

ENVIRONMENT

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

IT IS with great pleasure that the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club introduces readers of *Newsday* to what is to become a regular feature produced by the Club. Using this space, we intend to highlight the many facets of the natural history of Trinidad and Tobago, including not only our wildlife and geography but also policy issues and historical accounts.

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club's mission is to bring together persons interested in the study of natural history, the diffusion of knowledge thereof and the conservation of nature and natural resources. Founded in 1891, the Club operates under a constitution and a set of rules and traditions. As part of The Club's 100th anniversary celebration, it was incorporated by an Act of Parliament (Act No 17 of 1991). Club activities include monthly

lectures from experts and regular field trips, both here and abroad. Sub-groups within the Club engage in additional activities and projects. One project which generated significant interest was the Sea Turtle Project, the origin of the country's present day turtle conservation efforts. Starting in 1963, in response to reports that turtles were being slaughtered at our beaches, members conducted beach patrols during the nesting season at Matura, Las Cuevas and elsewhere, using the time to also collect data on turtle ecology and capture rates. This information eventually led to the amendment of the existing turtle laws and Act No.23 of 1975 "The Turtle and Turtle Eggs Regulations" was issued. In 1973 the Club also spearheaded efforts to halt the shipment of LPG through the Caroni Swamp by the Shell Oil Company.

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MEMBERS of the Club at the Moruga Bouffe. PHOTO BY EDDISON BAPTISTE

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Club's goals: Awareness, conservation through education

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The majority of the Club's contributions are purposefully conservative in nature. They have also come in a variety of forms. For instance, after the Royal Victoria Institute Museum had been destroyed by fire in 1920, Club members actively assisted in the rebuilding and replacement of the natural history exhibits. In 1947, it was at

a meeting called by the Club that it was decided to establish the Zoological Society of Trinidad and Tobago (the Emperor Valley Zoo). The Club is also a founding member of COPE, the Council of Presidents of the Environment.

The Club has since pursued its goals of awareness and conservation through education, to which end it

produces several publications. *The Field Naturalist* is a quarterly publication which documents Club activities, while *Living World* is our annual peer-reviewed journal offering research papers and short notes on natural history topics produced by both academic and non-academic authors. The Club has also published books, namely *Native Trees of Trinidad & Tobago*,

The TTFNC Trail Guide, and a fold-out field guide on wildflowers. Additionally, an annual natural history calendar is produced (more information on our publications can be found on our website or Facebook page).

Since the Club's inception 122 years ago, the natural environment of Trinidad and Tobago has been faced with a multitude of threats, many of

which are greater now than ever.

Preserving our natural heritage will depend heavily on educating our population on the value of what we have and on the risks that endanger it. It is our hope that this natural history series can help in the realisation of this goal.

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