



Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

July – September 2015

Issue No: 3/2015



Herpetology Field Trip Report, January 13, 2015 **MATURA FOREST**



by Mike G. Rutherford

On Saturday 13th June the Herpetology Group headed out to Matura Forest as few of the members had done much recording there before. The chosen trail was one just north of the village of Matura which eventually led to Manulot Falls. As the falls

were over 6 miles away we did not intend to go all the way there, just deep enough into the forest to get to some good habitat.

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Members of the Herpetology Group heading into Matura Forest

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July - September 2015

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Disclaimer :

The views expressed in this bulletin are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion and views of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

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HERPETOLOGY FIELD TRIP REPORT MATURA FOREST TRIP 2015

(Continued from page 1)

The group consisted of myself, Dan Jaggernauth (to guide us), Renoir Auguste, Dillon Suepaul, Adam Fifi and members of the Glasgow University Trinidad Expedition 2015, including Mark Greener and Roger Downie. We started from a liming spot on a tributary of the Matura River at around 4:15pm. We could tell it was a popular place as there was rubbish everywhere. The weather had been wet over the previous few days but there was barely any rain during the walk apart from a brief 2 minute squall.



Foam nests from the túngara frog, Engystomops pustulosus

The first part of the trail was through plantation pine forest that had become overgrown with epiphytes and had a thick understory making it quite different from other pine plantations I have seen in Trinidad. All along the trail at every puddle there were foam nests from the túngara frog, *Engystomops pustulosus*, (photo above) and quite a few of the puddles contained tadpoles as well. As the rainy season had only started recently the frogs had been quick to take advantage.

The pine eventually gave way to bamboo and Heliconia thickets where Adam spotted a manycoloured tree lizard or "chameleon", Polychrus marmoratus, on a low branch, half hidden behind a leaf. We took several photos causing the lizard to start a threat display, opening its mouth wide and extending its dewlap.



Many-coloured tree lizard, Polychrus marmoratus

We carried on finally coming to more natural forest. At around 6:15pm we stopped and had snacks whilst waiting for darkness to fall. At this point we poked around in the leaf litter and found a single Urich's prophet frog, *Pristimantis urichi*, a small frog easily identifiable by the bright blue top third of its iris.



Urich's prophet frog, Pristimantis urichi

Not far into the return journey the group got very spread out along the trail and around the same time the front part of the group encountered a snake, the rear part group also found one. The front group spotted a long-tailed machete savanne, *Macrops* (formerly *Chironius*) septentrionalis crawling through the vegetation but quickly disappearing after one or two photographs. The rear group found a

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slug-eating snake, *Sibon nebulata*, also on vegetation. This small snake was temporarily captured for a closer look, at which point it displayed a common anti-predator method of many snakes which is to spray their assailant with a foul smelling liquid from their anal glands, leaving me with very smelly hands for the rest of the night. However, this did allow us to get some good close-up photographs!



Slug-eating snake, Sibon nebulata

A little bit further along the trail we spotted a large turnip-tailed gecko, *Thecadactylus rapicauda*, climbing along a leafy branch right above our heads, the bright yellowish belly of the gecko stood out very well but once it positioned itself against a leaf its camouflage was much more effective.

Occasionally we heard frogs calling during the walk and, although we saw most of the callers, we did not see any of the dwarf marsupial frogs, *Flectonotus fitzgeraldi*, which seemed to be further off the trail.

As we got back to the wider trail through the pine forest, we encountered more frogs and added adult túngara frogs and the common whistling frog, *Leptodactylus fuscus*, to our sightings. One of the more interesting species of the night was a *Leptodac*- tylus (formerly Adenomera) hylaedactylus which was once thought to be mainly found in the south west of Trinidad. However, in recent years they have been recorded in places such as Nariva and Fishing Pond. Whether they are expanding their range or they were just under-recorded in the past is hard to say.



Leptodactylus hylaedactylus

Finally, back at the starting point, we looked around the river and found crapaud, Rhinella marina, and the ditch frog, *Leptodactylus validus*.

Overall we walked about 9km, half of that in darkness, and saw two species of snakes, two species of lizards and seven species of frogs — so although it wasn't the most productive night herping we've had, it certainly wasn't a bad one and it made me keen to explore the Matura Forest again in the future.



Field Trip Report, April 26, 2015 NORTH MANZANILLA: THE 'ROAD TO HELL'? by Nicholas See Wai Photos: Jeffrey Wong Sang



A group of 22 enthusiastic hikers met at the south entrance of the University Of The West Indies in anticipation of the TTFNC's April 2015 field trip to North Manzanilla. From there, the group made its way to Valencia and then Sangre Grande.

A parade by members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service briefly delayed the group, but when it passed, we continued on our journey. Once in Manzanilla, we met more hikers at a gas station and continued to Camp Trace. After a briefing by trip leader Dan Jaggernauth, we set off on "The Road to Hell."

One of the first sightings of the day was a plumbeous kite, *lctinia plumbea*, which was perched high in the branches of a silk cotton tree, *Ceiba pentandra*. After passing the tree the group came across a coconut plantation, and then the seashore, which was covered with *Sargassum* algae. A cannonball tree, *Couroupita guianensis* was also spotted. Dan Jaggernauth picked up a fruit that had fallen from the



The group walk along the cliffs on the Manzanilla coast.

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tree. He explained that the smell of the fruit was very putrid. The cannonball tree is native to South American and Central American rainforests. The fruit is edible, but it is usually not eaten by humans due to its foul smell. The fruit is used for medicinal purposes; it can be used to treat hypertension, tumours and inflammation.



A cannonball tree, Couroupita guianensis, with characteristic fruit, flowers and buds On the trunk of the tree.

After leaving the plantation, the group came across a makeshift bridge that consisted of two narrow concrete pillars. The bridge was solid, but it lacked safety barriers. Dan joked that the bridge was in breach of OSHA regulations. From here on the trail was very easy. Along the way a large tree with the familiar hanging nests of the crested oropendola, Psarocolius decumanus, was seen. A violaceous trogon, Trogon violaceous, was seen perched in another tree. A carat palm, Sabal mauritiiformis, and a sandbox tree, Hura crepitans, were also pointed out by Dan. From here on the trail headed downhill towards the coastline. Thorny plants forced members to crawl under them to get to the trail that led down to the beach. A slow descent led to a beautiful cul-de-sac that was dotted with coconut trees.

Again, Sargassum weed littered the shore. Some members also reported seeing a Portuguese man of war, *Physalia physalis,* among the weed. Members steered clear of it. At this point some members sat down to rest and have lunch while others explored the area. Coconuts were plentiful, and some members helped themselves. After having their meals, Dan led a small group uphill that allowed for spectacular views of the coastline. Tall *Roystonea* palms towered over us. Dan estimated that they may have been between 80 to 100 feet tall. Members also took note of the coastal erosion and the black sand. A small flock of brown pelicans, *Pelicanus occidentalis*, and magnificent frigatebirds, *Fregata magnificens*, glided lazily over us.

