

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

QUARTERLY BULLETIN JANUARY 1979

Dear Member,

You are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Club to be held at the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College, on Thursday 11th January 1979 at 5.30 p.m.

AGENDA

1. Confirmation of Minutes of last A.G.M.
2. Business arising out of the Minutes.
3. Honorary Secretary's Report for 1978.
4. Honorary Treasurer's Report for 1978.
5. Election of Officers for 1979.
6. Other Business.

FIELD EXCURSION

The first Field Excursion for 1979 will be held on Sunday 28th January to upper Lady Chancellor Road. Members are asked to assemble at the lower end of the Lady Chancellor Road, near the Queens Park Savannah to leave at 7.30 a.m.

CONSERVATION EDUCATION PROGRAMME

By Circular Letter dated 6th October 1978 the Secretary of our Environmental Conservation Committee invited members to volunteer their assistance in the Club's Conservation Education Projects to be launched early in 1979. Members who have not yet completed the form which was attached to the Circular may still do so and submit it to the President or Honorary Secretary at the Annual General Meeting.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Members are reminded that the Annual Subscription of \$10 and \$5 for Junior Members became payable on 1st January. The Honorary Treasurer will be receiving Annual Subscriptions at the A.G.M. This year the Club is committed to the publication of its 1979 Journal and the reprinting of the Club's Rules, and will need all the funds that it can get.

FRIGHTENING NEWS (V.C. Quesnel)

All naturalists interested in conservation should try to read the news of the Conservation Biology Conference held in San Diego, California recently and reported in Science News, 30th Sept 1978, p 233. Here are some of the highlights. Michael Soule and Bruce Wilcox estimate that as wild animals are increasingly confined to game reserves where populations will be much smaller than previously, animals and plants will stop evolving and become extinct from the accumulated genetic defects caused by inbreeding. They estimate that in East African national parks about 11% of the large mammal species will become extinct as a result of inbreeding within 50 years, 44% within 500 years and 77% within 5000 years. Since there is a relation between the size of game reserves and the rate of extinction and game reserves will occupy only 1.5% of the earth's surface by the end of the century, the eventual loss of terrestrial species will be about 3.5 million.

This theme was continued by Timothy Whitmore of Oxford University. He calculates that at least 5000 individuals are required to preserve sufficient genetic diversity in large trees to prevent extinction. With the rate of exploitation now operating tropical forests may be reduced to scattered fragments by a.d. 2000 with little chance of regeneration. However, Ian Franklin of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization of Sydney, Australia believes that as many as 500,000 individuals may be required to preserve sufficient genetic diversity for any species to flourish. If this is so, large animals that are already in relatively small numbers are in grave danger.

MAKING LISTS (Richard French)

A non-event of some significance took place in our household recently, when at 6.40 a.m. on 21st Nov. 1978 my wife and I saw a white-tailed golden-throat hummingbird feeding at the Russelia shrub beside our veranda. What made it significant was the fact that this was the 100th species of bird recorded by us in or from our garden at Pointe-a-Pierre since we took up residence in our present house in July 1976.

In his fascinating and amusing book "A naturalist in Trinidad" Brooke Worth discussed the value and apparent fatuity of making such lists, involving counts of species recorded in this or that place. Some people are "list-makers" and some aren't. I am one, and am prepared to defend the practice as a valuable and often absorbing pastime.

The value is of course not in the fact of amassing a particular total, or of reaching a round number, but in the actual practice of observation and recording which the list-making activity entails. When I sit on my veranda looking out at the reservoir, on whose banks I am fortunate enough to reside, I am always subconsciously, if not consciously, noting items of natural history which gradually build up in my mind some understanding of the ecosystem surrounding me. What the list-making does is provide an extra incentive towards constant observation and storing information. It cultivates a useful habit, and at the same time occasionally supplies a source of statistics which may turn out to be not so useless after all. I recommend it seriously to all budding naturalists.

Lists may be compiled in a number of ways. They may be lists of species recorded over a long period in a particular area, lists of species recorded in different months, lists of plants at which a particular animal is found feeding, even "life-lists" of every species recorded anywhere (though this last may turn into a mere collector's fad). But the activity is at least almost always harmless, and at best may well lead one on to more important things.

FIELD TRIP TO EL NARANJO ESTATE ON 24TH SEPT. 1978

On Sunday 24th Sept. we visited El Naranjo Estate in the heights of Aripo. The usual convoy of cars wound up the Aripo Road raising a cloud of dust that made life a little uncomfortable for those at the rear. Branching off to the left about four miles up the valley we crossed the Naranjo River several times, charmed by the beauty of the clear water bubbling along in a succession of cascades. Coming out into the open at the entrance to the estate we found the valley widening out before us and the sun shining down on masses of yellow flowers of Cassia multijuga - a most refreshing sight.

When we were all collected at the estate house, Albert the overseer, spoke to us briefly on the history of the estate and its present cultivation which includes about sixty acres of anthuriums. Other flowering plants are also cultivated so the estate is very attractive to humming birds. In

addition, artificial feeders hang about the gallery of the house and the presence there of bananaquits is fiercely resented by the humming birds who continually dispute ownership with them. High on the wall of the house was a nest of the lesser swallow-tailed swift, Panyptila cayenensis, a long stocking of plant down woven together and cemented with saliva. The opening is at the bottom and the bird must climb upward a foot or more to reach the eggs on a ledge near the top.

