

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

THIRD QUARTER OF 1989

Dear Member

You are invited to attend the monthly meetings to be held on Thursdays July 13th, August 10th and September 14th 1989 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

July 13th - Savannas in Trinidad by Dr. P. Comeau
Aug. 10th - MEMBERS EVENING
Sept 14th - Modern Darwinism by Prof. J. Kenny

F I E L D T R I P S

July 30th - Trinity Hills (Leave POS 6.00 a.m.)
Aug. 27th - Central Range Wildlife Sanctuary
Sept 24th - Cerro del Aripo (Leave POS 6.00 a.m.)

CAMP IN LITTLE TOBAGO - May 28/29th - Paul Christopher and Caroline Chaboo

The trip to Little Tobago was excellent for the birders. Nothing less was expected from the largest sea bird sanctuary in the Southern Caribbean. A total of 22 species were spotted over the 2 days by various members.

The Tropicbirds (Fam. Phaethontidae) and brown boobies (Fam. Sulidae) were nesting. These two birds build nests on ledges among the cacti along steep cliffs. This was quite a picturesque setting for the babies. Unfortunately this was also a very precarious position for them - several dead babies were observed below the ledges.

We are happy to add that several nests with babies and eggs of Audubon shearwaters (Fam. Procellariidae) were seen. These nests were in tunnels and the presence of droppings at the entrance was taken as successful occupation. During the night, a number of birds were seen feeding their young or digging new tunnels. Ordinarily these feed a long way from shore during the day so opportunity to see or hear them comes mainly at night. The bird's loud screams and nocturnal behaviour probably inspired the local name "diablotein".

There was a noted absence of bridled terns and brown noddys. Only one brown noddy was seen. Both these are usually found mating at this time of year. A red footed booby was also sighted. This normally breeds on St. Gile's island. The three birds are in the Family Laridae.

At Speyside, some 27 birds were recorded. The following is a full list of the birds observed over the three days

OTHER Terrestrial Life

There was a conspicuous abundance of zandolees and machetes. Two other lizards were observed but not identified.

Trip to Little Tobago ContinuedMarine Life

The marine life was also very good. Those who ventured snorkelling got a look at spiny lobster, barracuda, solefish and many more fishes feeding among the fire, fan and brain corals. The hermit crabs did not remain in the water but were found marching all over the island including the highest peaks.

Birdlist for Little Tobago

Tropicbirds with babies and eggs, Audubon shearwaters with babies and eggs, Brown boobies with babies and eggs, Frigatebirds, *Elaenia elaenia*, bananaquits, osprey, shiny cowbird, blue-grey tanager, copper rumped hummingbird, black throated mango, bare-eyed thrush, brown crested flycatcher, oropendola, short tailed swift, chivy vireo, pale vented pigeon, *Gallus domesticus* - now a jungle fowl, tropical kingbird, Lesser anis and blackheaded seagulls.

Birdlist for Speyside

Mot mot, jacamar, barred antshrike, nananaquits, keskidee, white tipped doves, black throated mango, rufous breasted hermit, terns, macaws (escapees?) house wren, tropical mockingbird, *Elaenia elaenia*, Orange winged parrots, frigatebirds, blue grey tanager, rock dove, ruby topaz hummingbird, copper rumped hummingbird, green kingfisher, red headed woodpecker, golden olive woodpecker, grey kingbird, oropendola, palm tanager, black faced grassquit, blue black grassquit, cocrico, white fringed antwren.

AN OPPORTUNITY ON THE DOORSTEP
BY Richard ffrench

Since leaving Trinidad in 1935 I have had the good fortune to visit Venezuela on birdwatching expeditions on three occasions. These visits have been so rewarding that it seems worthwhile to chronicle the highlights for the benefit of naturalists (especially birdwatchers) in Trinidad and Tobago. It really is surprising that more people don't take the chance and visit Venezuela, which is after all so close. Even if you don't speak Spanish, you can get by with a phrasebook and common sense; also quite a lot of Venezuelans speak some English. In addition, Venezuela is much less expensive than Trinidad nowadays. Venezuela is such a vast country that one can hardly expect to do more than visit a few parts. I concentrated on four areas. The easiest one to visit is near Maracay, a large city 50 miles west of Caracas and lying just south of the northern mountain range. The city itself didn't interest me, but I found two roads crossing the mountains north towards the Caribbean. The first goes over to the seaside resort of Cata, passing through the Henry Pittier National Park. Just before you reach the watershed, at an altitude of about 4000 feet, you pass beside the road the Rancho Grande Biological Station. The building's history goes back to the prewar days of Dictator Gomez: later it figured in William Beebe's famous account of his natural history exploits, before he came on to end his days at Simla in the Arima Valley. A vast shell of a building, Rancho Grande's present function is slightly obscure; but I have managed on several occasions to visit it and climb up the ancient fire escape on to the large flat roof, which is a birdwatcher's paradise. For here you are at treetop level on the very edge of cloud forest. Blue-and-white Swallows, White-tipped Swifts and Swallow-Tanagers nest in crevices of the building, and the surrounding trees provide a feast of colourful tanagers, honeycreepers, hummingbirds and many other birds. Often I've spent several hours just wandering about on the roof, with wonderful views of such birds as Blood-eared Parrots, Long-tailed Sylphs and Blue-hooded Euphonias. Once we found a sloth feeding nearby, while Red Howlers often roar their chorus from neighbouring trees. For the more adventurous a trek up one of the forest trails may lead to some of the more obscure forest inhabitants like Venezuelan Wood-Quail or Nightingale Wren, but these are hard to see.