On the way back to the cars, Dan took the group on another trail that led through small stands of palm trees. A green honeycreeper, *Chlorophanes spiza*, was spotted high up in a tree. The trail then led to another spot on the cliff that gave us yet more spectacular views of the windswept coastline. From here the group made its way back to the cars, but not before taking pictures of the seeds of a jumbie bead, *Abrus precatorius*. This seemed somewhat appropriate, considering that the field trip was described as, "The Road to Hell." The tired members then returned to their cars after another very successful field trip.



Above: Jumbie beans. Below: Dan Jaggernauth picks up some of the Sargassum algae that covered the seashore.





Botany Trip Report, March 21, 2015 APPRECIATING ALGAE AT SALINE BAY by Paula Smith



The Botany Group's first trip for the year to Saline Bay in the Salybia area was attended by just over one dozen people. We were accompanied by Julian Duncan, Professor Emeritus, of The University of the West Indies and Lori Lee Lum of the Institute of Marine Affairs. This was a follow-up field trip to Lori's algae presentation at the TTFNC Meeting in February.

We arrived at Saline Bay at 8:00 am and were given a brief talk by Dan Jaggernauth about the littoral vegetation in the area, which is the seaside vegetation that can tolerate high salt conditions. He identified a member of the Sapotaceae Family which has a long brown pod and a small yellow fruit. Some who sampled it said it tasted like sapodilla. Dan also pointed out that *Spondias mombin*, cocorite palm (*Attalea maripa*) and pois doux (*Inga edulis*) were present. He also said that some time ago along the banks of the nearby Rio Seco was an unusual coconut tree with two heads.



Low tide at Saline Bay exposes algae-covered boulders and tidal pools All photos by Alësha Naranjit unless otherwise stated.

We welcomed Amelia Swift to her first Botany Trip. Amy Deacon indicated that this bay provided habitat for intertidal creatures including crabs, shrimp, fish and molluscs that live among the rocks on the shore, and that they have adapted to the conditions here. It was also mentioned by Alësha Naranjit that this area is known for sightings of marine mammals such as bottlenose dolphins and killer whales.

Professor Duncan gave a brief lecture before the start of the survey which included lots of insightful information about algae and their characteristics. Marine algae are generally classified into red, brown or green depending on the composition of photosynthetic pigments. This pigment composition is due to the wavelengths of sunlight being absorbed, reflected or refracted through the water to the algae. Green algae are present on the surface of the water due to their ability to absorb the short red wavelengths. Blue and green wave lengths can penetrate deeper waters so red algae will be found at lower depths.

Professor Duncan educated us greatly on algae; he said that in the tropics there are more green algae and as you move further north, away from the Equator, there will be brown and red algae predominating. He stated that algae are widely used in the pharmaceutical industry, in skin, hair and herbal products, and as an anti-wrinkling agent in creams. Trinidad has more red algae than green algae, however the green algae are more conspicuous and easier to identify. He said that we would be looking for characteristics of colour, shape and type of attachment when identifying specimens.

Everyone proceeded to the sea with trays and buckets in hand and started what would turn out to be a fun-filled, interactive and educational survey. The tide was extremely low and we walked out into the sea in ankle-high water for the most part, about 20 m away from the shore. This was T&T's version of the 'supertide' that made international headlines in France and England. The new moon phase was the Friday before and the resulting spring low tide is caused when the sun, moon and earth align, and thus has a greater than usual gravitational force on the water. We walked in a northerly direction passing the mouth of the river, covering a vast area that was all covered and richly populated with different species of algae.



Above : Prof. Duncan holds up a specimen of Gracilia sp.

Below : Samples collected by Lori Lee Lum and Prof. Duncan for closer examination in the laboratory



Algae can live in both fresh and salt water and the types of algae present will differ in both conditions. They are also affected by the rainy and dry season. Someone asked the question, "How do algae reproduce?" Professor Duncan said it can be through fragmentation, when pieces of the algae break off due to currents and these pieces form more algae. Some algae can be spread by seed. Their rate of growth and reproduction can be increased by nitrification, which is when nitrates in the water give nourishment to the algae. Other algae have reproductive structures where you will have some

male and female plants, while yet other species have both male and female structures in one plant - an example of the latter is *Padina* spp.

Some people sighted a most beautiful specimen of the Sargassum polyceratium algae with very large healthy air bladders (which looked like tiny balls); these air bladders function as flotation devices. This specimen had vibrant-coloured fronds and plentiful visible receptacles which, we were informed, were the sex organs.

This area was very well populated with algae – both in terms of coverage and number of species (we found 24 in total), possibly due to the nutrients in the water from nearby sewage lines which would encourage algae to grow at a fast rate. Other organisms seen within this intertidal area were: a juvenile porcupine fish, a venomous scorpion fish, a number of hermit crabs, at least six different species of crabs, a shrimp, and a reddish coloured worm. Many of these creatures were captured by our two most eager and energetic young Botany Trip helpers, Adele and Alain Briggs (8 and 6 years old). None of the animals were harmed and all were released back into their natural habitat.

The day would not have been complete without watermelon-slice refreshment from Dan. The outing ended with presentations to both Professor Duncan and Lori of a copy of the TTFNC Living World Journal. Some persons assisted in the sorting of the algae that were to be taken back to the lab for proper identification under a microscope. Others took a relaxing walk along the full length of the beach. The day was a most enjoyable learning experience for everyone, with many different species of algae collected. I believe we now all have a better appreciation and knowledge of algae and will no longer just say, "Hey look - seaweed!"



Professor Julian Duncan (left) explains the difference between green, brown and red algae (L-R: Shari Wellington, Lester Doodnath, Georgette Briggs)

In total, 24 algal species were observed:

- **I.** Chaetmorpha sp.- A linear alga, dark green in colour, resembles fur on animals when wet.
- **2.** Enteromorpha sp.- A cylindrical alga, fronds resemble hollow tubes, pale green in colour.
- **3.** Bryothamnion sp.- A maroon coloured alga, with long spine-like fronds.
- 4. An unidentified red alga.
- 5. Trichogloea sp.- A red alga, slimy to the touch, being a calcified alga. Professor Duncan said that it was described for Trinidad for the first time on the 19th February 2015, although it was most likely present before that.
- 6. Sargassum polyceratium this is the common alga found throughout Trinidad, brown in colour, it was attached to a rock as "rock turf", which is the correct terminology and this is the environment of most algae throughout their lifecycles.
- 7. Caulerpa sp.
- 8. Crustose algae A red hard crust-like algagrowing on rocks with more mature crustose looking like ball formations. It is to be noted that this algae is important in the rebuilding of algal habitats.
- 9. Another unidentified alga this one is similar to *Gracilaria*.
- Gracilaria sp. A red alga despite it being green in colour, some species of Gracilaria are used for seamoss in the Caribbean.
- **II.** Dictyota A brown coloured alga with mid -ribs.
- 12. Padina gymnospora A brown alga, with curled over edges. This one was more frilled with terminal cells divided vertically, it also had white/creamish edges which meant it is calcified but not via calcium carbonate but calcified by aragonite. This species was first found in Trinidad with records in an Australian museum. We spotted this one throughout the day with more and more beautiful specimens being observed.
- **13. A third unidentified alga** this alga had reproductive organs.
- 14. A species formerly called Galaxura it

was brown in colour but needs to be properly identified .

