

Book Review

Life Along the Seashore of Trinidad and Tobago by Lori M. Lee Lum and E. Julian Duncan

'Life along the Seashore of Trinidad and Tobago' was launched in 2018 as part of the Institute of Marine Affairs' (IMA) 40 years anniversary celebration. I offer the Institute congratulations for opting to celebrate in this manner. The book is jointly authored by Ms. Lori M. Lee Lum of the IMA and Professor Emeritus E. Julian Duncan of the St. Augustine Campus of The University of the West Indies. On the market there is no other publication or literature in circulation that summarises flora and fauna of the Trinidad and Tobago coastline. This book attempts fill that niche.

On first general inspection, the book easily carried and conveniently sized for field use. Despite the unavailability of hard cover versions, it seems to be printed and bound for much use, as I have found, having taken my copy in the field on several occasions. The book has exactly 110 printed pages and is divided into the following major sections (not chapters): Marine Invertebrates (22 pages), Drift Seeds and Fruits (6 pages), Flowering Plants (22 pages), Algae (38 pages), and Solid Waste Pollution (5 pages); there is a bias towards flora.

Delving into the text, the first image is a map of Trinidad and Tobago displaying sample sites from which data was used for compilation of this work. In Trinidad, 14 sites were sampled and six in Tobago for a total of 20 sites. Surprisingly, site distribution was skewed with one site each on the north and south coasts of Trinidad, stark contrast to seven on the east coast. Of the five sample sites on Trinidad's west coast, three are located in the north west peninsula. Similar aggregation of sample sites occurs in Tobago where most are located on the south western region of the island. The furthest northern site is located in Speyside, whilst the entire coastline from there to Mount Irving Bay (on the Caribbean coast) has not been evaluated. Despite this, no justification is made for site selection on either island. Furthermore, a formal definition of the seashore and descriptions of the seashore types are lacking. Considering our coastline (ergo our seashore) consists of mud flats, rocky shores, and sandy beaches it would have been appreciated if the sites were representative of particular habitats.

Proceeding into the first section, 'Marine Invertebrates', one can see fauna spanning multiple taxa but mollusc dominates the section. Despite this, very little information is given on several mollusc species in comparison to other books such as Southeastern and Caribbean Seashores

by E.H. Kaplan (1998) or Seashells of the Caribbean by L. Sully (1990). Additionally, there are several species described as inhabitants of tidal rock pools, which can be justified as a seashore type, but some such as the sea fans and fire coral which are typical reef fauna. Mention is made of one burrowing crab (Atlantic ghost crab) yet the common mole crab which is seasonally abundant on the east coast of Trinidad is missing, along with larger species such as our local blue crab. For these reasons I would say the benthic communities are under-represented. This section would appeal to the general public in its content and layout, but lacks some technical information.

The Marine Invertebrates section is followed by three sections on a wide plethora of flora. This coverage is much appreciated as there is indeed a dearth of information regarding our islands' coastal and nearshore vegetation. At this point, it is very clear that book is authored by two different individuals as the writing style and attention to detail changed. The section on 'Algae' is very detailed, more so than that of sections on 'Flowering Plants' or 'Drift Seeds'. The author focused both on the general morphology and the microscopic structure of these plants. The details regarding the cellular structure can be comparable to work published by Littler and Littler (Caribbean Reef Plants, 2000). However, as the name suggests, the Littlers' book covered a very broad spectrum whilst this book quickly brought the focus to our local seashores. It was also good of the author to highlight new species reportings as well as potential invasive species.

My major concern however, is the omission of vertebrates, considering that the first section describes invertebrates. Sea birds which are one of the most common seashore faunas (for example sand pipers and laughing gulls) and the various nesting marine turtles such as leatherback, green and hawksbill are unmentioned. Lastly, even though invertebrates of the tidal pools are commented on, comments on fish species such as gobies or damselfish are lacking. Fish such as the 'four eyed fish' which are prevalent on both mud flats and sandy shore regions are also excluded. However, the brief on the solid waste pollution issue its impact on vertebrate communities are acknowledged.

Overall the book is well-written in clear and concise language and I have not found a single typographical error. Nonetheless, the aesthetics of some pages were compromised by images in multiple and perceivably

random dimensions, which is an issue throughout the book. Additionally, photographs lack consistent labelling common and scientific name of specimen, location and photo credit. Other publications such as *Seashore Life of the Caribbean* (Jones and Jones, 2009) have similar content but do not focus on any one particular island as their layout is defined by habitat and the associated fauna. In conclusion, I consider this book to be an asset in my reference collection and would recommend it to any young naturalist ranging from secondary school to the

undergraduate tertiary level, particularly botany students. I look forward to the second edition of this book and hope the comments in this review are considered, particularly improvements on the faunal component.

Ryan S. Mohammed

Department of Life Science, Faculty of Science and Technology,
UWI, St. Augustine
ryansmohammed@gmail.com