The road continues, in many ways similar to the Arima-Blanchisseuse Road, down the long winding descent towards the sea; but birdwatching is limited to the roadside, since Venezuela, unlike Trinidad, has hardly any public trails leading off the main roads. So try to avoid the weekends when visiting this road, since Venezuelans flock to the coast at that time, and they are even worse drivers than Trinidadians.

Much further afield, I travelled to the southeast of the Country, into the state of Bolivar south of the great Orinoco River. Here I stayed near Canaima, quite close to the world-renowned Angel Falls, and north of an area called Gran Sabana. This is a land of huge rivers, awe-inspiring waterfalls and the imposing tepuis (or table mountains), of which Roraima and Auyantepui are the most famous.

Apart from the rivers, the terrain consists of large open savannahs, with a few scattered sections of palm forest, primary lowland rain forest, and of course the tepuis themselves, which are either impossible to climb or require a major effort. However, I found the rain forest fascinating, especially at small clearings where the indigenous Amerindians have their settlements. Birds of many species can be seen well around these clearings. On a recent visit I recorded 12 different hummingbirds in one day. The savannahs and the gallery forest fringing the smaller rivers also provide good opportunities for seeing macaws and other parrots, hawks and other birds that frequent riversides, such as kingfishers, jacamars and puffbirds.

One of my most favourite areas in Venezuela is the region of the high Andes. The problem is the distance from Caracas. Well to the west of the country, the Venezuelan Andes run more or less north-south, with a convenient centre at Merida, a beautiful mountain city renowned for its (somewhat volatile) student population. In the Andes you can choose between visits to the subtropical areas at around 5000 feet altitude, which provide either forested foothills or lush agricultural lands, where many birds more familiar to a visiting Trinidadian may be found: or higher in the temperate zone at, say, 9000 feet. Here birds will be scarcer amidst the open pasture lands of the farmers or the rather austere forests with conifers predominating. However, you'll easily find birds that never occur in Trinidad, such as the Great Thrush, Brown-bellied Swallow and Torrent Duck. Finally, you can ascend (by road) to the paramo region above the tree-line at an altitude of 11,000 feet or more. Moving around - rather slowly, until you become acclimatized to the thin atmosphere - amongst the interesting, if somewhat limited, vegetation, you can find such birds as the Bearded Helmetcrest hummingbird, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant and Plumbeous Sierra-Finch. The bleak grandeur of the scenery adds to the attractions of the place, plus of course the fascinating customs and crafts of the Andean Indians.

It would be quite possible to spend a complete vacation in any one of the areas already mentioned, and still find plenty to discover. But the most spectacular and rewarding birdwatching that I have encountered in Venezuela has been not in these areas, but in the llanos, the vast central plain stretching beside the great rivers Apure and Orinoco. Primarily cattle-rearing pastures, the llanos flood every wet season, so it is best to choose a period of the dry season to visit, when the great distances can be covered on what are mostly pretty good roads. I have visited two huge ranches, each about 100,000 hectares, in the central llanos, where conservation of wildlife has been practised for many years. The resulting spectacle of water-birds makes one ache for what Caroni and Nariva might have been, while at the same time recognising the different scale of the Venezuelan canvas. For here you can encounter many thousands of ducks, ibis, herons and other waterfowl, peacefully feeding and flying about within a comparatively short distance from human observers. I have recorded over 150 different species of birds in one day, just on one ranch, and most of them seen under ideal conditions. It is a photographer's paradise (and nightmare, since you use up reel after reel of film in no time!). As if that were not enough, it is not uncommon to find herds of capybaras, white-tailed deer, crab-eating foxes, skunks, anteaters and other mammals, even in broad daylight; while caimans, anacondas and fresh water turtles are frequently encountered (without all the fuss and bother about danger that we are used to in Trinidad).