- 15. A different species of the red algae Gracilaria – in Trinidad there are 8-10 different species and in Tobago there are even more species due to more sunlight exposure.
- **16. A fourth unidentified alga -** this algae had abundant growth and a fibrous network with a reddish brown body and white tips.
- 17. Another species of Gracilaria this was a brown coloured specimen but belonging to the red algae group. The brown colour may be due to "chromatic adaptation".
- 18. Acanthophora muscoides a red alga.
- 19. Dictyota ciliolata a red alga.
- **20. A fifth unidentified alga –** A brown algae.
- 21. Centroceras clavulatum A very small red alga with fine fronds (branches) like hair strands.
- 22. Another species of *Dictyota* with banding across its fronds.
- **23. A sixth unidentifed alga -** this was a very fine, grass-like alga.
- 24. Caulerpa chemnitzia a rare find that was only collected in Trinidad for the first time in February.



Swimming crab Photo: Amy Deacon





Botany Group Report, June 14, 2015 BRECHIN CASTLE SUGAR ESTATE AND THE INDO-CARIBBEAN MUSEUM



by Vanessa N. Ramrattan & Arielle K. Ramadharsingh

On Sunday June 14, 16 members of the Botany Group of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club visited the Brechin Castle Estate at Couva and the Indo- Caribbean Museum at Waterloo.

The objective of the first leg of the trip was to observe first-hand the Sugar Heritage Village project. Members of the group assembled at the Visitor's Centre, Brechin Castle, at around 9.00am and were greeted by Professor Brinsley Samaroo. At the Centre, a short film titled "King Sugar" was shown. This feature documented the history of the development of the sugar industry in Trinidad and was quite informative and interesting. After the presentation, Prof. Samaroo gave a brief talk on the project and the areas that the group would be visiting at the estate. He stated that essentially 528 acres of land are to be developed into facilities and resources for educational, historical, sporting, recreational, environmental and commercial purposes. In terms of botany he mentioned para grass (*Urochloa mutica*) as one of the plants found on sugar cane lands and used by the East Indians as fodder for animals.



Front view of restored plantation house

Photo: Veynu Siewrattan

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The first stop was the former bicycle shed in which workers would park their bicycles on arrival at the factory. Whilst in a dilapidated state, it was easy to imagine it filled with early morning activity as workers would park their pride and joy before heading off to a hard day's work.

After leaving the bicycle shed, members proceeded to the old factory. First the group stopped to observe two old 35-tonne steam locomotive engines that Prof. Samaroo managed to salvage and hopes to have refurbished and brought back to working order. Members then entered the bowels of the old factory. One of the goals of the project is to create a working model of this factory.



Old locomotives used to transport the taskers Photo: Veynu Siewrattan

The next stop was the four former cooling ponds. These ponds are supplied with fresh water from the Couva River. The vegetation here is characterised by the swamp immortelle (*Erythrina fusca*) and other water-loving trees such as jamoon trees (*Syzygium cumini*). The area is fairly rich in terms of wildlife with a few caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*) and several bird species being observed. This area is to be developed as the Four Ponds Water Feature where visitors can fish, picnic and enjoy Heritage Village. In this village will be re-created life on the sugar estates, complete with labourers, ajoupas, implements used on the estates, railways lines and engines. The Archive, Research and Document Centre is another feature of the project facilities. This centre will be home to a collection of over 150 years of documents related to the sugar industry in Trinidad and Tobago; and the tedious work of compiling and filing these valuable documents has already begun.



Vegetation around ponds used for cooling water Photo: Veynu Siewrattan

The Sevilla Club and Sevilla Estate House were the next two areas visited. The Sevilla Club was the entertainment centre for senior management staff who, back in the day, enjoyed a "whites only" clubhouse. Since the closure of Caroni (1975) in 2003 the Club has fallen into a state of severe disrepair with the roof collapsing. This area had large samaan (*Albizia saman*) and royal palm (*Roystonea oleracea*) trees. Major refurbishment works are at present underway and the Club is expected to be brought back to its former days of glory and would be used as conference facility and a venue for functions such as weddings. The cat's claw vine (*Macfadyena unguiscati*) was seen with its yellow flowers.

A tour of the beautiful sprawling 68 year old

colonial-style Sevilla Estate house was the next stop. The grandeur of the house can be seen as one enters the large foyer. The beautiful wrought iron works are still present along with some of the original flooring and bathrooms. The house is light and airy, being kept cool by the breezes blowing through it. One could only have imagined the house fully utilised in its day, with the lady of the house hosting wonderful dinner parties and high afternoon tea in the company of the bourgeoisie.

The house itself was constructed in the 1950s by the Tate and Lyle Sugar Company, an English firm, and was used by the manager at the time, Captain Watson. It was later used as Caroni (1975) Ltd's human resource and administrative building. The roof has since been replaced and the house is undergoing restoration. Arsonists had destroyed a wing of the house that was used as an administrative section in 2003. The house is the proposed site of the sugar museum.

The next stop was the Golf Course. The 9-hole course was designed and built by W.S. Fulton and Ram Goberdhan in 1927. It is planned to expand the golf course to 18 holes and one of the former estate houses is to be converted to a Golf Centre.

After the tour, members were taken back to the Visitors Centre for a de-briefing session with Prof. Samaroo. He indicated that the Prime Minister was expected to formally open the project on July 28, 2015.

Prof. Samaroo then invited suggestions from the Members on improving/adding to the project. Lester Doodnath volunteered the Club's services with respect to the types of vegetation that may be suitable for the project and also assisting with supplying and planting some trees in the area.

The session ended with Dan Jaggernauth

presenting Prof. Samaroo with a token of appreciation in the form of the Club's annual calendar and a donation of money collected by the group members present.

The next leg of the trip took the members on a lovely drive through the former cane belt from Couva to Waterloo; we arrived at the Indo-Caribbean Museum at around 12.00pm. At the Museum the group was greeted by Mr Jokhan who gave an educational guided tour of the museum. The museum has a collection of books, jewellery, household, musical and other objects used by the East Indian indentured labourers. A collection of money from members of the group was presented. This museum had various plants planted or used by East Indians in pots on the compound such as neem (*Azadirachta indica*) and tulsi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*).

This was an interesting and informative trip that took members to the gentle rolling plains of Central Trinidad and provided valuable insight on the importance of the sugar industry to the development of the country, as well as the significant contribution made by the hardworking labourers on the sugar cane plantations. The trip ended following the wonderful time had by all who attended.



