

# THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

31st March 1980

## MEETING - 2ND QUARTER

You are invited to attend the meetings of the club to be held on 10th April, 8th May and 12th June 1980. At each meeting the agenda will be:-

1. Confirmation of minutes
2. Business arising from the minutes
3. Announcements
4. Lecture
5. Exhibits and Miscellaneous Notes
6. Other business.

The lectures will be:-

- 10th April - Life in the Worlds of Bromeliads by Dr. J.S. Kenny.  
8th May - Caribbean Flora by Dr. Dennis Adams.  
12th June - Humming birds by Mr. Ian Lambie.

## FIELD TRIPS

27th April - Fig Walk via Salibea River.

Departure 6.00 a.m. from St. Mary's College, Pembroke St with a short stop at Curepe Roundabout at 6.30 a.m. For those wishing to camp overnight from 26th, arrangements will be announced at the 10th April meeting.

23rd - 26th May - Details later. Write them in this space for easy reference.

29th June - Mt. Harris. Departure 7.00 a.m. from St. Mary's College, Pembroke St. Short stop at Curepe roundabout at 7.30 a.m.

## 1980 NATURAL HISTORY SEMINARS

The programme of the 1980 Seminar/Workshops at the Asa Wright Nature Centre is as follows:  
Nature Photography June 12 - 26      Drawing & Painting June 26 - July 10  
Ornithology July 10 - 24      Entomology July 24 - August 7.      Tropical Ecology Aug. 7 - 21.

Participation Fee is \$550.00 which covers accommodation and food, transportation on Field Trips including Tobago and expert guidance from qualified leaders. Junior Members of the Club who have reached "O" Level standard in Botany, Zoology, Biology or Art may apply to the President, Asa Wright Nature Centre P.O. Bag 10, Port of Spain. Starting their academic qualifications, for a Scholarship to participate in the Seminar/Workshop programme.

## REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

Least Tern sightings - I have initiated research on the population dynamics and distribution of Least Terns on the Texas coast (USA) to identify possible causes of a recent decline in breeding pairs. Both adult and young terns will be marked with colored wing tags (streamers) during the 1979, 1980, and 1981 breeding seasons. Tags will be placed on both wings and will bear a single letter and digit for individual recognition of birds. Anyone observing Least Terns marked in this manner is requested to record: date, time, specific location, tag color, letter and digit, general activity, plumage description, association with other birds, observation distance and direction, and name, address, and telephone number of observer.

Please send information to: Bruce C. Thompson, Dept. of Wildlife & Fisheries Sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843, USA. Also, report sightings of marked terns to: Bird Banding Laboratory, Office of Migratory Bird Management, ISFWS, Laurel, Maryland 20811, USA.

Note. Least Terns are particularly likely to be seen at the Nariva River mouth.

## BIRD NOTES (Richard French)

Recent research and information on birds include the following:-

The Scarlet Tanager Piranga olivacea was first reported for Tobago by Huxley on May 1, 1966 (Bond, 1968, 13th Supplement to Checklist of W. Indies Birds, p.12). This precedes my earlier report in this Bulletin of a male seen at Crown Point in April 1978. Bond also reports a first record for Tobago, hardly credible, of the Summer Tanager Piranga rubra, made by the same observer on May 2, 1966. Could these have been the same bird?

An interesting recovery of a banded bird reported by Bond (14th Supplement, 1969, p.10) was of a Manx or Common Shearwater Puffinus puffinus found at Manzanilla Beach on Nov. 10, 1968. It had been banded at Skokholm, Wales on August 30, 1967. Regular checks of the Manzanilla beach would undoubtedly reveal more interesting Shearwater recoveries.

Professor Stanley Harris from California made some interesting observations during a trip to T. & T. last February. These included a Hook-billed Kite at Simla, an American Kestrel near Arima and a White-winged Swallow also at Simla. The latter seems most odd, since this species is normally associated with lakes, rivers and seacoast, and has never before been recorded in the hills. Could it have been a swift, possibly Panyptila?

Mary Hahn of Valsayn has followed up her observations of Hook-billed Kites, reported here earlier, with a Jan. 1979 record of an immature bird, whose call she also tape-recorded. The call might be described as a musical rattle, rising slightly in pitch in the middle, and lasting about 1½ seconds.

Little work has been done on recording the activities and status of the more unusual visiting warblers, so it seems worthwhile to report briefly here on the occurrence in my garden at Pointe-a-Pierre of the Prothonotary Warbler Protonotaria citrea. First seen on November 14, 1977 feeding in a bougainvillea bush, this tiny bird with the brilliant orange-yellow head was seen on 18 more days up to January 25, 1978. The fact that most observations were in the early morning and late afternoon probably only reflects the fact that those were the times we were about to see it! It mostly fed in small trees or shrubs, searching about in the foliage for small invertebrates. It also frequently came to the bird bath or sprinkler to bathe, and was once seen hawking for flies. Late in December it showed some sign of moult, but this had disappeared by late January. It was very evidently the same bird we were seeing, as it tended to frequent the same feeding trees, as well as the water; so the above confirms the status of the species as a winter resident, rather than merely a passage migrant. The species has been seen again in our garden only on Jan. 20 and 21 this year, but of course we can't claim it to be the same individual.

(Postscript. A recent visit on January 27 to the Croupouche caves showed that the Oilbirds are thriving in the colony there. A rough estimate of the numbers was 400.)



