

## Plantagenet Lechmere Guppy

By NICHOLAS GUPPY

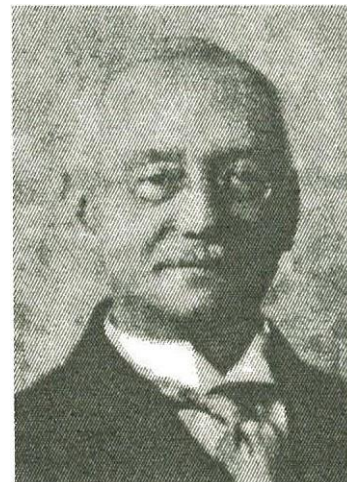
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"Jim", or "Planty", as he was known, was the eldest child of Lechmere and Alice (nee Rostant) Guppy, and was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad on 15th April 1871, at No. 1 Wellington Terrace, Queen's Park. He was educated in England at Buntingford Grammar School. After leaving school he entered Government service, first as a clerk in the Audit Office (1891), and later in many different capacities. He spent many years in Tobago, where he was Sub-Receiver and Postmaster, and then Warden.

Inheriting his father's scientific proclivities, from an early age he undertook work in his spare time for the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, London, and wrote a number of papers on Trinidad fish and insects. These he illustrated with drawings and paintings of outstanding quality, which are indeed beautiful works of art. The largest collection of these is in the London Natural History Museum and about a dozen are in the Trinidad museum.

He was an early advocate of the biological control of insect pests, which he applied successfully to the sugarcane froghopper. Discovering that a hover-fly or Syrphid was an important parasite on eggs of the froghopper in Kenya, where the cane varieties 'Seely Seedling' and 'Striped Ribbon' were grown as in Trinidad, he advocated that a complete system be set up to provide the right conditions for the fly to control the pest. This involved the planting of clumps of Samaan trees near the cane to provide both birds and the fly with shelter in hot dry weather, the 'hurdlings' of cattle (which eat the fallen fruit) under the trees, and the use of their manure on the cane. The system was so successful that after nine years he was able to report that no further outbreaks of the pest

had occurred. He visited Grenada, Martinique (which curiously has no froghoppers) and other Caribbean islands in February of 1917, while researching the pest. Aged 20, in July 1891, with seven other naturalists he was co-founder of The Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club; and



he was a member of the Museum Committee of the Royal Victoria Institute, the forerunner of our museum.

After retiring from Government service in 1929, for some years he worked independently as an expert and dealer in tropical fish for aquaria, and in 1934 was living in Georgetown, Guyana (then British Guiana), where he is described as the chief animal dealer, collecting for the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and the New York Zoological Gardens, among other organisations. He introduced the 'Guppy' fish (named after his father Lechmere Guppy, who discovered\* it in 1859 when 23 years old) to England (1906), Europe and the United States, where it rapidly became the world's most popular aquarium fish, a status it has maintained ever since.

His sister, Yseult Bridges, describes him as by nature a singularly happy man, who cared nothing for social occasions and took life uncritically. He devoted his leisure hours to sailing a small yacht called Vanessa (scientific name for the English Peacock butterfly), his crew consisting of 'Tobago Jim', an elderly negro who had roamed the seven seas. Sadly, tragedy befell him early

\* Guppy's discovery of the fish in Trinidad was in fact preceded by the discovery of the same fish in Venezuela. See "Agouti to Zandoli" in this issue - Ed.