

ENVIRONMENT



BROMELIA HUMILIS

Chacachacare's unique features

IN JANUARY the T&T Field Naturalists' Club journeyed to Chacachacare, located off the north-western coast of Trinidad. The island boasts of several unique features of interest to natural history enthusiasts.

The salt pond is a naturally occurring body of hyper saline water on the southern end of the island. Lacking fish or other large organisms, the lake may appear at first glance to be devoid of life but it is home to several invertebrates, including large numbers of brine shrimp (*Artemia* species).

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ABANDONED leprosy buildings

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Programme Venue: Point Lisas Campus
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Programme Venue: Chaguaramas Campus
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Master of Education in Educational Technology

Programme Venue: Valsayn Campus
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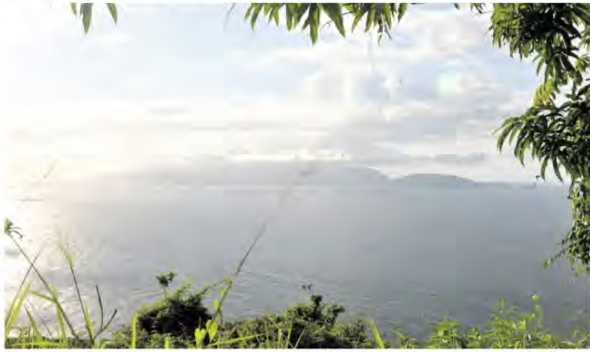
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ENVIRONMENT



VENEZUELA. PHOTOS BY JEFFREY WONG SANG



SEA island cotton.

Historic structures vandalised

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Unlike their epiphytic relatives, the terrestrial bromeliad, *Bromelia humilis* can be found growing in dense patches on the ground in some parts of the island. Their leaves are equipped with sharp spines which can make traversing these patches very difficult. When in bloom, the green leaves at the centre of the plant will become red, drawing attention to the short inflorescence.

Sea island cotton (*Gossypium barbadense*) was once grown on Chacachacare and the descendants of this once profitable crop, now growing wild, can be found scattered throughout the island. Cotton cultivation attracted many planters to the island during its heyday.

Chacachacare is the closest part of Trinidad and Tobago to Venezuela. Approximately seven miles to the west, Venezuela is clearly visible from the lighthouse. Because of this proximity, there is a higher probability of movement of plant and animals between both landmasses, especially of birds and insects. People also take advantage of this proximity. In 1813, the Venezuelan revolutionary Santiago Mariño planned and launched his attack against Spanish Royalists in eastern Venezuela from his base on Chacachacare. Mariño is considered one of the heroes of the Venezuelan War of Independence, eventually fighting alongside Simon Bolivar.

The island was used as a leprosy hospital until 1984 and the remains of several buildings can still be found scattered about the island. Shamefully, members of the public and the defence force have all played a part in its destruction by vandalising the historic structures for wood and other items.

For more information on our natural environment contact the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club at admin@ttfnc.org or visit the website at www.ttfnc.org. The club's next monthly meeting will be held on March 12 at St Mary's College, Port-of-Spain. This month's lecture is titled: "What are colony cycles and what do they mean" by Christopher K. Starr.



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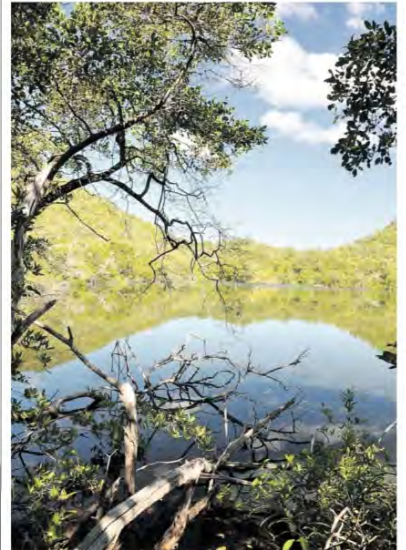
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THE Salt Pond.