

ENVIRONMENT

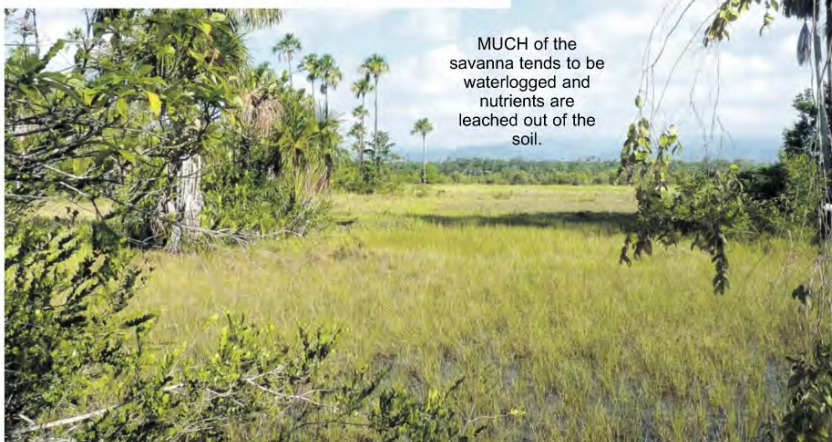
A Naturalists' view: Aripo Savannas



THE BIZARRE sundew captures small insects for additional nutrition.

THE TRINIDAD and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC) visited the Aripo Savanna Scientific Reserve in September. This unique area is one of the few remaining natural savanna ecosystems in Trinidad. It is characterised by low, scrubby vegetation, waterlogged soils and open grasslands. It was declared an Environmentally Sensitive Area in 2007.

MUCH of the savanna tends to be waterlogged and nutrients are leached out of the soil.



One of the key species in the savanna is the towering moriche palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*). Outside of the savanna, it is found in only a few other areas in Trinidad including Valencia, Erin, Nariva and Los Blanquizaes. The fruits of the palm provide food for macaws, parrots, agoutis and other wildlife. These fruit can sometimes wash ashore on the south coast from trees growing in neighbouring Venezuela!

In 1978, the botany group of the TTFNC undertook a field study of one of the orchids found growing in the savannas

– *Cyrtopodium broadwayi*. The purpose of this six-year study was to document as much of the life history of this species as possible.

Another attractive plant is the savanna flower (*Mandevilla hirsuta*). This vine is commonly found in the forest edge and is easily identified by its gorgeous yellow petals and red centre. It is common outside of the savanna as well.

Certainly one of the more bizarre plant species to be found in the savanna is the sundew (*Drosera capillaris*).

• ARIPO continues on Page 6B



THE FRUIT of the moriche palm.

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A bizarre plant species

● ARIPO from Page 4B

Because the soils of the savanna are frequently waterlogged, nutrients are quickly leached out. The poor soils force some plants to seek their nutrition elsewhere. This sundew traps small insects in the sticky secretions on its leaves and the insects are slowly digested to release much-needed nutrition.

For more information on our natural environment, you can contact the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club at admin@ttfnc.org or visit our website at www.ttfnc.org. The club's next monthly meeting will on November 13 at St Mary's College, Port-of-Spain. This month's lecture is titled Human impacts on mangrove wetland systems in T&T by Erin Mangal.



THE beautiful savanna flower (Mandevilla hirsuta).

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