

THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

FOURTH QUARTER OF 1989

Dear Member

You are invited to attend the monthly meetings to be held on Thursdays October 12th and November 9th 1989 at 5.30 p.m. at the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College, Port of Spain. Also the field trips as follows:-

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

- October 12th - The Contribution of Sociology to Environmental Protection by Prof. M. Cain
- November 9th - The Plant Disease Doctor, The Farmer and the Naturalist by Dr. F. Elango

F I E L D T R I P S

- October 29th - Hollis Reservoir - Leave POS at 7.00 a.m.
- November^{25/} 26th - Monos Island (Camp)

DECEMBER - As customary we have no organized activity for this month but we normally have a Christmas Party - Are we having one this year and what form and time - please come prepared to discuss.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION from Johanna Darlington, c/o Mrs. Yasmin Comeau
National Herbarium of T & T.,
Dept. of Plant Science & Biochemistry, UWI

I am preparing a bibliography of caves in Trinidad and Tobago and the animals that live in them. While reading up old papers I have come across references to a number of caves that are unknown to me. I wonder if any F.N.C. members are familiar with these caves and can tell me where and how to find them? The names of the caves are:-

Diego Martin - Casti Cave, La Soconusco Cave, La Fontaine Cave.

Maraval - Paramin Cave and Perseverance Cave.

Lavantille Cave - said to be used as a rubbish tip

Santa Cruz - Soconusco Cave

Zagaya Cave near Grande Riviere

There are also a couple of man-made caves:-

Arima-Blanchisseuse Road - gold mine shaft

Caura Valley - mine shaft (distinct from the natural cave or Jumbie Hole that I do know about).

If anyone has ever collected animals in any Trinidad or Tobago cave and had them identified (or still has the specimens) please will you write and tell me about it?

VISIT TO GUADELOUPE, August 1 - 15, 1989 by Caroline Chaboo

I spent two weeks in Guadeloupe acting as Field Assistant to Johanna Darlington, who was making a survey of the termites at the invitation of the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique. This enabled me to see a lot in a short time. Guadeloupe is really two islands separated by a narrow

channel, which form a butterfly shape. The two are very different in geology, topography and vegetation. Grande Terre on the east is composed of coral limestone and is low-lying, but has many steep scarps and gullies called "fonds". The vegetation, where it has not been cleared, is dry woodland or scrub but much of it has been converted into poor grassland or crops.

Basse-Terre on the west is volcanic and rises steeply to nearly 1500 m. There are at least six vegetation types ranging from dry scrub at sea level to very wet at high altitude, with rainfall of up to 3 m per year. On the highest peaks such as the Soufriere volcano the vegetation consists mainly of bromeliads, lichens, short ferns and mosses, none of them more than 1 m high. Below the tree line the rain forest lives up to its name and is loaded with epiphytes and crowded with graceful tree ferns. The steepness of the slopes produces spectacular scenery, with high waterfalls and clear, cold rivers rushing through gorges and among giant boulders. Most of Basse-Terre is a huge national park, with well-maintained roads and long-distance walking tracks. Excellent maps and guidebooks are available in the Forest Houses (tourist centres) and the whole park is remarkably clean and free from rubbish and litter. The greatest boon of all was that we were assured it was perfectly safe for two women to walk anywhere alone - unlike Trinidad in these dangerous times. The fauna is restricted, as you would expect on an oceanic island, with only six mammals, one snake, a few lizards and 12 species of frogs. The Hercules beetle (also found in Trinidad) is a protected species in Guadeloupe.

Guadeloupe has one of the best National Park systems in the Caribbean. This is not surprising when one realizes that people like Yves Renard, the president of the Caribbean Conservation Association, were heavily involved in setting up the system. The results they have achieved are most impressive, and we in Trinidad (for all our greater diversity and resources) could learn a great deal from their example.

Addendum. The above was written before hurricane Hugo devastated Guadeloupe on the night of 16-17 September 1989.

FIELD TRIP TO LITTLE TOBAGO March 27th to 29th - Frankie Farrell

In the Third Quarter Bulletins of 1989 Paul Christopher and Caroline Chaboo gave their account of the bird life on Little Tobago. (It has just come to the Secretary's notice that the trip was listed as May 27-29 - it should have read as above March 27-29th 1989) The following account is concerned mainly with the plant life of the island. I am indebted to Caroline Chaboo who, while observing the bird life also collected more of the plant specimens than I thought fit to collect.