Dan presents TTFNC 2015 calendar to Mr. Jokhan of the Indian Caribbean Museum Photo: Veynu Siewrattan



Mike's millipede

Club member and UWI Zoology Museum curator Mike Rutherford has had a millipede named after him! The species, which Mike found near Charlotteville, Tobago and sent to experts in the US, has been named *Pandirodesmus rutherfordi*. (Editors)



A juvenile and adult Pandirodesmus rutherfordi Photo: Mike Rutherford

Tacaribe turtles: lessons learned

During August's field trip to Grand Tacaribe a tragic but noteworthy event was observed. A few tents were pitched on the sand, right up against the embankment and next to the treeline, and one tent. unknowingly, was placed on top of the nest of a leatherback turtle. Around midday, nestlings suddenly began to emerge from under the tent and make their way to the sea. It was clear that the extreme heat was too much for the turtles and many did not reach more than 20 feet from the nest before perishing. Tragically, 49 hatchlings were found dead while 4 were saved. Our assumption is that the shade of the tent lowered the temperature of the sand and/or lowered light levels near the surface which the hatchlings interpreted as an indication of nightfall. As a result of this experience, tents should no longer be erected on the sand. Different turtles nest at different times of the year (e.g. we observed hawksbills nesting in October) so it would be difficult to predict the presence of active nests at any time. (Management)

A wildmeat price database

As part of the Club's mission to provide information on the country's natural history, we would like to begin collecting data for a wildmeat price database. This could become a useful tool for the Club, researchers and policy makers given the scarcity of information available on this topic. Participants are asked to complete the available forms and submit to management. Forms are available online or from management on request. (Management)

Observation of H. cupido at Granville

A dead specimen of the butterfly, Helicopis cupido, was found at a guest house in Granville in August 2015, (see photo below) Granville is located in south west Trinidad, along the Gulf of Paria and the guest house was located on the beach. A search of the surrounding area turned up several small but isolated patches of Montrichardia which is the food plant of *H. cupido* caterpillars. The individual had at some point gotten trapped in the house and was found dead next to a mesh-covered window, along with other dead insects which met the same fate trying to escape. Montrichardia is found in swampy conditions throughout the country so *H. cupido* might be present in many of these patches, even the smaller ones. (Kris Sookdeo)



Dead specimen of H. cupido found in Granville. Photo: Kris Sookdeo





Bug Group Report on trip to St Eustatius, January, 2015 IN AND OUT OF AN OLD VOLCANO by Christopher K. Starr & JoAnne N. Sewlal



St Eustatius - informally, Statia - is a volcanic island in the northern Lesser Antilles. At 21 sq. km, it is of a size to explore reasonably completely in a few days. Two of us went there for a week in January 2015, around the delayed start of the dry season. Our visit was hosted by St Eustatius National Parks (STENAPA) and the Caribbean Netherlands Science Institute (CNSI).

Because Statia has rocky shores with hardly any sandy beach, it attracts very little riffraff tourism. The social benefits of this are readily apparent. We found the people wonderfully welcoming, with an overall harmony that is easy to admire. Along with this is a fine sense of courtesy. We came in for some criticism early in our stay when we walked into a supermarket without saying "Good morning" to the assembled staff and customers. After that, we were more attentive to local custom. Almost everyone we met spoke English, and those that did not spoke Spanish.



Vegetation on St Eustatius

Tourism in Statia, then, is almost entirely ecotourism, and it is a fine destination for both landand sea-focused visits. We were there for the first kind. For that purpose, the island comprises three regions: a) the Quill, a dormant volcano, toward the southeastern end, b) a series of high ridges in the northwestern part, and c) a broad saddle in between. The town of Oranjestad occupies the saddle, the part of least interest to us.

Small oceanic islands tend to have simple ecosystems. There is just one social wasp, the colourful Polistes crinitus, which appears to have quite a patchy distribution. Even patchier is that of Sceliphron prob. fasciatum, the only mud-nesting solitary wasp in evidence. We expected to find scattered old nests on many walls and ceilings, but we found them in just two places in great masses. One was a long cavity in a rock face, in which we counted 200 nests before quitting. The other was a concrete ceiling so thickly encrusted that we had no thought of trying to count them. The most spectacular solitary wasp on the island is the tarantula hawk Pepsis ruficornis. We often saw this large wasp – gleaming blue with yelloworange antennae and a nervous manner - searching in the ground layer. We never saw it make a capture, but its main and possible sole prey is presumably an unidentified large tarantula of the genus Tabinauchenius.

When visiting a new island, a good way to get a quick idea of what wasps and bees are common is to look for any of three flowering plants with broadspectrum attraction: the sensitive plant *Mimosa pudica*, Manila palm *Adonidia merrilli*, or coral vine *Antigonon leptopus*. If there is any sensitive plant on Statia, we didn't see it, and none of the Manila palms that we saw was in flower. There is, however, plenty of coral vine, and we do mean plenty. Although this plant is found wild throughout the tropics, only on Statia have we seen it as a true invasive. It dominates 15-20% of the land surface, according to a detailed recent survey.

And it attracted bees in great numbers, but here is the odd thing: The several thousand bees (no wasps) that we saw at coral vine were all honey bees, and we never saw more than a handful of wasps (no other bees) at other flowering plants. This raises three questions: a) What pollinated the flowers before the introduction of the honey bee, presumably in the 1980s? b) Has the spread of the honey bee driven some native pollinators to local extinction? and c) Has the arrival of the honey bee changed the floral composition of Statia?

One termite, the very widespread Nasutitermes corniger, is extremely abundant. Without undertaking a rigorous search, we noticed just one other species, Termes hispaniolae, found only in closedcanopy forest.

The hermit crab *Coenobita clypeatus* is everywhere on the slopes of the Quill. Almost all crabs occupied what seemed to be the same species of compact seashell, including the many we saw above 500 m. Crabs on the slope were forever being startled by our approach, retreating into their shells, and then rolling down the hill. We never stopped being amused by the multitude of rolling crabs.



Hermit crab, Coenobita clypeatus

The only frog reported from Statia is *Eleutherodactylus johnstonei*, but is it really there? We never heard it, and do you know any place where *E. johnstonei* exists in silence?

As usual in the Lesser Antilles, *Ameiva* are much less common, while *Anolis* are much commoner than in Trinidad. Especially on the windward side of the Quill, we found *Anolis schwartzi* in such abundance that we often had three or four of them in view at once. The notable thing was that they were almost all juveniles. Young lizards evidently have little probability of reaching adulthood.

We had a good look at the red-bellied racer, Alsophis rufiventris. On St Kitts and Nevis this snake

was driven to extinction by mongooses and is now found only on mongoose-free Statia and Saba, where it is reasonably common.

As in much of the West Indies, the zenaida dove, Zenaida aurita, is common in open areas everywhere and always a pleasant sight. To our chagrin, we failed to add the colourful, endangered bridled quail dove, Geotrygon mystacea, to our life list.

STENAPA has a fine system of trails on the Quill and the northern ridges, although they are not always marked as clearly as we might wish. On more than one occasion we had to scout back to recover a trail that we had lost. The Quill has three main trails. Around-the-Mountain makes a circuit at about mid-level. The Crater Trail goes over the rim at a pass at about 400 m and descends to the bottom of the crater. The Mazinga Trail goes around the rim from the pass up to Mazinga Peak at 600 m.

Around-the-Mountain makes for a fine jaunt through several habitats, mostly varieties of dry forest. The naked Indian tree, *Bursera simaruba*, is a conspicuous part of the forest.

