

# THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

Dear Member

## SECOND QUARTER 1989

You are invited to attend the monthly meetings of the club to be held on Thursdays April 13th, May 11th and June 8th 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 13th - Phytochemical Studies on some local Medicinal Plants  
by Dr. A. Maxwell

May 11th - Natural History of Panama by Dr. Bob Brown

June 8th - Termites in Trinidad by Dr. J. Darlington

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

April 30th - Chatham/Los Blanquizaes (Camp) be prepared to get wet.

May 28th - El Tucuche (Leave POS 6.00 a.m.)

June 25th - Bush Bush (Leave POS 6.00 a.m.)

## TRIP ALONG THE GRANDE RIVIERE/SANGRE GRANDE BRIDLE PATH - 28/29th January 1989 by Frankie Farrell

The Grande Riviere/Sangre Grande road is an old bridle path made possibly as far back as last century. When first made it no doubt connected the two villages but in more recent times the latter part of it between the Southern foot hills of the Northern Range and Sangre Grande must have been obliterated by development work in the area. On a previous occasion an exploratory trip had been made along this bridle path, but because the walk was started late and because time was wasted when the wrong branch at a fork in the road was taken, the group did not go very far. Glen and Dave, our fastest walkers, did reach a point where a bridge led over a small stream.

As we were reasonably sure that this would be a long walk it was decided to make this trip a two-day one. Arrangements were therefore made to camp at the house of the Nantons at a point between Grande Riviere and Matelot on Saturday the 28th. We were thus able to make an early start on the Sunday following.

On trees around the Nanton's house we saw some Silver-beaked Tanagers (*RAMPHOCELUS CARBO*). On the road from Toco to Grande Riviere there was a Black Hawk which may have been the Great Black Hawk (*BUTEO GALLUS URUBITINGA*). On the road between the Nanton's house and the beginning of the trail we saw Gallow-rumped Caciques (*CARICUS CELA*).

At the start of the trail the group was made up of twenty three members. Two of these had made the trip of about two and a half hours from Port of Spain on the Sunday, but at what an inconvenience? Disregarding the directions of two residents who seemed bent on advising us in their own vernacular to make a circuit and an early return, we pressed on. The early part of the bridle path was covered by a great variety of weeds. The more common ones were: Begonia (*BEGONIA* spp), Jacob's Coat (*COLEUS* spp), St. John's Bush (*JUSTICIA SECUNDA*), Black Stick (*PACHYSTACHYS COCCINEA*), Deer Meat (*CENTROPOGON SURINAMENSIS*), Club Moss (*SELAGINELLA* spp), Broomweed (*SIDA* spp), TONTANEA spp. (a herb with distinctive bright royal blue berries), COLUMNEA spp (a plant growing on tree-branches with hanging stems and flowers coloured in light shades of red and yellow), Bachelor's Buttons (*HYPTIS CAPITATA*), Cane Reed (*COSTUS SPECIOSUS*), and Cousins or Sweet-hearts (*DESMODIUM* spp). Three other weeds were collected for identification but this has not yet been done.

It was soon evident that we were in untouched rain forest, and many examples of typical forest vegetation, both epiphytic and ground were seen. Those noted were: two members of the CYCLANTHACEAE - (Mamoo (*ASPLUNDIA*) and CYCLANTHUS),



different members of the MELASTOMACEAE, more than one species of PIPER (PIPERACEAE FAMILY), a member of the MARANTACEAE (MONOTAGMA SPP), members of the RUBIACEAE (PSYCOTRIA ULIGINOSA and PALICOUREA SPP), Wild Tannias (XANTHUSOMA SPP), Aroids (PHILODENDRON SPP), Bromeliads of different kinds and finally Tree Ferns.

Unfortunately a close examination of the trees was not made but Jeretons (DIDYMOPANAX MOROTOTONI), Cayucas (VIROLA SURINAMENSIS), Mountain Rose (BROWNEA LATIFOLIA) and Roseau (BACTRIS SPP) were seen.

Birds seen along the way were a Green Hermit Hummingbird (PHAETHORNIS GUY) and a Squirrel Cuckoo (PIAYA CAYANA).

We were quite certain that we reached the spot Glen and Dave stopped at on the previous occasion mentioned above. There was a fallen tree and a growth of bush at this point and we had to make a detour. After this point the path was quite clear and we went some considerable distance further on. We could see that this bridle path needs further exploration at some later date.

Our host, Mr. Nanton, supplied us with a curious and almost unbelievable fact. He said that he had observed that the suckers of the banana when emerging from the ground made a sound that could be clearly heard. This is something that I would like to verify and it is possible that I will be able to do so as I have a few banana plants growing at my home.

On the whole this trip was enjoyed by the party and this was in some considerable measure due to the kind hospitality of our hosts. I take this opportunity of thanking them accordingly.

---

#### FIELD TRIP TO NORTH OROPUCHE WATER INTAKE ON 26th FEBRUARY 1989 (V. Quesnel)

While waiting at the WASA installations on the North Oropuche (the spelling on all the maps I have - not Oropouche) for the 10 to 15 minutes that elapsed before the party from P.O.S. arrived (David Rooks please note) I searched the lawns and the precincts of the buildings for Rubiaceae weeds. I found Borreria laevis, B. verticillata and the tiny Oldenlandia corymbosa. After the others arrived the usual talk followed. Oral Roberts offered to take us to another spot he knew of on the Oropuche River and we followed him there instead of going to the water intake. We crossed the Oropuche at the bridge on the main road and turned off the road where it turns sharply to the right. We followed a dirt road to the left until we arrived at a convenient parking place. An easy walk of about 40 minutes took us to the river. On the way we met loggers hauling out felled trees, apparently mora and crappo, for which they said they had permits and on going down a fairly steep slope we came to a slab of rock beside a swift-flowing river.