On the trip over in the ferry I must mention, however, that Bob Browne observed a Wilson's Storm Petrel (*OCEANITES OCEANIEUS*). This is interesting because Richard French has not observed one but mentions it as a possible visitor to this area.

I observed nothing outstanding at Speyside where we slept on the first day of the trip but Little Tobago was full of interest. Tobago, the vegetation of which has considerable resemblance to Trinidad's, had seasonal forests. Most of the areas where they grew have been converted into cultivated areas and a reconstruction of the types of forest that formerly grew there can only be made from the scarce relics of the forest that are still to be found. Little Tobago has the only remaining example, of one of the types of seasonal forest, deciduous seasonal forest, that formerly existed in Tobago.

Little Tobago's rainfall is at the lower limit and it has a severe dry season lasting about five months. The geological formation is composed of igneous rock and the overlying soil is very shallow. Under these conditions only a deciduous seasonal forest is possible. The forest has two layers: an upper open and a lower closed layer. The upper layer ranges between 30 and 40 feet and the lower between 10 and 20. The upper layer is almost entirely deciduous in the dry season while the lower remains evergreen. At the time of this visit the rainy season had not yet started and as a consequence it was not easy to identify the leafless upper story trees. I did see, however, the palm *COCOTHRINAX BARBADENSIS*, which constitutes about 30 percent of this layer. Other trees observed were Naked Indian (*BURSERA SIMARUBA*), Parrot Apple (*CLUSIA SPP*) and two other trees, which are not mentioned in Baird's Ecological Monograph on the Natural Vegetation of Tobago, namely: Palmiste (*ROYSTONIA OLERACEA*) and *CASEARIA SPP.*, the latter in full flower. Unfortunately neither Caroline nor myself paid much attention to the lower story. Apparently the only plant I recognised was *CASSIA BACILLARIS* and

and Caroline collected (OURATEA GUILDINGII), both of which are included in the list given below. The extraordinary feature of this forest is that the ground vegetation is almost exclusively made up of an Anthurium. Baird gives this species as HOOKERI but the flora indicates that this species grows as an epiphyte on trees and the species JENMANII grows on the ground. However a few of the anthuriums were seen growing on the trees.

Besides the members of the forest mentioned above a number of shrubs and herbs were found and collected. The list is as follows:-

POLYPODIACEAE: Adiantum Spp., Hemionitis palmata, & Vittaria lineata

SOLOMACEAE: Cestrum altenifolium var. Pendulinum & Capsicum baccatum

OCHNACEAE: Ouratea guildingii

PORTULACACEAE: Kalinum paniculatum

LEGUMINOSAE: Abrus precatoria, Canavalia maritima & Cassia bacillaris

OXALIDACEAE: Oxalis frutescens

MALVACEAE: Malvastrum americanum

PLUMBAGINACEAE: Plumbago scandens

AMARANTACEAE: Alternanthera ingramiana

RUBIACEAE: Erithalis fruticosa

COMPOSITAE: Vernonia scorpioides

ACANTHACEAE: Aphelandra pulcherrima

LORANTHACEAE: Phoradendron trinervium

EUPHORBIACEAE: Tragia volubilis

BROMELIACEAE: Bromelia Spp.

CACTACEAE: Cephalocereus Spp (Three other unidentified cacti)

POLYGNACEAE: Antigonon leptopus

AGAVACEAE: Probably a Furcraea but not positively identified

ORCHIDACEAE: Diacrinum bicornutum

The virgin orchid seemed to be the only orchid growing on the island. It was in full flower and was very plentiful. Two of the three unidentified cacti could very well be two cacti mentioned by Baird in his Monograph, namely HYLOCEREUS LEMAIREI and the Turk's Cap cactus (CACTUS BROADWAYI).

On reaching one of the highest points of the island I saw a bird on the ground which did not seem too much disturbed by my presence but moved away on the ground reluctantly as I approached. On describing it to Paul he said it was most likely a nightjar.

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

The Club's Conservation in Action Committee studies environmental conservation issues of concern to the Club, particularly those about which the Club is expected to make a meaningful comment. Such issues have included wildlife conservation, toxic waste, forest fires, environmental pollution, water management, long-line fishing and more recently lead poisoning.