Our walk through the cultivation revealed bromeliads, gingers, heliconias, Marantaceae and many other colourful plants in addition to the anthuriums. In the surrounding bush I found several of the common Rubiaceae, some palms and a specimen of the small tree, Tabernaemontana undulata, locally called roi de mapipire because an infusion of the root is reputed to be a cure for snake bite. The flowers resemble those of the cultivated periwinkle or old maid, to which it is related, but are always white with some pink on the tube of the corolla instead of the many colours of the periwinkle.

On returning to the house we spent a short time watching the humming birds but saw only the common white-breasted emerald. There was no sign of the jacobin, a humming bird which, though rare, is known to visit the estate.

By this time some people had already left for home but about half the original party set out along the road up the valley hoping to get to the ridge separating Aripo from Guanapo. However, the road petered out into an uninteresting track through a cacao plantation. We had taken a wrong route and by the time we found the right one it was past midday, the sun was hot and we were all a little tired. Only six climbed the ridge leading to guanapo and only three reached the ridge. The patch of forest we passed through seemed to have none of the familiar plants we knew from so many previous field trips and the reason is not immediately obvious. To explore this we would require another visit but we had done enough for one day.

ST ANN'S PEAK (V.C. Quesnel)

In the last bulletin I promised more news of a second trip to the area of St Ann's peak. On the club's field trip of 27th August we did not reach St Ann's peak having mistaken the peak with the screens for St Ann's. On 25th Sept. John and Anne Hilton and Frankie Farrel and myself returned to the area. We went by way of Cashew Hill and on reaching the wide road leading to the peak with the screens we ignored this and turned down the Fondes Amandes Road. This took us eventually to a low spot on the ridge where we explored an old house site from which we could look in the Santa Cruz valley and out along the Northern Range to El Tucuche. Then, turning east along the ridge, we followed a well marked trail to the screens. We continued along the ridge past the screens and eventually came to the junction with Ariapita Road by which we returned. From here to the top there was a wide and apparently well-travelled trail to the peak. Now we know how to get to the peak and we know that our troubles on 25th August were caused by drifting off the Fondes Amandes Road. For a map of the trails in the area see Trinidad Naturalist Nov. - Dec. 1978.

FIELD TRIP TO CANARI BAY

Canari Bay, the site of the club's field trip of 29th Oct. 1978, is a secluded little bay on the south coast of Trinidad about 12 km east of Moruga. Few members of the club had even heard of it, much less visited it, and most members looked forward to the trip with keen anticipation. The original plan was to have two parties one going by boat and the other going overland from Edwards Trace. However, when we got to Basse Terre, the village where the parties were to separate, our guide for the overland trip reported that the whole area was extremely muddy and that in his opinion the trip would take twenty four hours. The last statement was probably an intentional gross overestimate but we decided to have everyone go by boat. We proceeded to Móruga seven or eight kilometres down the road.

The beach at Moruga was an ecological disaster area. Dead fish and other debris littered the beach. A long, stagnant pool of filthy water separated the beach from the village and the stench of rotting fish filled the air. On the other hand, the water at Canari was surprisingly clear for a south coast bay and many members opted for a swim on arrival. I turned my attention to the sea-shore vegetation and almost immediately came upon a couple of specimens of the spiny Bassanacantha phyllosepala, a plant I had searched for in other dry places and had not found. Also, to my surprise, there was a luxuriant, flowering specimen of Drymonia serrulata, a common epiphyte of the family Gesneriaceae that I had always found previously in places much wetter than I imagined this to be. If it were not so large and untidy it would have possibilities as a garden ornamental for foliage,

flowers and fruit are all decorative.

I was anxious to explore the forest inland and a party of seven or eight of us forced our way through the rather tangled growth near the beach and found a path leading to a wooded area. Here we noticed that the forest was different from the forests in the northern range. It would take a more detailed survey of species than we made and counts of individual species to establish the reasons for the difference but here is what we noted. Sandbox (Hura crepitans), Naked Indian (Bursera simaruba), Hog Plum (Spondias mombin) and wild coffee (Faramea occidentalis) were common, the last-named even abundant. Represented by one or two specimens were fustic (Chlorophora tinctora), bois pois (Swartzia pinnata), mountain rose (Brownea latifolia) and Cuchape (Coccoloba latifolia). I had learned to recognise fustic on the club's trip to Quinam Bay some years ago when we were fortunate to have a forester along with us. It has spines and a serrated leaf margin. Swartzia can be recognised by the yellow flowers and knobly seed pods springing straight from the main trunk of the tree. In addition to these there were, of course, many we could not recognise, and in the undergrowth the ever-present balisier (Heliconia bihai) and various members of the Rubiaceae. A night blooming cactus (Hylocereus lemairei) clung to the bole of one of the larger trees and vines of the species Paullinia leiocarpa climbed up into the canopy. Paullinia is recognizable by its winged leaf stalk and rachis (rather like that of Inga) and round, bright red, hairy fruit.

We returned to the beach just in time to board the boats for the trip back and learned of the activities of others en route. Hans Boos had explored an old cocoa plantation and drying sheds. He had found the following lizards Conatofes vittatus, G. humeralis, Sphaerodactylus molei, Thecadactylus rapicauda. We added Plica plica to the list. Edward Rooks, who was studying butterflies, recorded six Pierids, some Heliconids, a couple of Satyrids and the zebra (Colubura dirce) all common butterflies in other parts of Trinidad.

All in all, it was an enjoyable trip despite the stink at Moruga.

27th December 1978

Ian Lambie

Honorary Secretary