The descent of Crater Trail is not a long one, but it is quite laborious. We stopped short of the end, because cautiously climbing from one moist, partly mossy rock surface down to the next in many stretches sapped our motivation. We just got tired of having to be that careful and concentrate on the next step, which wasn't our idea of a nature walk. The crater is protected from drying winds inside, so that it is close to lowland rain forest, quite distinct from the rest of Statia.

Ascending the Mazinga Trail, we came into elements of cloud forest: more epiphytic bromeliads *Tillandsia usnoides*, and plenty of *T. fasciculata*, thicker leaf litter, and the occasional patches of cushy moss. We expected to find tree ferns at that level, but not even one. Instead, their place seems to be taken by the large *Philodendron gigantea*. Some of these were on trees, but some on the ground had long stems that amounted to trunks.

Approaching the peak area, there is a roped stretch up a rock face. Going up - and especially down - requires judicious planning with zero regard for elegance. It is not something to attempt if you are tired and absolutely not if you are hiking alone. As far as we could tell, the habitat above the rock face presented nothing new, so one could turn back at that point with no loss. After all, a nature walk is not about seeking a "challenge".



Examples of trails on the island



We spent the greater part of a day walking the northwestern hills. The landscape is cactus scrub throughout, hence highly disturbed, yet it is still a wonderful place for a ramble along ridges. We hadn't seen many goats on the loose on the Quill, but there were plenty on the ridges and in the nearby flatland. Many belong to nobody in particular and so are up for grabs. We met a man who hunts them in order to sell the meat in St Martin.

Statia is very rocky everywhere. During slavery times, great numbers of stones in that part of the island were gathered into piles, even walls, obviously

at great labour. Several times we stopped to sit on

a big rock, aware that it must have been placed there centuries ago by an African forcibly wrenched from his homeland forever.

During a rest stop under some low trees, we noticed a bright red spider on a web just centimetres above the leaf litter, then another and another. It was Aleimosphenus licinus (Tetragnathidae), also found on other islands. We looked in the immediate area and collected a couple more. As we walked along, we kept an eye open for others, and in time we found several more in one very restricted area. Now, this was an odd pattern. The spiders were relatively large, juicy and very close to the ground in an area replete with lizards. In such a situation, one would expect them to be cryptic, yet they were just the opposite, conspicuously bright red. In addition, they seemed to have a clumped distribution, so that predator that found one could reasonably count on finding others nearby.

The obvious hypothesis suggested itself: They must be extremely distasteful. By this time, we had 14 specimens, so we could afford to eat two each in order to test the hypothesis. All four experimental spiders had a green taste, nothing special, and JoAnne got a bitter aftertaste from one of hers. The prediction is not corroborated, to our surprise. The problem remains unsolved.

We had one other field excursion of note. At the invitation of Reese Cook of the St Eustatius Center for Archaeological Research (SECAR), we went to a dig, the main house of a plantation dating back about three centuries. That was quite an education. And then Reese showed us an adult female *Iguana delicatissima* in her habitual basking tree nearby, the first of the species either of us had ever seen in the wild.

A report on a spider survey and a nature note on the nesting habit of *N. corniger* from this trip have been submitted to the Living World.



JoAnne Sewlal sitting on one of the stone piles gathered centuries ago by slave labour



ONLY A WASP, ONLY A BUSH... ONLY THE EARTH Commentary by Hans Boos



The Environment!

What a word this is in today's world.

When I was a boy growing up in my parents' reduced economic circumstances in rural San Fernando, I am sure that had anyone mentioned this word to me I would have had to look it up in my school dictionary, which was one of the required books while I attended Naparima College.

But I was very fortunate to have such a boyhood. Fortunate in two main ways.

The reduced economic circumstances resulting from World War II affected many Trinidadians, but did not diminish my father's interest in nature, an interest he made every effort to pass on to his children.

In 1942, we had not yet moved South, and were still living in Port of Spain, and one of the first lessons I learned from him was while sitting with him on the nobbly roots of a giant devil's ear tree (*Enterolobium schomburgkii*) which stood in the Queen's Park Savannah at the southwestern end, and which eventually fell down the length of Cipriani Boulevard.

Searching among the shiny leaves of a bois chandelle bush (*Piper marginatum*) growing between the roots of this patriarch devil's ear, dad's expert eyes picked out the camouflaged larvae of a butterfly called the king page (*Heraclides thoas*). These he showed me, pointing out how nature had designed them to look like bird droppings on the leaves. We took these wet-looking, multi-coloured caterpillars home to where we lived in a two-room barrack, behind a house (recently razed) next door to the now famous Boissiere House on Queen's Park West.

In a cardboard shoe-box we kept and fed these caterpillars. Fresh-picked bois-chandelle leaves were put for them into the box, and we watched their growth and the miraculous pupation into seemingly insensate dry twigs suspended to the wall of their prison on the finest of strands of silk.

Then one day Dad placed the box open on one of our cots, and we waited. But waiting is not a strong point in a boy of four, and I missed the miracle of the emergence from the dried, stick-like pupa of the beauty of a king page butterfly. However I was fortunate for I saw many another emergence, and expansion of filmy wings, to the gold and black striped butterfly that often fluttered on the poinsettia flowers spilling over the galvanized-iron fence separating our yard from the house next door. The king pages, orange dogs (*Heraclides anchisaides*) and the many other fuzzy moths that emerged from strange caterpillars my brother and I collected over the years that followed, were sometimes given a preliminary feed on bunches of hibiscus flowers, and the mosquito nets secured around the natal cots were pulled up, opened, and these unblemished, fragile creatures were allowed to fly free into our front yard.

This was about the time when our island was considered blessed by one of the sharpest doubleedged swords to come out of the needs and development of WWII.

DDT was seen to be the saviour of mankind, for it was an effective controller of the insects that primarily affected allied troops fighting in far-off, hostile, tropical theatres of war. Yellow fever, malaria and other virulent arboviruses took a greater toll than enemy firepower.

DDT was to replace the mosquito net in Trinidad too, as its derivatives and relations began to be used to control the insect pests, both social and agricultural.

By this time we had moved to San Fernando and this is where the second piece of fortune was my lot. It was not a fortune in terms of tangible things, but in opportunity.

There was an abundance of still quite wild places to nurture our curiosity and for us to explore and do boyhood things. We were young and, like most young boys and girls of these somehow better remembered times, we found our play and our pleasure in what we discovered around us, and made do with simpler, and for us, richer things.

Where we lived, on a hill overlooking a tract of land between North Road and Vistabella, there were fruit trees aplenty and enough wild bush in which to roam and play and to pretend we were whatever our fancy and imagination made us. Bois canot and bois flot trees grew tall and with the leaf stalks and cocoyea we made kites and cages to house picoplats and semps that were there for the catching.

