

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

MEETINGS - 4TH QUARTER 1984

You are invited to attend the monthly meetings of the Club to be held in the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College on October 11th and November 8th 1984 at 5.30 p.m.

A G E N D A

1. Confirmation of Minutes
2. Business arising out of the Minutes
3. Lecture
4. Announcements
5. Exhibits and Miscellaneous Notes
6. Other Business

L E C T U R E S

Oct. 11th - The Orchids of Trinidad by Prof. Julian Kenny

Nov. 8th - The Forgotten Plants by Dr. Julian Duncan

F I E L D T R I P S

Oct. 28th - BalataBay (Leave POS 7.00 a.m.)

Nov. 24/25th Gasparee or Scotland Bay (Leave POS 7.00 a.m.)

December - Christmas Party - Please come prepared to discuss and assist with the organization of same.

MEMBERS EVENING - AUGUST 1984 As you all will probably be aware the following groups were organized at this meeting:-

Exploration Group led by Dave Ramnarine and Glen Wilkes

Turtle Project led by Molly Gaskin

Bird Watching led by Ann Marie Kacal with assistance from Richard ffrench and David Rooks

Photography Group led by Muriel Pierre and R. Ragbir

Reptiles and Amphibians led by Hans Boos

Butterfly Group - n e e d s a LEADER

Marine and Land Snails led by Genevieve Van den Exnde and Steven Kalpee

In order to survive these groups need the support of members. Hence this is a call to all members to join the group which may most interest you OR failing this to come forward and suggest if you would like to form another group. Suggestions are ALWAYS welcome. The aim is to have a very active and vibrant club.

Excursion to Tobago, 22nd to 24th June 1984 by Frankie Farrell

The party of 22 naturalists caught the Friday afternoon ferry to Tobago and enjoyed a rather smooth passage over. The tedious journey from Scarborough to Charlotteville brought them, tired and hungry, to Turpin's bungalows somewhere close to midnight.

The next morning the party went by small boat to Little Tobago. Two trips had to be made. The arrangements were made through the kind courtesy of Keith Musgrave of the Forestry Division. On the way across a bridled tern, STERNA ANAETHETUS, was seen. This rather uncommon tern is dard above and white below and is characterized by a white collar separating the black back from the black crown. It has been observed to breed on Little Tobago.

Little Tobago like all small islands has quite a limited flora which enables the naturalist to make a check list of the most common plants quite easily. The most

prominent feature of the vegetation is that a large part of the island is covered by a forest in which the most common tree is a palm, *COCOTHRINAX AUSTRALIS*, forming with other trees a very discontinuous canopy about 15 metres high and covering an undergrowth made up largely of an aroid, *ANTHEURIUM HUEGELII* or possibly *CEMINI*, growing sometimes on fairly bare limestone rock. This undergrowth is seen sometimes in other places, such as the Islands of Monos, Huevos and Chacachacare, but never in quite the profusion found on Little Tobago. *Cocothrinax* has palmate leaves and at the base of the trunk, just above ground, a bunch of very fine interwoven rootlets the purpose of which, to this observer, appears to be quite obscure.

A fairly common plant also was the Naked Indian or Gommier tree, *EURSERA SIMARUBA*, with its green bark peeling off in brown thin flakes like tissue-paper. Other trees seen were bois cannon (*CECROPIA PELTATA*), bamboo, *BAMBUSA VULGARIS*, hog plum, *SPONDIAS MONBIN*, and a tree with flowers growing straight out of the main trunk which I was unable to identify. Undergrowth plants seen were *APHELANDRA TETRAGONA* with its scarlet tube-like flowers, a few cacti and a jumbie bead vine, *AERUS PRECATORIUS*.

As I walked along I kept seeing from time to time a few blue-crowned motmots, *MOMOTUS MOMOTA*, which seemed fairly tame and allowed me to get fairly close before flying away.

A trip was arranged for Sunday but at the appointed time our guide did not turn up. We arranged our own trip accordingly and drove our cars westward along Man-o-War Bay for some distance and then got out and walked as far as Hermitage Village. Nothing very outstanding was observed on this walk.

LIVING WORLD 1985 - 1986 (V. Quesnel)

I hope to start editing the material for this issue in early December so papers for publication should reach me by December 1, 1984 if at all possible. Contributions do not have to be long. Short notes on recent records or observations that are not likely to be repeated are welcome. Anything that is not suitable for the journal can go in the Quarterly Bulletin.

