

## **“Wildlife management must take top priority”**

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists’ Club (TTFNC) was founded in 1891 to bring together persons for the study and preservation of our natural environment. During these 122 years of existence it has witnessed the gradual decline in the populations of many of our plant and animal species. To this end, the TTFNC believes that protecting sustainable populations of all native species must be the top priority for wildlife management in Trinidad and Tobago. We believe that if hunting is to continue it must be managed based on sound empirical knowledge of the present populations and population trends of each targeted species.

As such, the TTFNC is of the view that while the proposed three year moratorium on hunting will undoubtedly bring some benefit to the population of game species in Trinidad and Tobago, this time must be used wisely to establish baseline data on our wildlife populations. The absence of such research would represent a lost opportunity to conduct this crucial work which may not arise again for many years if bypassed now. Additionally, any beneficial increase in the population of game species arising from the moratorium will be short-lived and undoubtedly eroded once the hunting season reopens.

Nonetheless, in the absence of sufficient scientific data on our wildlife populations, the Club supports the precautionary principle, which dictates that hunting should be tightly restricted until adequate data can be collected and effective regulations can be formulated and enforced. As such, even in the absence of such research being part of the proposed moratorium, the TTFNC will still support the proposed moratorium.

Quite aside from the decision to impose a moratorium or not, we would like to take this opportunity to put another proposal on the table.

The Club is of the view that the commercial sale of wild caught meat is perhaps the most significant contributor to the decline in the populations of our game species. To this end, we strongly suggest that an outright ban on the commercial sale of wild caught meat be implemented and enforced. We recognise that there is a need to satisfy the many stakeholders involved in this issue and we expect that this proposal will find favour with sections of the sport hunting fraternity as well as the anti-hunting lobby. Indeed such a law may have a far greater beneficial impact on our wildlife populations in the long run than the proposed moratorium itself.

**Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalists’ Club**

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