One of our hideouts was under a large, domed allamanda (Allamanda cathartica) bush growing in the land adjacent to the Judges Quarters. In this land, tree houses were built in the mango, guava and sapodilla trees, and we really believed we were Tarzans and lanes, as we hung and swung on stout vines culled from the then heavily forested San Fernando Hill, where balata fruit as big as plums littered the forest floor. This allamanda bush was our special hideout, our private world, away from prying parents, where we stored our treasures, made our plans for our lives and dreamed away our uncertain future. Then one day, overhead through the tangled branches of our favourite refuge, there was a flurry of movement and shafts of holiday time sunlight beamed through into the usual leafy twilight.

Our retreat had been invaded by thousands of caterpillars. They munched away at the poisonous latex-filled leaves, fat and juicy, their whip-like tails jerking in cadence with their progress up each leaf mid-rib, chewing away our cover, our green leafshingled roof, while a heavy drizzle of their droppings audibly rained down on us and coated the bare ground below with a layer of peaty, smelly frass.

The poisonous sap of the allamanda, ingested by these larvae of a species of sphinx moth, made these caterpillars unpalatable to the usual bird predators, and it was only years later as I thought about the disaster that rendered our bush naked in a day, leaving thousands of the caterpillars to starve to death before they had grown enough to pupate for the next amazing change to the adult moth, that I understood what had happened-what had destroyed our playhouse under the allamanda bush, and had doomed an entire generation of moths.

It was the missing piece of the puzzle. Without this piece the jigsaw was incomplete, made no sense, perfect picture fell and the apart. It was the essential interlocking piece. The controlling, stabilizing piece, the factor, which normally saw to the survival of a certain number of caterpillars, moths, and the allamanda bush.

For our hideaway never re-grew after the onslaught. It shrivelled up in the following week of the dry season and slowly crumbled into a pile of rotten

twigs, burying the thousands of caterpillar corpses of a generation of moths.

And the missing piece was the wasp.

"What wasp?" you ask. Well, as I said above, it was years before I discovered that several species of parasitic wasp use the caterpillars of butterflies and moths as hosts for their larvae. Without these wasps, whose larvae can withstand the toxins ingested and stored with the caterpillars, more caterpillars survive than the habitat in this case the allamanda bush—can support.

And what happened to the wasps?

Well, the crop-spraying planes that flew nonstop, day after day over the cane fields upwind and to the east of San Fernando, released a killing blanket of insecticide that was insensitive to what was below.

Frog-hopper, pest, beetle, and butterfly, mosquito and moth fell dead, the beautiful and useful along with the dangerous and deadly. And where moths and butterflies during their dormant period as pupa, or egg, or even hardy caterpillars which can ingest a sap so toxic to other animals, escaped some of the deadly mists, the wasps, the unrecognized wasps, all were killed as they went about their daily activity.

We human beings have done away with most of the wasps in our existence. We have systematically killed off the controlling factors, the missing pieces that make up the whole picture of life on earth.

The time may come when we recognize that the earth is really only a very big allamanda bush.

I could not see it then as I lay under the bush and looked up at the tiny points of blue between the matted green leaves and stems. But I can see it now when it may already be too late.

Today, we had better take a good hard look at what we are doing, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but also to the one and only world we have, for the dead bodies are already piling up and the protective layers of our atmosphere are already poisoned and threadbare.

There is no place else to go, and unless we all collectively and individually wake up to the fact that as a species, mankind has lost much of what he once had, and is rapidly despoiling what remains, there will be no home left, no hideaways, no allamanda bush, no earth.



ENCOUNTERS WITH BOTHROPS

by Hans Boos Part 5 of 5



ON THE ROAD

Road hunting for snakes is a time honoured practice. Snakes often come out of the bush to seek the warmth of the asphalt surface that has absorbed the heat of the day. Nocturnal snakes get an extra boost by lying on the warmed roadway, but unfortunately they are often the victim of passing cars or humans who can easily spot them in this open space.

I have driven the roads of the Northern Range for many a night but I have had little success when I have been actually searching for snakes. Usually I have spotted them while driving on some other errand or mission and usually my passengers are less than enthusiastic when I have stopped whether to collect the specimen or to hurry it off the road from other passing cars.

Only two incidents stand out in my memory.

One night, at about eight o'clock, I was driving down the Arima/Blanchissetse road, not far south of Temple Village when I spotted what appeared to be a snake in the middle of the road. Stopping and running back to find it by torchlight, I saw it was a very juvenile *Bothrops*, lying coiled on the warm substrate, still warm from the midday sun. I collected it and released it deeper in the bush on my next trip.

The second occasion I was walking back to the cabana at the Asa Wright Nature Centre where Raymond Mendes was staying during the Annual General Meeting. It was drizzling softly and the lights from the nearby old cocoa house threw cones of light on the wet black surface of the roadway, when we spotted a snake "side-winding" down the gentle slope of the road, sliding skilfully on the rain-slicked asphalt.

Exactly like the small side-winder rattlesnakes of the Mojave Desert in North America, this little fellow was gliding along, going downhill at his leisurely pace. When he spotted us he speeded up but was not swift enough to elude our capture. Raymond kept it to photograph it and then it was quietly released deeper in the bush where it had a better chance on not being seen again and killed.

EXOTIC IMPORTS

While working in the Emperor Valley Zoo I became acutely aware that after reading "Skip" Lazelle's (1964) paper on the *Bothrops* of the Antilles, I wanted to see the species for comparison to those from Trinidad, and I also got a request from the Bronx Park Zoo for specimens from St Lucia and Martinique Islands, for they would be willing to exchange them for any snakes they had on their surplus list and which we could display in the zoo.

To accomplish this objective I made two trips to the island of St Lucia, in April, 1975 and April, 1980, both trips resulting in the capture of not only lovely specimens of *Bothrops caribbaeus* but also a large St Lucian "tete chien," their version of the boa constrictor, *Boa constrictor orophias*.



Bothrops caribbaeus from St Lucia

I wrote up the second visit's account and presented it at the monthly meeting of the Club on May 8, 1980 for I had been financed, along with Frankie Farrell, to be the Club's representatives to the Conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation, held in St Lucia in April, 1980. In this account I related the excitement of hunting, finding and capturing these very beautiful and dangerous snakes. A pair was eventually traded with the Bronx Zoo.

The ones from Martinique were a different story. I had contacted the Institute Pasteur that maintained a presence on Martinique Island— I believe mainly to assist in the treatment of any snake enven-

omation on that island—to set up the conditions for a possible collecting expedition.

Before I had heard any replies from that institution I went on vacation to Canada, and upon my return I met the Zoo in an uproar, for, without any warning, the Institute Pasteur had sent me, or the Emperor Valley Zoo, a box full of the Martinique Bothrops lanceolatus.

Without the necessary import documents, the box was sent back to the sender who promptly sent it back to Trinidad. This went on several times until I was there to intervene, acquire the required documents, and finally accept the shipment. As it turned out there were several dead snakes in the box, but three survived, and to our delight one of them had been a gravid female and had given birth in the enclosing bag and had survived along with her young ones. Photographs of both species of these unique snakes were published in "The Venomous Reptiles of Latin America" (Campbell & Lamar, 1989).

An animal dealer, Kurt Herzog, collecting in Guyana, used to visit the zoo from time to time and supplied us with animals he had collected or traded in Guyana; he would often have interesting snakes to offer.

