

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

FIRST QUARTER OF 1989

HAPPY NEW YEAR

You are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the club to be held in the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College on Thursday 12th January 1989 at 5.30 p.m. Please note that this is the time to make any changes to the Management Committee so attend the meeting and cast your votes.

A G E N D A

1. Confirmation of the Minutes of the last A.G.M.
2. Business arising out of the Minutes
3. Honorary Secretary's Report for 1988
4. Honorary Treasurer's Report for 1988
5. Reports from all interest groups
6. Election of Officers for 1989
- * 7. Adoption of Proposed Amendment to Rule No. 13
8. Other Business

*BE IT RESOLVED that Rule No. 13 be amended to omit line 8 of that Rule - i.e. Quote "at least one of whom shall be a Junior Member". Unquote.

Rule 13 reads: "The affairs of the Club shall be vested in and conducted by the Management Committee which shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting. The Committee shall consist of the President, Vice-President, Honorary Treasurer, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Assistant Secretary and three other members, at least one of whom shall be a Junior Member. Five members shall form a quorum at meetings of the Management Committee. The Management Committee shall appoint sub-committees from its members and co-opt on these committees any other members it sees fit. All such sub-committees and committees shall present an annual report on their activities to the Honorary Secretary one month before the Annual General Meeting."

NOTES to the Election of Officers:

- (1) In accordance with Rule No. 5, the President is not eligible for re-election this year. (He has already served three consecutive years)
- (2) Because of personal affairs the Vice-President cannot offer his services for any post in 1989.
- (3) All other officers being eligible offer themselves for re-election. However, it is up to members to make wanted changes.
- (4) Members elected to the Management Committee must be (a) Financial and (b) prepared to attend all meetings of the Committee and as far as possible of the Membership.
- (5) Honorary Auditors and other Committees - Must also be financial members.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Become due on January 2, 1989. Please pay early so that you can receive all bulletins etc. Adults \$30.00 - Juniors \$15.00.

You are also invited to attend the monthly meetings to be held on Thursdays February 9th and March 9th 1989 at 5.30 p.m. at the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College.

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

- Feb. 9th - Coral Reefs in Trinidad and Tobago by Mr. Richard Laydoo
Mar. 9th - Structure and Ecology of Trinidad Forests by Mr. T. F. Farrell.

F I E L D T R I P S

- Jan. 28/29th - Grand Riviere/Platanal Trail (Camp)
Feb. 26th - North Oropouche Water Intake.
Mar. 25/26th - Little Tobago (A change may be necessary here as this is Easter Weekend)

E S P E C I A L L Y F O R N E W M E M B E R S

What to expect from the Club and what the Club expects of you.

1. The Club has monthly lectures/meetings and outings which you are invited to attend. When on outings members are required to observe the objectives of the Club, especially in the conservation of Nature and natural resources which of course demands that the surroundings be left as intact and as clean as possible. All garbage should be taken back with you to be disposed of and not left behind for other members to have to collect. No musical instruments should be brought on field trips to the forests - on these trips we want to listen to the music of nature. Young children will be allowed only if accompanied by parents or guardians. Every member should bring along his or her basic requirements for the day i.e. water and food. In the rainy season a change of clothing is recommended.
2. Quarterly bulletins are sent to all financial members. The annual subscription becomes payable in January.
3. Biennially you will receive a copy of the Club's Journal "Living World".

Field trip along the Hololo Mountain Road on July 31, 1988 (V. Quesnel)

Back in the 1940s a well-kept trail ran from the upper end of the Lady Chancellor Road around the head of the St. Ann's valley and over the ridge into the Santa Cruz valley, joining the main road at Paxvale. The Hololo Mountain Road starts near the St. Ann's HiLo, runs up the ridge that separates St. Ann's from Cascade and joins this trail. It was our intention to take the Hololo Road to the Lady Chancellor Road extension and follow it to Santa Cruz if possible.

We gathered at the Emperor Valley Zoo at 7.00 a.m., parked our cars in the parking lot and walked through the Botanic Gardens to St. Ann's where we began our ascent in bright weather with lots of butterflies feeding at the flowering shrubs that grew by the side of the trail. As we left the houses behind we were quick to notice that water had eroded the trail and that there were many patches on the hillside where gardeners, having felled and cleared away the trees, were trying to scratch a living from vegetable crops grown in the rather shallow soil. There were many weeds on this part of the trail and I made a small collection which I subsequently took to the National Herbarium for identification.

