
**The Hunt for Caribbean Viruses:
A History of the Trinidad Regional
Virus Laboratory**

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Trinidad and Tobago, 2000

This is a book that every member of the Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalists' Club should read. A book that they should want to own and keep on their library shelf. It is a book that will be welcomed by all persons interested in the natural history of Trinidad or in the history of scientific investigations.

Dr. Tikasingh's book is a very readable and fascinating account of the establishment and growth of the Trinidad Regional Virus Laboratory (TRVL) during the period 1952 to 1974; and its subsequent re-organization as the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC). It begins by describing how a small group of researchers set up a field laboratory for the Rockefeller Foundation in a small wooden building on the Port of Spain waterfront and started to train a team of technicians for the study of viruses. A detailed account is given of the expansion of the work to several areas of the country, with the establishment of field centres and camps, and of the many hiccups and frustrations experienced for many years. After only a few years, in 1955, the virus laboratory began to expand its activities regionally. Surveys were conducted and serum samples collected in Tobago, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Antigua, Jamaica, Guyana and Venezuela. Meanwhile, the laboratory was involved locally with studies of yellow fever and encephalitis, and had discovered several new viruses. In the next few years, influenza and Newcastle Disease (in chickens) were added to the areas of research, together with non-viral disease agents, such as *Leptospira*, *Toxoplasma* and *Trypanosoma*. In 1961, there was a move to greatly expanded facilities at Federation Park and an association of the laboratory with the University of the West Indies. By this time a major scientific programme was underway on Bush Bush Island, in Nariva Swamp, which included ecological investigations of a wide range of invertebrates and vertebrates. In addition to isolation of viruses, the TRVL amassed considerable information on environ-

mental conditions and on the biodiversity of Bush Bush, as they studied potential virus hosts and agents of virus transmission. Such studies were expanded to Soldado Rock in 1962, the Arena Forest in 1965, the Turure Forest and Cedros in 1966. After this the TRVL became involved with polio and rabies investigations and control. The various roles played by the Government, Ministry of Health, other agencies and the University are included in Dr. Tikasingh's thorough documentation.

The reader is taken through the technical features of this rapidly developing research programme easily, as Dr. Tikasingh has been able to describe the methods used in virology simply and without confusing detail. The book is profusely illustrated, to show the study sites and some of the practical methodologies. The non-specialist will learn a great deal about this fascinating field of endeavour. There are maps showing the locations of field and overseas study sites. The several appendices contain financial statements and annual reports from the TRVL, which will be of great interest to historians and directors of research programmes.

In his careful account, Dr. Tikasingh provides the names of all the people involved, the visiting scientists, local experts and local support staff. Most of these players are shown in the numerous text illustrations and he tells us who they all were, where they came from and how they each contributed to the field and laboratory work. Throughout the book, one is constantly reminded that the work of the TRVL was a team effort and that the success of their programme was due in no small measure to the efforts of nationals. Local readers are going to feel very proud of the work done by TRVL in Trinidad and of its well-deserved international status.

Another feature of this book that will be of particular interest to field naturalists and other biologists is the extensive list of publications resulting from the work of scientists at the TRVL. This shows that a wealth of knowledge has been accumulated about biodiversity in Trinidad and other neighbouring countries and is contained in these publications and in the TRVL reference collections. This includes taxonomic and ecological data on such groups as the mosquitoes, sandflies, horseflies, ticks, scorpions, reptiles, small mammals and birds. The natural history data

collected from Bush Bush has formed the basis of all later studies on the management of Nariva Swamp, as has that for Turure, and that from Soldado Rock is some of the only data from that site.

I enjoyed reading Dr. Tikasingh's book and learnt a great deal from it. It is a truly valuable contribution to the history and scientific culture of Trinidad and Tobago. The book is published by CAREC, in association with PAHO and WHO and is available from the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre in Federation Park.

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