

# THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

2ND QUARTER 1987

You are invited to attend the monthly meetings of the club to be held on Thursdays April 9th, May 14th and June 11th 1987 at 5.30 p.m. at the Audio Visual Room of St. Mary's College. Also the field trips as listed.

## A G E N D A

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

## L E C T U R E S

- April 9th - Medicinal Plants by Mr. Francis Morean  
May 14th - First Aid for the Field Naturalist by Dr. P. Poon King  
June 11th - Our Turtle Tagging Project by Ms. Molly Gaskin

## F I E L D T R I P S

- April 26th - Bush Bush (Leave POS 6.00 a.m.)  
May 24th - El Tucuche (Leave POS 6.00 a.m.)  
June 28th - Tobago or Bagatelle Road to Macqueripe

PLEASE NOTE: Children allowed only if accompanied by their parents who are to be responsible for them.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Became due on January 1st. If you are not financial please pay otherwise you will not receive any bulletins, etc. after this issue.

## FIELD TRIP TO GRAND FOND BAY, MONOS ISLAND, on 29/30th November 1986 - Frankie Farrell

This trip was in substitution for the programmed trip to Cedros due to uncertainty whether the rest house in that area, belonging to the Forestry Division, would be available. Probably because of the uncertainty only eight persons took the trip. The party was ferried from the Island Owners Depot to Monos by a large boat provided by the Institute of Marine Affairs.

On arrival at the usual camping spot at Grand Fond Bay the litter left by previous parties was immediately obvious. The group, in compliance with Field Naturalists' practice, had no intention of adding to the disgraceful and unsanitary display.

Even before the tents were put up a Mr. Griffith joined the party. Apparently he was occupying one of the vacation houses nearby. He claimed to be a lover of Nature but we found out that he was more hunter than naturalist. However he discovered a scorpion on a log lying across the pathway and this was collected for handing over to Hans Boos who was expected to turn up in his own boat but unfortunately did not. Griffith proved to be a voluminous talker, and among the many things he talked about was a big well nearby which provided the island in previous times with water and after which the bay, Grand Fond (big well), was named. One can picture the whalers of last century (perhaps the Tardieus from Scotland Bay) harpooning a whale off Point Baleine, coming in to Grand Fond with it to get water and to boil the whale fat at Copper Hole on the western arm of the bay.

The first walk was on the Saturday afternoon along the jeep road built by the Americans during World War II along the western arm of the bay. The intention was to reach Copper Hole at the extreme point of the bay. However it turned out that this was not possible as the road, easy at first and only slightly overgrown with vegetation, lost its tree canopy in certain sections resulting in the generation of very difficult patches of "lastro". Even with severe cutlassing progress was painfully slow and the party eventually turned back. The vegetation of Monos has been described in the accounts of previous trips and it is not proposed to repeat



the description here. One interesting feature worthy of mention however was the predominance in the undergrowth in certain sections of the walk of *ANTHURIUM JENMANII* displaying its rosette of large spatula-shaped leaves. This should not be confused with *ANTHURIUM HOOKERI* of very similar appearance which grows at higher altitudes mainly if not exclusively as an epiphyte on the forest trees.

On Saturday night the party went over to Mr. Griffith's house, and saw a number of large fish-eating bats, *NOCTILIO LEPORINUS*, catching their prey. The night sky was studded with brilliant stars and planets as it was practically cloudless, the air was clean and there were no competing ground lights. Mr. Griffith produced a very powerful and expensive pair of binoculars - so he took care to explain to us - and we observed among other things the two nebulae in Orion and Andromeda respectively.

On Sunday morning the attempt was made to scale the highest point on Monos on the northeastern side of the island. On a previous trip this ascent was made without too much difficulty as the vegetation was quite low due to dry-season fires and the main obstacle was razor grass, probably *SCLERIA REFLEXA*. This time, however, the vegetation had had some time to grow back and form a somewhat impenetrable growth of "lastro". Although the party struggled resolutely on with vigorous cutlassing for some distance it was realized that the ascent would take too long to enable the group on return to camp to have lunch, clear camp and prepare for departure. The second walk was therefore abandoned, but not before Roger Edghill, while cutlassing, came in contact with a pringamosa, *CNIDOSCOLUS URENS*, that plant with thorns capable of producing severe and lasting irritation. Fortunately he had quite a well-stocked first-aid kit from which he took a counter-irritant which effectively relieved him of much discomfort. On the flatland among the coconuts we found an old abandoned and filled up well, which may have been the original well mentioned before.

On return to camp Mr. Griffith turned up again and gave me specimens of a fern which he told me grew on the island, It proved to be the star fern, *HEMIONITIS PALMATA*.

Birds identified by members of the party were:- corbeau, *CORATYPS ATRATUS*; king corbeau, *CATHARTES AURA*; palm tanager, *THRAUPIS PALMARUM*; silver-beaked tanager, *RAMPHOCELUS CARBO*; sucrier or bananaquit, *COEREBA FLAVEOLA*; manakin (not positively identified) humming birds (not positively identified: tropical mockingbird, *MIMUS GILVUS*; and sandpiper (not positively identified).