Towards the head of the valley (Cascade) the trail passed through land that had been cultivated in tree crops and then through degraded forest. When we reached the Lady Chancellor Rd Extension Glen Wilkes, with a small party, headed for Santa Cruz but was unable to go all the way to Paxvale because the track was badly overgrown. The rest of us had lunch at a shady spot on the ridge after which I explored the forest briefly. At about 600 m we were high enough to be in Lower Montane Forest where, according to Beard (Natural Vegetation of Trinidad) the four most abundant trees forming the canopy are bois gris (Licania ternatensis), mahoe (Sterculia caribaea), serrette (Byrsonima spicata) and wild debasse (Licania biglandulosa). The only one of these I noticed was mahoe but there were others that occur in this type of forest such as hogplum (Spondias mombin), locust (Hymenaea coubaril) and poui (Tabebuia serratifolia). Chaconia (Warszewiczia coccinia), bois l'agli (Ryania speciosa) and bois tatou (Rudgea freemani), three common understorey trees in this type of forest, were also in evidence. But other trees such as saltfishwood (Macherium robinifolium), cypre (Cordia alliodora), naked indian (Bursera simaruba), bloodwood (Croton gossypifolia), maraquil (Cupania americana), bois canot (Cecropia peltata) and cutlet (Citharexylum broadwayi). This might indicate that the forest on this ridge is now a traditional type of forest caused in part by man's activities. The cutlet tree was the first of its kind I had seen and I don't know if I could recognize it again. It was in flower and I was able to identify it later from flowers I collected. Chaconia and bois tatou were also in flower.

I did not pay too much attention to birds. Most of the ones I saw were common enough but the Squirrel Cuckoo (Piaya cayana) and the longbilled Gnatwren (Ramphocaenus melanurus) were among the less commonly seen ones. I was hoping to see some hawks and kept myself alert for them but there was no sign of any.

Our way home was by a different route. We proceeded along the trail to Lady Chancellor Road which was overgrown and virtually obliterated in places and came eventually to St. Ann's peak (625 m). We did not delay there but headed down the St. Ann's valley arriving at the zoo well after 4 p.m. By that time, of course, there were lots of visitors at the zoo and some inconsiderate persons had parked their cars so that some of us could not move ours. A disappointing end to a day of rather tiring walking. It is sad, too, to find that the old trail which was such a pleasant one in the 1940s has deteriorated to the extent it has.

Field trip to Mt. Harris Forest Reserve on September 25, 1988 (T.F. Farrell)

Mount Harris Forest Reserve is a fairly extensive area on hilly land in the East-Central part of Trinidad. It is easily accessible as the Cunapo Southern Road from Sangre Grande to Rio Claro runs through it for a few miles. The Forest Division has added different trees to the natural vegetation from time to time with the result that the observer of the flora will encounter a greater variety of trees than he would ordinarily find in any one section of untouched forest. In a previous trip to this forest, arranged by the Forest Division, a number of foresters were able to show to members of the Club interested in the flora a wide variety of trees. As this trip has been fully described in a previous bulletin and as nothing outstanding was observed on this trip there is little to be said in this report.

As none of the usual leaders of field trips was available on this occasion the leadership fell on me. As I was unable to remember from the previous trip mentioned above the exact point at which we entered the forest to get to Mt. Harris, the highest point in the area, I enlisted the aid of a resident of the area who assured me that he was often employed by the Forest Division to do work in the forest and was well acquainted with the area. He informed me that forest fires in the dry seasons of 1987 and 1988 had destroyed certain sections of the forest and he had been employed to assist in the regeneration of these areas. He took us to one of them and showed us how the new trees had been planted in rows. Three types were being used: mahogany (foreign and local - so described by our guide), cedar and appamate - the pink poui. Actually however, mahogany is not native to Trinidad. The two mahogany species were SWIETENIA MAHAGONI, the West Indian Mahogany and S. MACROPHYLLA, the British Honduras Mahogany. The cedar was CEDRELA MEXICANA and the Appamate, TABEBUIA PENTAPHYLLA (a non-native)

Our guide then took us to another area where a path led from the Cunapo Southern Road into the forest. Going uphill at first we soon reached a spot where a branch of the pathway led to a small waterfall. Due to the heavy rainfall during the month of September the volume of water was much greater than I have ever seen before. A little further on there was a water tank, the purpose of which we were unable to make out. We thought the pathway would lead us to Mount Harris where we would have a view of the surrounding countryside, especially the Nariva Swamp, but the guide did not seem to know this part of the forest and would go no further. Following along the path which had now levelled out somewhat, we went some considerable distance without finding a spot that could be recognised as Mt. Harris. There was nothing left to do but to return along the pathway to the Cunapo Southern Road.

