to stop. 

## Where have our Callaloo Crabs gone?

*(Continued from page 24)*

enacted conservation legislation to sustainably manage this important marine resource. These Laws include: (a) a minimum size limit; (b) a daily catch or bag limit per person; (c) prohibition of the taking of “berried” females; (d) prohibition of the taking of moulting individuals; (e) the requirement of a fishing permit; and, importantly (f) a “closed season” for the taking of lobsters. These laws are vigorously enforced and the penalties for their contravention are very high.

The Caribbean countries which observe a closed season for the taking of lobsters include: Belize mid-February to mid-June; The Bahamas: 1st April to 31st July; Jamaica: 1st April to 30th June; Dominican Republic: 1st April to 31st July; Haiti: 1st April to 30th September; St.Lucia: 1st May to 31st August; St.Vincent and the Grenadines: 1st May to 31st August; Grenada and Carriacou: 1st May to 31st August.

Studies by the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute have determined that the annual breeding season for Caribbean Spiny Lobsters is between the months of March and July.

Beginning in March 2010 a simultaneous closed season for the taking of Spiny Lobsters during the four-month period, 1st March to 30th June was adopted by the Central American countries from Belize to Panama. This four-month closed season was subsequently observed in 2011, 2012 and again in 2013.

### The Queen Conch - *Strombus gigas*

In many Caribbean Countries the Queen Conch is recognised as a very important food source both for local consumption and for export, and in some of these countries is second only to the Spiny Lobster as a fishery of economic importance. Similarly, as for lobsters, conservation laws have been enacted to sustainably manage this important resource (except in Trinidad and Tobago). These measures include: (a) the requirement of a fishing permit (Bahamas); (b) prohibition of foreign registered boats; (c) a minimum size limit; (d) a daily catch or bag limit per person; and importantly, (e) rigorous enforcement of a “closed season” for the taking of conch. In addition, in the Bahamas there are closed areas or “No-take Zones”.

The Caribbean countries that observe a closed season for the taking of Queen Conch include: Belize: 1st July to 30th September; The Bahamas: 1st July

to 30th September; Jamaica: 1st July to 31st October; The Cayman Islands: 1st May to 31st October.

It is to be noted that during the breeding season (March to September) conch migrate to shallower waters where they are unfortunately most vulnerable.

The only Queen Conch farm in the world is located in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Most of the produce from this farm is sent to the USA where it is packaged and exported to various countries including Trinidad and Tobago. (Selling price in Tobago TT\$425 for a 5 lb. box). Recently, large quantities of cleaned and packaged conch imported from Grenada has become available in Trinidad and Tobago.

The fishing for conch is prohibited in the USA, Honduras, Colombia, Venezuela and Haiti.

For additional information you may visit the Conch Heritage Network Website 

[www.strombusgigas.com](http://www.strombusgigas.com)

Dan Jaggernaut (left)  
presents a copy of  
TTFNC's QUARTERLY BULLITEN  
Issue 4, 2012  
- 2012 Tucker Valley BioBlitz Edition -  
to the Mayor of San Fernando Dr. The  
Honorable Navi Muradali  
at the  
SANCITY GREEN EXPO 2013  
April 25 – 29 Skinner Park  
San Fernando.



TTFNC QUARTERLY BULLETINS ONLINE LINK:

<http://ttfnc.org/photojournals/index.html>



## Management Notices

New members; Volunteers; Publications

## New Members

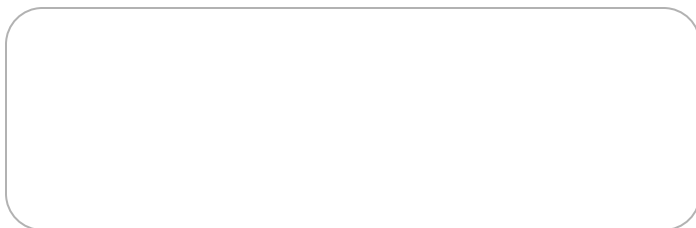
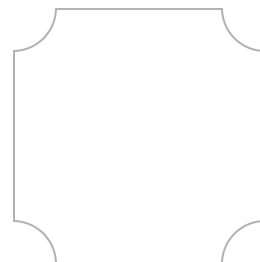
The Club warmly welcomes the following new members:

*Junior members:*

*Ordinary members:* **Anushka Seemungal, Colvin Chen, Denise Etienne, Dennis Colthrust, Ester Armoogam, Fayard Mohammed, Jobe Jnr. Millington, Sean Murphy, Stanley Araujo**

*New life members:*



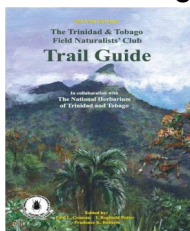


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## PUBLICATIONS

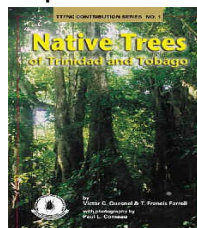
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The following Club publications are available to members and non-members:



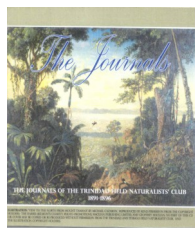
The TTFNC  
Trail Guide

Members :  
TT\$160.00



The Native  
Trees of T&T

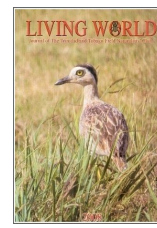
2nd Edition  
Members :  
TT\$80.00



Living World  
Journal 1892-  
1896 CD  
Members :  
TT\$95.00



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.

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## MISCELLANEOUS

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### 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 the 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 3rd Quarter 2013 issue is August 31, 2013.
2. Electronic copies can be submitted to the 'Editor' at: [admin@ttfnc.org](mailto:admin@ttfnc.org)  
or directly to the editor or any member of Management. Please include the code QB2013-3 in the email subject label.