Once he turned up with what he said was a bag of the South American rattlesnake, the species found in Guyana, *Crotalus dryinus*, and an unknown specimen of what appeared to be a *Bothrops*.

When Kurt tipped it out of the bag, what emerged was one of the most beautiful snakes I had ever laid eyes on. It was a *Bothrops brazili* the first and only one I have ever seen. Unfortunately the collector had damaged its neck-vertebrae during the



Bothrops brazili, from Venezuela

collecting procedure, probably pinning it too forcibly, and though the photographs do not show this internal injury, the snake never could feed and eventually died (See photo above).

The last import we made was one of the most beautiful of the *Bothrops*. It is found in Argentina and is known as the urutu, *Bothrops alternatus*, and though I do not recall how we acquired the pair, it is possible that it was an exchange with the Bronx Park Zoo. Distinctly marked with curved lobed crescents on the side of the body, they proved to be the gentlest of the *Bothrops* I had experienced (see photo below).



Bothrops alternatus, from Argentina

The last encounter was sadly akin to many others I had had in previous years. In La Guyanne in 2000 (Boos, 2011) I came across the mangled remains of a small specimen deep in the jungles of the Mountains of Kaw. Who or what would have come across this snake in such a wilderness is beyond me, but its fate points to the unhappy fact that snakes, especially *Bothrops*, are given little consideration, or chance of life, when sighted by their main enemy man.

These are the encounters with *Bothrops* that I can recall from the long history I have with collecting and handling of snakes, not only from Trinidad but from far flung places where these beautiful, dangerous and fascinating animals occur. Though my avocation is not one chosen by many, studying, observing and finally getting some understanding of the role these snakes play in our diverse world is ultimately very satisfying and rewarding.

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Hans Boos with Bothrops caribbaeus, St Lucia

Our heartfelt condolences go out to the family and friends of

Carrall Alexander,



Clayton Hull

and

Neil Birbal

They were all members of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club and were committed to conservation of the environment.



Memoirs of a two week paddle around Trinidad in a canoe in 1985 IN THE WAKE OF THE CARIBS by Glenn Wilkes — Part 3 of 5



Thursday 15th. 0 miles

It grew light, but it was overcast and dreary. The little radio I had brought to monitor the weather forecasts had long been abandoned as a waste of time. The next leg took us around Pt. Radix, one of the unknown and possibly dangerous parts of the trip. Fishermen had described a chain of rocks off the point, and I had no intention of being caught there in rain or squall. To the east there were flashes of lightning, and though the system remained distant, we decided to enjoy a rest day. By a strange co -incidence, a couple we had seen at Salybia Toco, turned up on the beach close to our camp. We gave them a wave of recognition, but they didn't seem the least bit curious about our presence two days later at Manzanilla. I was disappointed. I had developed a childish "show-off" routine to deal with guestions. For example, if we had just pulled in at Salybia in the evening, someone who had seen us paddling around the point, and who didn't expect that anyone would venture outside of the bay in such a dinky little boat, would probably want to know where we had come from.

"We just come from the fisherman's jetty in Toco", I'd reply, knowing that "just come" implied that it was part of a longer trip.

"You mean you come from further than that?"

"Yeah, we had lunch in Grande Riviere".

"Where all you start out?"

"This morning we came from Madamas". Again, the "this morning" was bait.

"Madamas? Which part is that?"

"About eight miles from Matelot. That's where we camped last night".

"So how you get there?"

"Well the day before we came from Las Cuevas".

"Las Cuevas? Wait nuh, what it is all you really doing?"

"We paddling 'round the island. We started out in Carenage Friday afternoon".

Pause.

"ALL YOU MAD NO ARSE!"

The routine didn't work with fishermen. They didn't necessarily associate size with seaworthiness, but we often had to remind them that in the old days, fishermen used to "pull oars". Strange enough, they always considered distant seas more dangerous than their home waters.

"All you come through THE BOCAS?"

The game would backfire because they would eventually accept us as equals, and ignore the fundamental difference in our mode of travel.

"All you going to Matura tomorrow? Make a early start before the seas raise, and by nine o'clock you reach".

' Half-past four we would sneak in the bay and hope none of them saw us.

I welcomed the rest day at Manzanilla. From the time we had started the run down the East Coast, I had been pulling harder on my left side to counteract the "weather-cocking" effect of the wind, and I was feeling the strain. We still had nearly twentymore miles of Atlantic coast to do. five Our first experience with these seas had been a harrowing one. It had started out as an exploratory trip down the Mitan River, and when we got to the mouth we had figured we might as well take a paddle in the sea. Some guys were fishing there and we could see they thought we were crazy. That was in the first boat I had built. It had no bulkheads, and we used to stuff inflated car tubes in both ends as emergency flotation. There was little trouble in heading

out through the surf, since the depth at the mouth of the river prevented the waves from breaking close to shore. We were well out when we tried to turn to head back in. The tricky point is when you're broadside to the oncoming seas. You have to know what you're doing. In flat water you counteract any instability by bracing on the side in a manner similar to what you naturally tend to do if you're about to fall on land, i.e. you use the paddle as an extension of your hand, and push yourself back up. On the moving face of a swell, or worse yet, a breaking wave, a paddle in the water on the capsizing side becomes a pivoting point and actually helps you to overturn. We had two paddles in the water on the wrong side of the boat when we turned, and immediately flipped over. Ha-ha. Big joke. We climbed back in and then realised that we had a problem. The inner tubes kept the kayak up, but not enough to allow us to bail out the boat, as each oncoming wave simply dumped more water in the cockpits. The boat was too low in the water to paddle, so eventually we decided to swim. When we started kayaking, we had neither experience nor instructor, but we were both good swimmers, and we always figured that "if push come to shove" we would abandon the boat and swim ashore. I guess we must have been about a guarter-mile out, and abandoning the boat seemed quite unnecessary, since we both had on life jackets. I took the paddles, Foots grabbed the bow-loop, and we started in. We had both done the two-mile harbour race on different occasions, but this was something else. We had to fight a strong current all the way in and it took a long time. On shore, the group we had seen fishing had abandoned their lines, sure that a tragedy was unfolding. I panicked a bit when Foots took off his life jacket and stuffed it in the boat. He ignored my frantic shouts to put it back on. Later he told me it was keeping him back! Even when we were finally able to stand, it was with difficulty, as the current was pulling the sand from under our feet. The experience that day impressed on me the need for bulkheads. It was easy to put one in the stern, and I did, but I wasn't satisfied. In any event there were a number of other things in that first kayak that I was unhappy with, and I soon started work on the second boat which we launched in Tobago on 15th.

May 1982. It had bulkheads fore and aft. By dusk the bad weather had dissipated, and we figured it was safe enough to sleep in the hammocks.