FIELD Trip to El Tucuche on October 30, 1988 (V. Quesnel) and (T. F. Farrell)

After having decided at the October 13th meeting that we should go to El Tucuche via the Caura trail I was induced to change my mind about that on the morning of the trip itself as we assembled at George Earle Park in St. Joseph. At the meeting we had not considered what recent torrential rains might have done to the access road which was to take us to the starting point and some persons now expressed doubts about the security of parked cars there. So, I decided that perhaps we should go by way of Ortinola as we usually do.. Not everyone heard of the change of plan and the result was a split in the party, some going to Ortinola and some to the Bancal Road. I take the blame for this and the resulting confusion. Because of the split our secretary found herself at Ortinola with slippers on her feet while her boots were with the Milnes at the Caura starting point. After I abandoned an attempt to get the boots Luisa and I set off from Ortinola an hour after the others. One, perhaps the only, good result of this confusion was that we now know it takes approximately an hour longer by the Caura trail than by the Ortinola trail to get to Tucuche.

Very early in the climb through the Ortinola valley it was obvious that the trail had deteriorated markedly from the state in which it was at our last ascent of Tucuche. In some places the trail could hardly have been called a trail; it was a gully perhaps a metre deep. The reason for the deterioration was not immediately obvious but became clear later as we neared the junction with the trail from Caura. Timber trees had been felled in the upper part of the valley and hauled down the trail. It is my belief that the damage is not only permanent but will increase with time. However, there is little we can do about it since the trail goes through private property.

My sole objective on this trip was to collect some cuttings of Podocarpus trinitensis for shipment to a New York botanist and this was duly accomplished. Some of the hikers ahead of us had seen a snake attempting to eat a bat and from the description of the snake I thought it might be the machete savanne, Chironius carinatus, a species that normally feeds on birds. I never reached the top, and did not expect to because of the late start, but Luisa did get her boots when we met the group from Caura. Frankie Farrell, starting from Caura, did reach top and at age eighty is the oldest man ever to do so as far as we know. He says he is now good for this till 85 and I am sure we all wish him success in future attempts.

The drive along the Bancal Road was at some points very steep and muddy. This explains why some of the cars could not make it. The benefit of climbing El Tucuche by way of the bridle path starting in the Caura Valley is that the gradient is always gentle. Its length is 11 miles and the point at which the Bancal Road meets it is about two to three miles from the beginning. The distance to be walked is as a consequence considerably longer than the shortcut through Ortinola Estate. The walking pace of the party was slow and as a consequence we took five and a half hours going to the summit and four and three quarters coming down. This compares quite unfavourably with Glen Wilkes who took three hours going up and two and three quarters coming down. Because of recent heavy rain many trees had fallen over the path and in many places there were miniature landslides. This delayed progress to some extent.

Unfortunately as I was concentrating more on walking than on observing the flora I may have missed an interesting plant or two. For instance I did not see the wild pawpaw I had collected on a previous trip which has been sent to Kew Gardens for positive identification and on which cross breeding experiments with the cultivated pawpaw are being carried out to see if a more

disease resistant plant can be found. At the beginning of the walk there were quite a few flowering weeds but they were all well known to me and had been collected before. On the way up there were one or two showers of rain and on reaching the top there was a great deal of mist - so characteristic of El Tucucha - which somewhat spoiled the view. At the summit I found I was in fairly good condition. We could not stay long however as we wanted to get back to the cars before darkness could set in. There was only a short rest therefore before the descent began.

The journey down was slower than it should have been because both Jim Milne and myself were having leg trouble. Jim had a leg injury which he had acquired in his younger days when playing games. The ligaments (I think) of my right knee began to hurt more and more after we had got some way down - the inevitable consequence - I suppose - of advancing age. I kept urging Him to increase his speed until he said he did not want to keep anybody back and insisted that I go ahead, which I did. I now regret I did so as I was told he had much difficulty in crossing over some of the obstacles in the path. Near the end of the walk darkness had set in but there was still enough residual light to see my way. Jim's arrival was in greater darkness but fortunately for him one of the party remained with him and as he had a torchlight he was able to see his way.

Field trip to Mt. St. Benedict on November 27, 1988 (V. Quesnel & T. F. Farrell)

On this trip it was our intention to walk up the ridge from The Mount to the ruin on Mt. Tabor and continue on above this to a point where, according to Yasmin and Paul Comeau, a magnificent view of Trinidad could be obtained both to the north and the south. We had an officer from the Forestry Division along with us who, at the start of the hike, spoke of the efforts of the Forestry Division in reforesting the hillside. Repeated burning of this mountainside, probably over a century or more, had established a large patch of savanna-type vegetation that was continuing to increase in area. Caribbean pine was the principal species planted but other trees such as pink poui and flambouyant and species suitable for handicraft work such as screw pine had been planted as well. Of the exotic trees I saw no sign but the pines had grown well despite difficulties from fires in the early years. In fact, fires still ravaged the hillside, though the pines now escaped damage, for Scott Alston-Smith recalled that he had been on the hillside in the dry season and the ground cover had been entirely burnt away. Now at the end of the rainy season it had grown back.

