THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

THIRD QUARTER OF 1990

Dear Member

You are invited to attend the monthly meetings of the club to be held on Thursdays July 12th, August 9th and September 13th 1990 at 5.30 pm at the Audio-Visual Room of St. Mary's College, Port of Spain. You are also invited to attend the field trips listed hereunder:-

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 12th - AMAZONIA by His Excellency, Mr. Fernando Alves
Ambassador of Brazil

August 9th - MEMBERS EVENING

Sept. 13th - IMPACT OF TOXIC CHEMICALS ON THE ENVIRONMENT
by Dr. Michael Lines

F I E L D T R I P S

July 29th - El Tucuche (Leave P.O.S. at 6.00 a.m.)

August 26th - Platanal (Leave P.O.S. at 6.00 a.m.)

Sept. 30th - Trinity Hills (Leave P.O.S. at 6.00 a.m.)

HUNDRETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS - JULY 7th to 14th 1991

You are especially invited to plan your holidays etc. so as to be in T & T in July 1991 to firstly assist and then take part in the week's planned activities. We would like to make the week a memorable one and therefore hope to have 100% participation of members.

Dr. Elisha Tikasingh has agreed to chair the committee for the celebrations made up as follows:-

Linda Ahwai	-	Special Project - Labelling of trees in the Botanic Gardens
Colin Agostini	-	Field Trips
Yasmin Comeau	-	To honour members
Ewoud Heesterman	-	Guide to Nature Trails
Ann Hilton	-	Public Relations
John Hilton	-	Budget
Victor Quesnel	-	Special Issue of the Living World
Elisha Tikasingh	-	Museum Exhibit
Noel Vaucrossen	-	Special Issue of Stamps
Luisa Zuniaga	-	Dinner and Secretariat

The committee has been meeting monthly and helpers will soon be needed. We are therefore asking members to come forward and give your names, telephone numbers and the areas in which you can or would like to help. We will need plenty of help in order to make the celebration a success.

P.S. Members who have promised articles or who would like to submit articles for the Special Issue of the Living World are asked to submit them as soon as possible.

The planned programme of events for the week July 7th to 4th 1991 is as follows:

Sunday	July 7th	Inter-faith service at St. Ann's R.C. Church followed by tree-planting of native species in the Botanic Gardens
Monday	July 8th	Opening of a permanent natural history exhibition in the National Museum. This exhibition is to be the club's gift to the nation to commemorate the centenary.
Tuesday	July 9th	Formal launching of commemorative stamps with special franking for those attending the launching.
		Dinner with specially invited guests from overseas, the President of the Republic, distinguished guests and members of the club.
Wednesday	July 10th	Public lecture on environmental protection and recycling.
Thursday	July 11th	Public to be invited to a "getting to know us" meeting of the club in the Audio-Visual room of St. Mary's College.
Friday	July 12th	Display of Natural History Books in the U.W.I. Library
Saturday & Sunday	July 13th July 14th	Field trip to Tobago

FIELD TRIP TO FIG WALK JANUARY 27/28, 1990 by Graham White

Fig Walk was an overnight camp. This was to ensure that we had time, first to find 'fig walk' and second, explore the surrounding forest. Paul Comeau was leading the way but did not spend the night.

We got off to a slightly late start due to the shortage of cars. Only two of the campers brought cars. These were left at the Matura police station.

We followed the path to the Matura waterfall which ran parallel to but high above the Rio Seco. We eventually dropped down to the river, crossed it twice and continued along the path after the second crossing and not heading up the river to the waterfall. At one river crossing we passed a character with an axe. He must have found an axe to be the singly most useful tool in the forest as opposed to the normal cutlass or swiss army knife. After crossing another small tributary we climbed a very steep ridge to descend again into the Rio Seco above the waterfall. The river was surrounded by untouched Mora forest and the river was far from "seco". We followed the river for what seemed to be ages along the way spotting what was probably an Otter's spraints. Eventually the river did live up to its name and we were walking up a wide flat completely dry river bed. Despite the apparent dryness the surrounding trees were festooned with spiphitic and indeed epiphyllic mosses. While mosses covered and drooped off most of the leaves the leaf litter underfoot was very crispy. It was a strange combination of mossyness and dryness.

