

CONSERVATION NEWS

by R. P. French

Since we last went to press, various developments in the conservation field have taken place. In this subject it is so easy to talk about what ought to be happening without taking positive and practical steps to implement the plans. Sometimes implementation depends upon money, which is not always forthcoming; but so often sufficient effort and initiative from enough people is all that is required. It is good therefore to be able to record the following events.

The Pointe-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust

In the early 1960's John Cambridge, a Texaco engineer resident at the Brighton oilfield, raised a brood of ducklings of the Black-bellied Tree-Duck, *Dendrocygna autumnalis*, locally known as the Wichichi or Ouikiki. As a hunter, Mr. Cambridge realised that marsh-drainage and over-shooting were fast annihilating the locally breeding ducks, the Tree-ducks and the Bahama Pintails. Encouraged by his success with the initial brood, he obtained further clutches of eggs and in a few years established a flock of about 40 birds which were tame enough to be allowed to fly freely about the area.

On moving to Pointe-a-Pierre in 1966 the Cambridges brought with them the nucleus of this Tree-duck flock. In combination with a few enthusiasts a large roofed aviary, one hundred by ninety feet, was constructed on the edge of one of the Texaco reservoirs at Pointe-a-Pierre. In January 1967 the Pointe-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust was officially constituted, having as its chief aim "the keeping and breeding of wildfowl, especially native wildfowl. Wherever possible, birds will be released from captivity, in order to rebuild the depleted stocks of native wildfowl in Trinidad."

Mr. R. S. W. Deane, well-known in Trinidad as an aviculturist, undertook the curatorship of the birds, and under his able management the Trust has flourished. Eggs are laid in quantities by the two dozen captive adult Tree-ducks in nest-boxes within the aviary, collected and artificially incubated under the supervision of Mrs. Cambridge, and then distributed to various members of the Trust who care for them up to the flying stage. They are then taken back to the reservoir and gradually released. In the first three breeding-seasons more than 100 ducklings were released as fully flying birds, most of them banded with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bands and coloured plastic bands. It is pleasant to record that several of these birds have themselves paired and nested successfully in various areas of Pointe-a-Pierre, bringing up their own broods in the comparative security of the bird sanctuary.

In addition to the Tree-ducks, various other local waterfowl are kept by the Trust, including Bahama Pintail, Blue-winged Teal, Jacanas and Purple Gallinule, of which the latter have successfully bred in captivity. Exotic birds introduced from England include a pair each of Mute Swans and Black Swans. An Anhinga and a Black-crowned Night-heron provide added attractions for the large number of Pointe-a-Pierre mem-

bers who support the Trust. Additional financial help has come from local poultry-feed suppliers and from Texaco, while some ducks and swans were sent free of charge from England by the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge and by Birdlands Zoo, Gloucestershire.

The Asa Wright Nature Centre

In November 1967 Sir Hugh Wooding formally opened the Asa Wright Nature Centre at Springhill Estate in the Arima Valley. A Trust was set up and the estate bought from its former owner, Mrs. Asa Wright, who had lived there for 22 years and established a reputation as a hostess to some of the most renowned names in Natural History. The estate also contains the most famous and accessible colony of Oilbirds, *Steatornis caripensis*, in Trinidad.

Run by a Board of Management with a resident manager, the Nature Centre caters to visitors, mainly from the U.S.A., who want to enjoy a holiday amidst natural beauty far from the crowds and headaches of civilisation. Apart from the Oilbirds, the bird-life of the Arima Valley is prolific and varied, and as might be expected at a height of 1200 feet in the Northern Range, with both cultivated land and natural forest, a wealth of material awaits anyone interested in any branch of natural history. Local residents of Trinidad may also become members of the Nature Centre, which entitles them to visit it at any time and take part in its activities.

The first object of the Nature Centre Fund is "the protection in perpetuity of the Springhill Estate as a wildlife sanctuary and nature centre". It is, in fact, the first nature centre to be established in the neotropics. A fairly large grant was made by the World Wildlife Fund for the purpose of safeguarding more effectively the Oilbird colony. Some work has already been done towards this end.

Conservation Week 1968.

During the week September 30 — October 5, 1968, Conservation Week was celebrated in Trinidad with a variety of functions. A committee, spear-headed by our own Honorary Secretary, Ian Lambie, and the then Conservator of Forests, Hollis Murray, organised activities which ranged from press conferences and T.V. interviews to an exhibition at the National Museum, lectures, posters and contests for school-children.

Not the least important aspect of the Week was the impetus it gave to publications on subjects of natural history. Apart from several articles in the press, many of them contributed by our own members, agreement was reached with the Ministry of Education and Culture on the production of booklets for school on subjects of natural history interest. Although it was originally intended to have these booklets ready for Conservation Week, this plan was later modified in the interests of quality. Already two booklets have appeared, one on "Fishes and other sea creatures of our coastal waters", a product of the

Fisheries Division, and the other (partly in colour) on the Reptiles and Amphibians of Trinidad and Tobago by Hans Boos and Victor Quesnel, two prominent members of the Club. A third volume, on birds, is to be expected soon.

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