## FIELD TRIP TO THE BOTANIC GARDENS AND THE ZOO - (V.C. Quesnel)

This trip was arranged primarily to give members an opportunity to see the effects the work of the Save Our Savannay Committee has had on the appearance of the Botanic Gardens. We were pleasantly surprised. Some years ago the Gardens had become very untidy; now the lawns were cut and the edges trimmed.

The "showpieces" were as impressive as ever, the mighty brazil nut, the graceful palms, the avenue of bay trees, the spreading banyan tree. Look Out Hill was free of the lastro which had disgraced its slopes for several years but many of the poui trees had been damaged by fire and although several remained some may still succumb to the after effects of the fires. In the north-west corner, some coffee, cacao, and mango trees had been recently planted, apparently as examples of important crops, and, hopefully, others will follow. There were several local plants such as bois mulatre, chaconia, mountain rose and the hat stand tree (*Rheedia lateriflora*). However, the little cemetery seems to have been neglected and should be restored. Purdie, the second curator of the Gardens is buried there.

The visit to the zoo was uneventful: the party split up into small groups each pursuing its own course and for those like me who had not visited the zoo for many years, it was a pleasure to note how the present curator had improved the appearance of the place and the collection. Keep up the good work Hans.

## FIELD TRIP TO MORUGA (Anne Hilton)

Honorary Treasurer John Hilton estimated that 80 members, friends and assorted children were assembled on the oilfield road to listen to David Rooks's advice to beware of the spines on the *Bactris* palms in the forest on the walk to the Moruga Bouffe on 10th February.

On this occasion the Club was confident of finding the Bouffe. Although Victor Quesnel was unable to accompany us and Frankie Farrell was delayed, David Rooks, Neville Acham, Hans and Julius Boos had also been to the Bouffe in the past few months and had brought along compasses to make sure that we didn't get lost. Already there had been some anxious moments on the way to Moruga. Landslides had carried away 150 feet of the Moruga Road late last year and the damage was still to be repaired. This forced us to take a hair-raising detour on the Rock River Road.

While waiting for the cars that took a wrong turning at Moruga, Peter Dixon caught a *Leptotyphlops tenella* and on turning over a log discovered a dark brown miniature scorpion. Members gathered around to examine the find but unfortunately no one was brave enough to collect it nor could any one identify the beast as Julius Boos had gone on ahead in search of butterflies.

Although Barcant doubts the existence of *Pyrrhogyra c. crameri* in Trinidad, Matthew Cock collected a specimen of this butterfly on the road just before we entered the forest. W.J. Kaye had noted 2 specimens of *Pyrrhogyra c. crameri* in his supplement to the list of butterflies of Trinidad (published 1940); the first was collected by F. Birch in 1905 at Erin, the second collected by E. Fabian in 1922 at Moruga.

On the walk through the bush some 50 meters short of the Bouffe, David Rooks found scattered shells of Morocco eggs.

The Bouffe proved to be well worth the drive, the prickly *Bactris* palms, and the walk. Members clambered up the 3-4 meters high sides of the largest of the mud volcanoes to watch gas bubbles slowly forming and bursting in the cool, sticky, liquid grey mud. Julius Boos pointed out the fossil vegetation being belched out of an oval-shaped seep nearby. Curious children poked sticks into craters large and small, David Rooks drew attention to deer spoor on the smooth, flat stretches of solidified mud between the smaller volcanoes and seeps on the eastern side of the Bouffe.

Frankie Farrell, having sternly resisted the temptation to botanise on his way through the bush, arrived to identify the two types of bromeliad that are abundant in this poor environment. Robert Stanley found a hunting spider lurking in the cracks of mud at the crest of a cone of a 50cm. high and very active mud volcano. Hans Boos went fishing in the mud bubbling from a 75 cm. diameter cone and caught several guabine (*Rivulus hartii*).

On the walk back to the road Robert Stanley pointed out a tunnel under the root of a large, unidentified tree. David Rooks believed it to be the home of a racoon (*Euprocyon cancrivorus*) since there were racoon tracks all around the tree.

Other finds were a freshwater conch shell close to the racoon burrow, the common lizard *Plica plica* and a flat-headed cascudu (*Callichthys callichthys*).

Back on the road the party split in two, half going back to the cars for food and drink while the other half walked a kilometer or so up the road and into the bush to see an immense silk-cotton tree, *Ceiba*, complete with trailing lianes. Younger members and Neville Acham played Tarzan while the less active scrambled around the massive buttress roots. It was impossible to estimate the height or spread of the buttresses because loggers had felled a tree which had fallen across and was partly supported by two of the buttresses; however, members agreed that this must be one of the largest and most magnificent silk cotton trees in Trinidad.

Altogether the trip to Moruga Bouffe was most interesting and incident-free. The only casualty was David Rooks who, having warned us all to beware of them, 'collected' a spine from a *Bactris* palm on the back of his hand.

Note (V.Q.) A complete listing of all the plants in the open area was made and samples of mud were taken for analysis. Results later.

The 1981-82 journal. That July\*deadline for articles draws ever closer. Intending contributors have just 4 months to complete their papers. Please get on with it.

The Annual Subscription of \$20 (Junior members \$10) is due and payable to the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. John Hilton, 4, The Straight, Cascade.

V.C. QUESNEL (Hon. Sec.)