Monthly meetings are every Tuesday following the Club's monthly meeting (i.e. Tuesday 17th October and 14 November, etc.) at 6 p.m. Enquiries as to the venue can be directed to John Seyjagat at the Zoo, Tel: 622-3530.

All Club members who wish to participate are welcome. If you do not wish to participate on a regular basis but wish to make a specific contribution related to your expertise/experience, please let us know.

On October 17 the committee will concentrate on "Chemicals in the Environment" (pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers).

NEW RULES/REGULATIONS FOR THE CLUB

It is proposed to legally constitute the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club, which to date is an informal grouping.

In connection with this, the rules and regulations of the Club are being reviewed, with the intention of submitting a draft of new rules and regulations to the general membership.

Anyone with suggestions for new rules (or alterations to existing rules) is requested to submit such suggestions in writing to the Management Committee.

FIELD TRIP TO EL TUCUCHE ON 28TH MAY 1989 (V. C. Quesnel)

Surprisingly, 28th May turned out to be a beautiful day with no rain and relatively cool conditions. We did not know then that the rainy season this year would begin only in July and not during the last week of May as it usually does. Because I could not spend a whole day on the trip I did not intend to go to the summit but only to a spot just beyond the col at the head of the Maracas valley. The condition of this part of the trail was no better than it was on our previous visit when we first noticed the effects of logging activity in the valley, though young saplings growing up since then hid the gully that rain had carved out of the trail.

In this half of the trip birds were numerous though I did not pay too much attention to them. I noted bellbirds, peppershrikes, a Green Hermit and the characteristic calls of the Scaled Pigeon and the Stripe-breasted Spinetail. Other birds I thought were antbirds and woodcreepers were evident but I could not see them well enough without binoculars to identify them. I noted the zandolia, Ameiva ameiva, near the point where the trail crosses the upper part of the river at the 300 m level. I plan to keep a look out for it on future trips to determine, if possible, the highest elevation at which it occurs. I noted too the calls of many cigales (cicadas) that I know from the environs of my home in Talparo, including the only one in which I can with certainty associate the call with the species, viz. Quesada gigas. This is the largest cigale I know and is the one with the siren-like call.

Once past the col I looked for a particular plant of the family Melastomaceae with the hope of finding it in flower and collecting it for identification. I was out of luck. I did find some specimens (not nearly as many as have been there in the past) but none was in flower, though flower buds had developed on some. I then turned and headed for home wishing I could have stayed longer. If there were any interesting things to see on the summit someone else should complete the story in the next bulletin.

FIELD TRIP TO TRINITY HILLS ON 30TH JULY 1989 (V. C. Quesnel)

We had the same difficulty on this trip as we had on the previous trip to Trinity Hills, the inability to find the correct starting point. Glenn Wilkes and Dave Rammarine who were scouting the trail did find the correct path through a screen of balisier and followed the trail without difficulty but they did not cut away the balisier from the spot where the trail branches off from the oilfield road. Consequently, we could find no sign of their passage. All of the searching together with a slow trip from Port of Spain to Guayaguayare robbed us of most of the morning. When we finally took the trail that we had used on the last occasion we did not even get to the ridge before most members decided to turn back. This decision was also influenced by the fact that many members of a group of German students that accompanied us were suffering from jet lag and found the going too strenuous.

There was little of biological interest. Very few plants were in flower and few birds were heard or seen. One person apparently saw capuchin monkeys and I saw one frog of the species Phrynohyas zonata. I was surprised by this finding, perhaps because this was my first encounter with it in south Trinidad. On returning home I consulted Julian Kenny's publication of the frogs of Trinidad and found the following: "Distribution: Presumed to be throughout Trinidad, except at higher elevations in the Northern Range, Recorded from Maracas valley, U.W. campus, Valencia forests, Nariva Swamp, and Point Fortin." Pencilled in alongside were my records from Las Cuevas, Diamond Vale, Blue Basin and Hare Hill Farm, Talparo. With this new record the distribution does indeed seem islandwide.

This frog is noteworthy for the fact that when handled it secretes copious amounts of a very viscous liquid. It is irritating to the skin of some people and causes itchiness.

One good outcome of the trip was that on the return of Glenn and Dave we located the beginning of the trail and put a temporary mark at the spot. Yasmin Comeau promised to return and put a permanent mark.

Luisa Zuniaga
Honorary Secretary
1 Errol Park Road, St. Ann's
October 3, 1989.