These places in Venezuela - and many others - are just crying out for visitors, and at last the tourist authorities there are beginning to wake up and take notice. Make sure that you get in on the act before it is too late. I might even meet you there!

Inter-American Development Bank - Second Consultative Environmental Seminar held at the Bank's Headquarters in Washington D.C. from 24-26, May 1989 By Yasmin S. Comeau

The writer represented the Club as an external participant at this meeting. All expenses were paid by the bank. Together with Mr. Arthur Mc Shine a paper on "The Environmental Situation in Trinidad and Tobago - NGO view" was submitted at the Bank's request. Documents from this seminar will be lodged in the club's library.

The purpose of this meeting was to generate constructive dialogue between the bank, Public Agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in borrowing member countries concerned with environmental protection and natural resource conservation.

Emerging from the three days of debate and discussions was the recognition by the Bank of the important role played by NGO's in Latin America and the Caribbean, in alerting their Governments to increasing environmental damage, helping remedy some areas of damage with limited resources, through their intimate knowledge and understanding of local conditions, and that NGO's were already committed to halt further decline given the opportunity for greater involvement and consultation in the Bank's project cycle.

In the Bank's draft for "Interaction between IDB and NGO" in its implementation strategy the following points are stated:

- 1 Identify 10/ NGOs that could participate in Bank's programs and maintain a roster of qualified NGOs.
- 2 Facilitate information on the environmental aspects of projects on a selective basis and respecting the confidentiality of privileged information, to interested NGOs. To the extent that it may be required, the Bank will consult with proper government authorities access to information by these NGOs.
- 3 Hold briefings on specific topics related to Bank policies and projects under consideration and in execution.
- 4 Disseminate more information on environmental aspects of projects and on the role of NGOs through regular communication channels, such as Press Releases, IDB News and other means.
- 5 Solicit information and views of NGOs throughout the project cycle, and during the preparation of country and sector studies.
- 6 Communicate to government authorities the Bank's intention to identify opportunities for participation of local NGOs in policy dialogue and Bank financed projects.
- 7 Organize workshops, seminars and consultative meetings with local regional and international NGOs to discuss topics of common interest and to coordinate actions with other organizations and government agencies.
- 8 Support research on the experience of NGOs participation in community organization and project preparation and implementation to determine replicability in Bank programs.
- 9 Promote and utilize existing government-NGO coordination mechanisms.
- 10 Continue the function of External Relations as liaison with international NGOs, including the channeling of inquiries to and from these organizations.
- 11 Make every effort to increase its own staff capabilities, whether through training or recruitment of qualified professionals with sociological/anthropological expertise, as this will improve program and project interaction and consultation with community groups and NGOs.

10/ To facilitate implementation of this roster, cooperation with the World Bank, which is undertaking a similar activity, would be desirable. Similarly, rosters compiled by other organizations should also be utilized.

Therefore, it is clear, if the club is to take up this challenge, proposed by the Bank, its legal status must be established. Greater participation by each member, particularly the special interest groups to further strengthen the flora and fauna file, along with an increased willingness by members to contribute articles to the press and/or journal must be forthcoming.

The club is respected and recognized as one of the oldest functioning Non-Governmental Organizations in our country which will be called upon, more than ever before, to assist in national planning policies as environmental issues move unto the political agenda. We should not let this opportunity to influence changing attitudes towards the protection of the environment and conservation of our natural resources slip by!

Neville Acham, deceased

The Memorial Service for our past President who was the victim of a tragic accident while returning from the field trip of April 30, 1989, was held as planned on Friday June 9, 1989 at the St. Mary's College Chapel. Officiating was Fr. Christian Pereira and the welcome and introductory address was given by our Acting President, Mrs. Yasmin Comeau. Among the congregation were eminent members of the society, relatives, friends and members of the club. In his short sermon Fr. Pereira extolled Neville's love for his fellowman in giving freely of himself for their benefit. A special candle was lit in memory of Neville and held by a few members who each remembered Neville for the light he was in their lives.

The Neville Acham Memorial Fund (Publishing) was launched on this occasion and the sum collected \$1,307.00.

Please remember that the Fund is now open and donations are welcome to keep it in operation.

Field Trip to Trinity Hill on July 30, 1989

Because of a fallen bridge a different route will have to be taken on this occasion. Please check with your Management Committee before the trip or on the day for maps. Further instructions will be given at our July monthly meeting.

Luisa Zuniaga
Honorary Secretary
July 9, 1989.