

# The Journals of the Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club, 1892-1896

CD published by the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club, 2004.

TT\$200 or US\$35

The Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club was founded in 1891 as a manifestation of the strong British amateur tradition in natural history (Starr 2004). After a vigorous early period, it fell into inactivity in 1907, with only intermittent activity until 1954, after which it has continued without interruption (Carr 1991; Quesnel 1991; Quesnel *et al.* 1956; Rooks 1991).

The importance of communication among members and with the wider public was understood from the outset, and in April 1892 the Club began publication of its journal. This continued through two volumes, each of 12 numbers, and then abruptly stopped, to all appearances, in 1896. The possibility remains that a few numbers appeared after this – readers with access to relevant archives in Britain or India are cordially invited to look into this question – but all indications are that vol. 1 no. 12 in February 1896 was the last until it was revived in 1956 (Quesnel 1991).

The reasons for the journal's demise after just four years are something of a mystery. The Club's membership had risen rapidly within a year from the initial eight to about 50, and the journal appeared to be doing very well. From a very respectable initial press run of 150, it quickly went to 300 and above, and the regularity with which it appeared was a sign of good health. The effective dissolution of the Club in 1907 appears to have been quite a separate event, and one is left with the mundane conjecture that a loss of one or two key members of the editorial committee robbed the journal of its impetus. There is no direct evidence of this, but small organizations are inherently unstable.

In the Club's founding period, a majority of members resided in Port of Spain and could presumably attend meetings. Still, there was the critical problem of maintaining contact with other naturalists outside of the city and abroad in an age before telephones and e-mail, and when road conditions made it difficult to move about in even so small a territory as Trinidad. Accordingly, the early journal served many more purposes than its modern counterpart, the *Living World*.

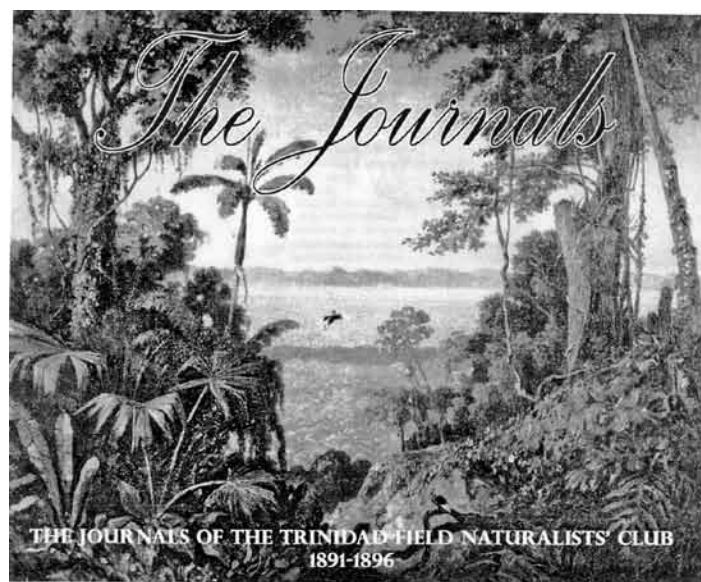


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In addition to research reports and nature notes, it included material that today would go into the minutes of meetings, committee reports and the quarterly newsletter, as well as excerpted papers from other journals. In short, it was a proceedings journal typical of its time.

The early journal gave special attention to problems of economic biology, alongside the more basic concerns of naturalists then and now. The members recognized the value of a good floristic/faunistic groundwork, so that species lists appeared from time to time. Beyond this, there are some notable biases that undoubtedly arose from the particular interests of those members who happened to be most active. Most strikingly, there was virtually no attention to marine life. And there was much more about animals – especially amphibians, reptiles and birds – than about plants and fungi. Birds received much less attention then than now.

Numbers of the post-1956 revived journal have been reasonably accessible, at least in Trinidad, to those determined to find them, but until now those from 1892-96 have effectively been hidden from most of us. This very convenient CD will thus be welcomed by many. It comprises 11 files readable in Acrobat. The first of these is an introduction and table of contents compiled by the editors. The entire pages of volumes 1-2 are divided in sequence among the remaining 10 files. Each volume comprises a little over 300 pages and includes its own subject/taxonomic index, useful in searching for particular topics.

The files were produced by scanning an original set of the journal. Not surprisingly, the available numbers were not always in prime condition after all these years, so that the print is not modernly crisp. Even so, one can read every passage without undue effort. This handsomely-produced set of the early *Journal of the Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club* is a bargain for local naturalists, archivists, libraries, and others who understand along with William Faulkner that "The past is not dead; in fact, it is not even past."

## REFERENCES

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