By the time I got there many members were already enjoying a swim in the clear water. Loggers were busy felling trees on "our" side of the river but across on the other side the forest seemed undisturbed. Superficially, at any rate, it looked like a lowland forest with intrusions of mora. Unfortunately, I could not stay long and could not examine the forest for species I knew should be there but I did see mahoe (Sterculia caribaea) and the small, under-storey tree Ryania speciosa in flower. Rubiaceae shrubs such as Palicourea crocea and Hotlips (Cephaelis tomentosa) and the vine Malanea macrophylla were also evident, the first two in flower.

I did not pay much attention to birds but a pair of raptors flying in the middle distance seemed to be Grey-headed Kites though my view of them was not good enough to be certain of this. Had they called but once I would have been able to identify them with certainty.

This is an interesting spot and worth another visit when I can devote more time to exploring it.

---

#### THE CALL OF THE SHORT-TAILED PYGMY TYRANT, (MYIORAIS ECAUDATUS) (V.C. Quesnel)

In the Quarterly Bulletin for the Third Quarter of 1986 I described for the first time the nesting of this species in Trinidad. I also described the call as "sreee, srreee, srreee...". Subsequently, Richard French in his "Supplement to A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago", 1988, stated that the call had reminded me of the call of a tree frog, a comparison I had, in fact, never made. However, recently I began to suspect that I had attributed to the



flycatcher the sounds of the Blue-chinned Sapphire, Chlorestes notatus. On 4th February 1989 I watched a pair of Short-tailed Pygmy Tyrants for about 30 min. and was able to study the call carefully. I want now to describe the call and clear up the confusion.

The call is short (under 1/2 sec.), thin, high-pitched and weak. It bears some resemblance to three other calls, that of a katydid, the Long-billed Gnatwren (Ramphocactus malanurus) and, extraordinarily, Hyla punctata, a beautiful, little, green tree-frog. The similarity lies in the fact that all of these calls is a series of "pips" like that produced by running a fingernail across the teeth of a comb. In the case of the Pygmy Tyrant the "pips" in each call number about 8-10 and change in pitch during the call, usually getting higher but sometimes falling a little. During the time I watched the birds, the calls were repeated continually at about 2 sec. intervals. The calls of the Blue-chinned Sapphire, which can be described as "srree, srreee, srreee", are made at a rate of slightly more than one a second and this difference in rate should help one to differentiate the two calls.

---

#### WHAT ARE WE GOING THERE TO SEE? (V. C. Quesnel)

This question is frequently asked of the club's field trips and the answer will depend in part on the destination of the trip. However, there is another answer that applies to every trip and may be stated somewhat as follows: "We are not going there to see anything specific; we are going there to give members the opportunity to pursue their own topics of study -in a place they may not know or can't otherwise get to easily". The club, after all, was founded to give naturalists the opportunity to meet and discuss their own observations and investigations and the field trips were meant to give additional opportunity to pursue their own studies.

The club has grown considerably since the early years and the membership is more varied now than formerly. Nowadays, many members simply want to hike for the exercise. Collectors use the field trips for their collecting whether they collect butterflies, dragonflies, earthworms, frogs, plants or anything else. Still others may want to use the trips for studying the distribution of a particular group of plants or animals. (For instance, I have records of howler monkeys from Chaguaramas and from Platanal and the Rio Seco in the Northern Range but none in between. Why?). Bird watchers can use the trips for seeing new birds finding nests or learning more about the habitat or ecology of the birds that interest them; Botanists can take note of plants in flower and thus study flowering behaviour. In all these cases there is no real need to reach the planned destination; the delights come along the way.

However, on some occasions there is a real need to get where we want to go. If we want to count the oilbirds in a cave then we must get to the cave. If we want to find out if there are still manatee in the Ortoire or Nariva rivers then we must get to the Ortoire or the Nariva. If we want to put Fig Walk on the map then we must get to Fig Walk. (It took three trips for us to discover exactly where Fig Walk is). If we want to find out where the water that enters the Aripo Cave leaves the cave then obviously we must get to the exit. This is an exploration I would dearly love to make but anyone on such a trip must be prepared for failure. However, for me the failure to find the exit would not mean that the trip was of no interest. There would be plenty to see along the way and we would get a better idea of where to go next time.

So, what I am trying to say is that the success of a field trip depends very much on what the individual members want to make of it. If each member would develop an interest in a particular aspect of natural history each field trip would become more and more an adventure in learning rather than an occasion for sight-seeing.

---

#### LIVING WORLD 1989 - 1990 (V. C. Quesnel)

The publication dates of Living World which used to fall in the odd-numbered years have slipped somewhat so that they fall in the even-numbered years. I am hoping to get the next issue out early in 1990 so that the Centenary issue can be published in July 1991. I would be glad if authors with material for the next issue would get it to me by 30th June, 1989.

---

NOTICE - Our treasurer's new address is 2 Kenian Court, 25 Coblenz Avenue, Cascade.

Luisa Zuniaga  
Honorary Secretary  
1 Errol Park Road, St. Ann's

March 29, 1989.