#### SAMAN TREES - To Save or not to Save? (V. Quesnel)

For some years it has been obvious that saman trees are dying off regularly in our public parks, probably because of the attacks of the sap-sucking insect, *Poecilloptera phalenoides*. The matter came up for discussion at the February meeting of the club and I touched on it again at the March meeting saying that the trees are probably old since they may have been introduced at the time of Woodford's governorship, 1813 - 1828. On looking up saman in "The Useful and Ornamental Plants of Trinidad and Tobago" I found the following: "supposed to have been introduced into Trinidad by David Lockhart, the first botanist in charge of the Botanic Gardens, between 1818 and 1824". Thus, all the trees planted at that time are about 160 years old. I have no idea what the life span of a saman tree is in its native habitat but I think it possible that it may not be much longer than 160 years. If so all the trees we see in Port of Spain may be senescent. This may explain why they are so attractive to *P. phalenoides*.

In a healthy plant in an active anabolic state the pool of amino acids in the phloem sap is small; in unhealthy plants it is large. Biologists now believe that it is the amino acids that attract the attention of the sap-sucking insects whose activity perpetuates and intensifies the unhealthy condition which in turn attracts more insects. If untreated, the plant eventually dies. This is what seems to be happening to the saman trees. As they become senescent they become more attractive to *P. phalenoides* and eventually its activity causes the death of the tree. If I am right about all this it may be a waste of time and money to try to save the trees because they may die of old age in a few years even if the insects are killed. Perhaps it would be better to cut them down while the timber is still usable and plant new ones. The young trees grow relatively quickly and produce a reasonably-sized tree in 10 - 15 years.

PLEASE NOTE that we exhibited our photographic display of the Flora & Fauna of Trinidad and Tobago at the Horticultural Society's Flower Show last weekend and won the Bronze Medal or Third Prize under the classification "Educational Displays".



Field trip to Icacos on 24-25th January 1987 (V. Quesnel)

For the second time our group was accommodated at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Denis Murray at Constance Estate and we thank them for their hospitality. The first camp there in August 1985 attracted only a few people but was rich in rewards. This time there were many more people, 20 - 25, but less obvious bird life. Nevertheless, the group made many collections and one new record for Trinidad.

To start with the birds, there were no sandpipers and no plovers and the sunbittern we had seen last time (a first record but now thought to be an escapee from the pet trade) had disappeared. There was no sign of the Spotted Tody-flycatchers we had seen last time. Nevertheless, in addition to common birds, there were two ospreys and a replacement for the Tody-flycatcher by another unfamiliar flycatcher I thought was the Brown-crested Flycatcher, Myiarchus tyrannulus. The Buff-throated Wood-creeper and the Yellow-throated Spinetail both seemed fairly common here this time compared with last time. So the birds did provide some interest.

The Botany Group (Luisa, Frankie and I) collected many weeds (see list below) among which was the first record for Trinidad of Triumfetta semitriloba Jacq., a plant known from Tobago put previously not recorded from Trinidad.

The herpetologists (John Seyjagat, Graham White, A. Persaud, Peter Kowlessar and Linda Ahwai) were very active and collected a number of frogs and fishes and made many sightings of lizards (see list below). Quite remarkable was the observed nesting of a leatherback turtle on the night 24-25th Jan. well before the normal nesting season which starts in mid-March.

In the afternoon of 24th January an exploratory trip east of the swamp produced a mud volcano with a cone about two metres tall and one or two other nearby vents but nothing remarkable in the way of wildlife. All in all, though appearing to be not as interesting as the previous trip this one had its fair share of useful observations.

Plants collected

Spigelia anthelmia (Loganiaceae)  
Cyathula prostrata (Amaranthaceae)  
Achyranthes indica ( do )  
Hyptis mirabilis (Labiatae)  
Eupatorium odoratum (Compositae)  
Isocarpa bilbergiana (Compositae)  
Wedelia carcasana (Compositae)  
Elephantopus mollis (Compositae)  
Croton hirtus (Euphorbiaceae)  
Croton lobatus (Euphorbiaceae)  
Sesamum indicus (Pedaliaceae)  
Hyptis pectinata (Labiatae)

F R O G S collected

Hyla rubra  
Bufo marinus  
Phyllaemus pustulosus  
Leptodactylus fuscus  
Leptodactylus macrosternum  
Lept. bolivianus  
Phrynohyas venulosa  
Lept. wagneri  
Pseudis paradoxus

Fishes collected at Chatham drainage

Hemigrammus unilineatus  
Astyanax bimaculatus  
Hoplias malabaricus  
Erythrinus erythrinus  
Gasteropelecus sternicla  
Gymnotus carapo  
Rhamdia sp.  
Callichthys callichthys  
Corydoras aeneus  
Cichlasoma bimaculatum  
Crenicichla alta  
Corynapoma riisei

FISHES Collected at Fullerton Swamp

Tilapia mossambica  
Polycentrus schomburgkii  
Poecilia picta

Lizards seen or Collected

Iguana iguana  
Ameiva ameiva  
Cnemidophorus lemniscatus

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Luisa Zuniaga  
Honorary Secretary  
March 23, 1987.