Incorrect record of the American Oystercatcher for Trinidad (V. Quesnel)

In the last bulletin I described my sighting of a spectacular bird, new to me, and my identification of it as the American Oystercatcher. At that time I did not have good pictures of this bird or of the Southern Lapwing (*Vanellus chilensis*) that showed the distinctive wing and tail patterns of both birds. I have now seen good pictures of them and with David Rooks I have seen the Southern Lapwing in the Oropouche Lagoon and there is no doubt now that the bird I reported as the American Oystercatcher is in fact the Southern Lapwing. Thus, there is still no recent record of the Oystercatcher for Trinidad. However, there is nothing to invalidate David Rooks' recent record of it in Tobago as described in the last bulletin.

Field trip to Morne Diablo Wildlife Sanctuary on 29th July 1984 (V. Quesnel)

In spite of prior arrangements there was no guide from the Forestry Division to take us to the Morne Diablo mud volcano which is a conspicuous feature of the Morne Diablo reserve. We eventually found the manager of the teak plantation who agreed to take us to a mud volcano he knew but on looking at the map later I concluded that the volcano he took us to was not the Morne Diablo volcano but the Landorf mud volcano. It was a long, hot walk to the site on a newly bulldozed road through the teak plantation. There was little of interest to see for most of the way but I noted that the Blue-black Grassquit, *Volatinia jacarina*, did manage to thrive even in teak plantations that are well known for their lack of wildlife. The area of the mud volcanoes was like that of the Moruga Bouffe with several large cones and a vegetation-free area or tassik. I made a list of the plants at the edge of the tassik but cannot find it now. I remember the vegetation being much like that of the Moruga Bouffe.

I spent some time with our guide in the small area of native forest nearby trying to learn some of the large trees. He pointed out *acoma*, *acoma topi*, *moussara*, *jiggerwood* and some others which I did not know and probably now cannot recognize again. However, of the plants I do know hog plum and sandbox were by far the most common. For me the trip was notable for the finding of a flowering specimen of a "rube" I knew previously from only one locality, Pointe Gourde. It has remained unidentified for several years and is almost certainly a new species for Trinidad.

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Field trip to Mt. St. Benedict on 26th August 1984 (V. Quesnel)

In scheduling this trip the main purpose of the Management Committee was to provide an opportunity to assess the success or otherwise of the reforestation scheme. We assembled in the yard of the Abbey School (David Rooks please note that I was on hand to greet the party arriving from Port of Spain) to listen to a brief talk by our president and then followed Glen Wilkes' lead up a path on the eastern side of the ridge through undisturbed forest. For me this was a wonderful trip because all along the path different species of Rubiaceae were in full bloom. Most were species I had seen many times before but this did not lessen my delight in seeing them flowering so abundantly. One, however, was unusual. This was Cephaelis pubescens which I had seen only twice before, once in a scrub forest at Longdenville and once near the Erin Savanna. I was surprised to see it in the hills but the Flora contains records of it from several places in the Northern Range.

After a very pleasant walk through forest we came out on to a fire-scarred ridge where the vegetation was mainly grass and sedge with the typical savanna trees Curatella americana and Pyronima crassifolia. The white-flowered herb that attracted the attention of so many of us was identified from a specimen I collected as Myrosma canifolia, a member of the Marantaceae (arrowroot family) and, apparently, a constant feature of fire-scarred hills.

After resting and having lunch at a spot that afforded a wonderful view of the plains below most of the party proceeded back downhill but some pushed on to the site of a ruin on Mt. Tabor. On the way we passed the largest Genipa (monkey apple) tree I have ever seen, in full flower. From the peak we came down a different route to the west through the pine plantation where we were caught in a short but intense downpour of rain that made life uncomfortable for some minutes. When the rain cleared we could observe that the pines had grown appreciable since our last visit on 26th November 1978 but that very little shrub vegetation had grown up between the pines. The floor of the forest was mainly the grass and sedge mixture that the savanna had originally provided. Possibly, fires still ravage the area and prevent the regrowth of shrubs.

My impression was that there were relatively few birds or butterflies around but this may be a wrong impression. Notes on this from others who paid more attention would be welcome.

Luisa Zuniaga
Honorary Secretary

September 26, 1984.