Among the pines the main elements in the ground cover were a tall grass that may have been Trachypogon ligularis (see Beard, The Natural Vegetation of Trinidad), a razor grass (Scleria sp), Heliconia psittacorum and Myrosma canifolia, a member of the Marantaceae. These did not grow all mixed together but in patches in which one of the four predominated. Among them in much lesser numbers were such weeds as Borreria latifolia, B. bartlingiana, Desmodium barbatum, Cassia patellaria, and Stylopanthes guyanensis. I collected other weeds too but never got around to identifying them. Of more interest to me was a tree with compound leaves of very tiny leaflets and a rough bark. There was a fair number of them and they had obviously not been planted. They were seemingly resistant to fire (at least as adults) and would perhaps, be worth propagating. I thought that identification would be difficult but collected some of the leaves anyway; there were no flowers or fruit. As it turned out, identification was easy. I suspected that the species was a Piptadenia in the Mimosoideae section of the legume family and because of a characteristic gland on the leaf I quickly identified it as P. perigrina, Savanna Yoke. A small understorey tree with beautiful red young leaves was also in evidence and this I knew to be a Myrcia but I didn't think I had any chance of determining which of the several species it was. Beard's Natural Vegetation of Trinidad supplies a probable answer: Myrcia stenocarpa, which, he says, had mostly given way to the Fire-resistant Byrsonima and Curatella in the open savanna. Perhaps the pine has made the area more favourable to Myrcia again.

There is another interesting tree that Beard lists as typical of this hillside savanna that I wish I had known about it before the trip. It is Roupala montana, one of the three species known as bois bandé. I know the other two species but not this one. I cannot vouch for the efficacy of any of the three species and am inclined to think their reputed powers more imaginary than real despite contrary reports. Roupala is described in A Guide to the Medicinal Plants of Trinidad and Tobago by Seaforth, Adams and Sylvester as follows:- "a thumb-sized piece of the bark in a cup of hot water is taken as an aphrodisiac. The effects are said to last for three days depending on dosage."

I wanted to return home early so on reaching the ridge separating the Maracas Valley from St. Augustine I parted company with the others. They went up to the ruin but shortly afterwards heard a loud buzzing sound which they feared might signify a swarm of Africanized bees and so returned without reaching the "lookout". I, meanwhile, attracted by a knoll to the west with few pines and many of the Piptadenia trees followed a path there to explore the spot. I expected to be able to go down a ridge from there back to the Mount. However, when I went down the only ridge, I found myself on the outskirts of a housing area on Riverside Road and a long way from the Mount with, to my horror, another ridge between "my" ridge and the one all of us had climbed at the start of the trip. All hope of an early return vanished.

Here, however, I discovered a remnant of the original savanna with Byrsonima and Curatella trees. A quick look around revealed no ground orchids but, instead, an unfamiliar melastome which I collected and later identified as Clidemia rubra.

Pressing on, I followed a path that seemed to lead in the right direction but after crossing a stream it petered out leaving me with no option but to force a way through the razor grass and scrub. This was accomplished in due course and I arrived on the intervening ridge where a clear path went upward. The cause of my confusion was now crystal clear. The intervening ridge did not join the main east-west ridge but joined the ridge we had all gone up a short way below the main ridge. Reluctant to take the long way up and then down I opted instead for another battle with bush and grass and eventually returned to the starting point - last not first. Not to worry; I had discovered a patch of the original savanna for further exploration later on. But so had Frankie, with a lot less trouble!

To Victor's account there is nothing much to add. When he parted company with the main group he did not realize that he was quite close to a remnant of the original savanna. When I left him it was a short walk to the main ridge separating the Maracas and St. Augustine Valleys. The reforestation was apparently not extended to this area and the savanna remained undisturbed. I was however hurrying on to catch up with the main group which had left me rather far behind and I only took a very superficial look at the vegetation. I, however, was able to recognize both Byrsonima and Curatella and the ground was covered with a rather thick layer of grasses and sedges and other small plants, much thicker than would ordinarily be found at the Aripo and other savannas. As to whether there were any ground orchids I am unable to say. After walking some distance along the ridge, which was fairly level, I caught up with the main group which was resting by the ruins of the original monastery. The descent was along a much easier path than the steep ascent we had made, and at a lower level ran alongside a small stream flowing down a fully.

Among the small plants Victor found under the pines (Pinus caribea) was AMASONIA COMPESTRIS which was quite plentiful and conspicuous with its yellow flowers and bright red bracts.

ATTENTION PLEASE

More and more demands are being made on the Club to provide services and in order to meet these demands we need more information from you, the members. Will everyone, therefore, please let us know what is (1) your profession, (2) occupation, (3) hobby. Also if your address and/or telephone number have changed. Please write it down and mail or hand it in to the secretary. Ensure that your name is on it too. THANKS.

Luisa Zuniaga
Honorary Secretary.

1 Errol Park Road
St. Ann's
December 27, 1988.