Friday 16th. 26 miles

The sun rose in all its post-storm splendour. The seas had "broken down", as the fishermen say, and it was so calm that rather than staying just beyond the breakers down to the mouth of the Ortoire, we headed straight across to Radix. In the light wind we were able to paddle normally, and zipped through the inner passage without a problem. Clear of the rocks, we headed into Plaisance Mayaro, looking forward to cold drinks. Mayaro is full of memories for me, good and bad. As young children we would endure the long, tiring drive from San Fernando, clutching a green lime to ward off the car-sickness, which would vanish magically when we crossed the silver bridge across the Ortoire, and be replaced by the excitement of trying to be the first one to see the sea. At St. Mary's College, I learned to swim, and the calm waters of Carenage and "down the islands" replaced the lure of the East Coast. I "re-discovered" Mayaro in my late teens, and it was a standing joke among my friends that day or night, once they said they were going Mayaro, my only request would be "let me get my bathsuit and my toothbrush". In 1966 my brother Lennie drowned trying to rescue a stranger and I stopped going there.

We tried to avoid the kids as we surfed into shore, but they surrounded the boat and grabbed it to carry it up the beach. One smart-ass started singing a song, and it took a while before I realised that it was a funeral march. The little bugger was pretending the kayak was a coffin! I remembered Foots' mother's remarks, and my mind went back to the hut at Radix cemetery, with a cold corpse on a concrete slab. I blocked both.

Our plan was to camp on the beach next to Jeffrey Ferreira's home, and avail ourselves of his showers, etc. It was noon, and "etc." would be finished cooking by now, so we put back in, with the welcoming committee hanging on to the kayak like remoras. Normally I get pissed off when people do that, but the kids were having so much fun, we

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laughed and let them ride. The sea was so calm now that we were able to paddle close to shore, checking out the beach like in the old days, looking to see who was staying where. When we got to Jeffrey's house, it was locked up. He wasn't expecting us... well maybe he was. But this was Mayaro, and my "Mopper's" instincts had been re-kindled, so I left Foots on the beach and set off for my nephew's home. Jackpot! I had lunch with Nicky and Denise, and left with Foots' own in a doggie bag.

For a while we were content to relax on the beach, but our eyes were on the calm sea and the beckoning Galeota point. I felt the same urge that had impelled me years ago; to leave a beach lime and walk the whole stretch of Mayaro, just to see what the point looked like. It had changed drastically in the intervening years; thanks to Amoco, but it still marked the end of the Atlantic and our halfway point. One of the rules I had formulated was to tackle the difficult parts of the journey in the early morning, when we were fresh and alert. The chances were that the seas would also be more favourable. But nothing could get more favourable than what we were looking at, and after the rest day, the morning's paddle had been little more than a warmup.

"Let's go!"

It was an exhilarating run, straight as an arrow. We must have been about a mile out as we approached the point, and we had a worrying moment when it started to rain, but it was only a passing cloud. Soon we were gliding past the "table" and heading into Guayaguayare. In the lee of the point we ran out of steam and coasted into the fisherman's facilities. We had put in 26 miles that day, and it ranked with Madamas-Toco as the most enjoyable leg of the journey. Once again we were greeted with the easy camaraderie of fishermen and spent the night in their luxurious "shed".

Saturday 17th. 20 miles

We said goodbye to our newfound friends at Guayaguayare, and headed across the bay to Gran Cayo point. Pushing on to Guaya' the day before had been a wise decision, for the wind and seas were back to normal. In fact it seemed as though we were still in the Atlantic rather than the Columbus Channel. The problem of keeping on course returned. From Toco to Manzanilla, I had held my paddle off-centre, sweeping a longer arc on the port side as a means of correcting our track. Foots had paddled normally, saying that from the stern, he could always bring us back on course by dragging his paddle on the starboard. But this slowed the boat, and to avoid that, I had pulled harder on the left. I still felt the strain of those two days, and called on him to help out by paddling the same way. He refused, saying that his method was better. Unable to convince him, I angrily reverted to a normal stroke, just to show him how dumb it was. He refused to back down, and we zigzagged all the way down to Casa Cruz. It was the only serious argument we had for the whole trip, and in fact I can't remember any other occasion in all the years of paddling, when we didn't work as a team.

We came ashore at Casa Cruz, and I took a long walk along the coast. At times I try to imagine what Trinidad must have been like when Columbus lied and said he'd discovered it. My favourite poem in Primary School was:

"There was an Indian, who had known no change, who strayed content along a sunlit beach gathering shells?

he heard a sudden strange commingled noise, looked up, and gasped for speech. For in the bay, where nothing was before, moved on the sea, by magic, huge canoes, with bellying cloths on poles, and not one oar, and fluttering coloured signs and clambering crews. And he, in fear, this naked man alone, his fallen hands forgetting all their shells, his lips gone pale, knelt low behind a stone, and stared, and saw, and did not understand, Columbus' doom-burdened caravels slant to the shore, and all their seamen land."

For the first time I felt I was seeing my country through the eyes of that mythical Amerindian ancestor. The Southern Range is not far from the coast, and in many places there is a steep drop from the forest down to the sea. The exposed cliffs had numerous round rocks embedded in the soil. At the edge of the sea, those that had fallen looked like

cannon balls, evoking another image of marauding pirates and buccaneers. They say you can walk from Moruga to Guayaguayare at low tide. You'd get very wet, but I guess you could. "One of these days", I promised myself.

As we pushed on from Casa Cruz, we were deeper into the Channel, and more in the lee of the Trinity hills. We were able to paddle normally now, and continued to Moruga without stopping. The Orinoco floods the Columbus Channel during the rainy season, and at Moruga, our own Canari/ Moruga river system adds even more silt to the waters. Numerous corbeaux on a mud bank contributed to the least attractive choice of a campsite on our trip. But there were shops with cold drinks, and it was getting late, so we pulled in at the fishing depot. The fishermen were a rough-looking lot, and not as approachable as the others we had met so far, but we ourselves were looking like sea-vagrants, and we hid our nervousness as we bedded down for the night on a pile of fishing nets.

To be continued....



if you would like to help plan the event



TTFNC QUARTERLY BULLETINS & INDEX ONLINE LINK : http://ttfnc.org/publication/field-naturalist/

Management Notices

New Members

The Club warmly welcomes the following new members:

Ordinary members: Adesh Seeram, Ailan Knights, Amel Baksh, Christine Makoski, Elsa Taylor, Gem Ramsumair Peter Dickson, Selene Warren

Junior members: Laura Teixeira

Family members: **Diva Amon**

NOTICE FROM THE EDITORS: Do you have any natural history articles, anecdotes or trip reports that
could be published in The Field Naturalist? We welcome contributions from members. Please email your ideas
or finished pieces to admin@ttfnc.org. We look forward to hearing from you!

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Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club P.O. Box 642, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago



PUBLICATIONS

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







The Native Tree 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

The TTFNC 2016 Calendar is now available at book stores, or to members directly through the Club (\$20). Please support your Club by purchasing one today!

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 the areas of flora and fauna) in Trinidad and Tobago. Full details are available on their website: <u>http://www.greenhallstrust-wi.org/link.htm</u>

Your 2016 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:

- I. All articles must reach the editors by the eighth week of each quarter.
- 2. Electronic copies can be submitted to the editors at: <u>admin@ttfnc.org</u>

or directly to the editors or any member of Management. Please include 'QB2016' in the email subject label.