A large limestone overhang on our left signalled that we had come too far so we doubled back for 100 meters and waited for the others. After one group caught up, we headed west leaving a large arrow (10m) pointing the way. At this point we left the Rio Seco to cross the watershed into a westward flowing tributary of the Salybia river. After much panting, and cutting of hundreds of blases (very few of which were ever seen again either by those following us or ourselves on our return), we got to the Salybia river. We walked up the river through more beautiful undisturbed forest. The terrestrial orchid Cranichia mucosa was in bloom on many of the rocks in the stream.

We finally arrived at a fork in the river that Paul assured us to be our destination. We immediately set off up the right fork of the river looking for our fig trees. There was no sign of any such trees and it started to pour down with rain. We very nearly, but not quite, sheltered under some very large leafed trees which somehow we had not seen on the way up! Once we saw the trees we spotted several others. There were in fact more up the left fork than the right one and indeed there were a few near the camp site that had obviously been planted by hunters. So fig trees do exist, and rather magnificent specimens they are too. Some must have been two feet in diameter which is a lot for a banana tree. Anyway we took photographs of the trees and noted that there were not much more than thirty or forty stems.

The wild life was a bit disappointing, we saw none. There was, to one used to our more western rivers a paucity of fish. We saw very few birds and no mammals. However the forest we were walking through was very interesting. Our camp site was in forest with a dense canopy, probably Mora and was consequently quite dark. At the fork in the river, less than 100m away the forest was completely different. The canopy seemed to be a discontinuous canopy with the dominant tree being the Wild Chataigne, Pachira insignis. The other large trees around were silk cotton, Ceiba occidentalis. Both these trees are deciduous and many had shed their leaves. As a result the forest was very light and had a dense ground cover along the river of Balisier, Heliconia bihai and what I think was Cyclanthus bipartitus. This division in the forest cover is clearly seen on the 1:25000 map of the area. It is possibly this high light level that enables the bananas to survive in this area.

We set up a camp on either side of the river since we could not agree upon which site was better. We managed eventually to start a fire from totally sodden pieces of wood much to the relief of Ewoud who needed to cook his dinner. After a typical Field naturalists evening with everyone with severe pains from what they ate or from laughing at what others ate we went to bed. At what seemed like midnight but was in fact only 10 o'clock we were disturbed by some hunters who, thinking that we were on a similar mission, asked if we were after Pawi.

In the morning we retraced our steps. We found that it was very easy to miss the path when crossing the water shed between the Salybea and dry rivers. There seemed to be a tendency, once on what you think is the watershed, to follow a tributary which in fact leads back into the salybea drainage. Three independant groups returning home had to retrace a few steps at this point. In this area a large Fer-de-lance was sitting under a log that was to be climbed over.

One group returning on Saturday chose to follow the river down to the waterfall rather than crossing the steep ridge. They managed to reach it faster than others who chose to tackle the ridge.

The d trip was thus enjoyed by all, though a few perhaps only in retrospect. I feel however that in future, the upper reaches of the Rio Seco would be a lovely place for a camp and it is less far to walk.

FIELD TRIP TO KARAMAT MUD VOLCANO ON 4th MARCH 1990 (Paul L. Comeau)

As far as I know, this was the first time the Club had ever made a trip to this site, located south of the Penal Rock Road via Haggard Trace. The local residents in the area refer to the site as 'Curamat' after the nearby Curamata River. Proceeding down Haggard Trace, which lies just beyond the eight mile post on the Penal Rock Road, you pass through cane and rice farms before entering the Moruga West Oil Field. Once through the unmanned gate it is just a short drive northeastward past some tank batteries on the left. Just beyond these an oil pump service road on the right leads you to Well No. 193 where cars can be parked.

About 38 members and guests made the trip under sunny skies. After a brief introductory talk about the site and mud volcanoes in general by the author we proceeded up a muddy forest track heading in a southeasterly direction through Semi-evergreen forest. Walking time to the mud volcano was about 20 minutes. Along the route oil spills from leaking pipelines spoiled the beauty of the forest. At the largest oil spill site, however, was observed a new record for the area, Iponea hederifolia (Convolvulaceae) which entwined around dead tree trunks and other vegetation. This species, also known from Barbados, has a conspicuous bright red tubular flower, and was discovered by Francis Morean on an earlier reconnaisance trip to the area. Nearing the mud volcano, a very large Bravaisia integerrima (Jiggerwood) tree with a massive stilt root system was observed. The relatively cool shade of the forest gave way suddenly to the hot glaring sufface of the large tassik (non-vegetated area) of Karamat Mud Volcano.

The shield-shape dome of the tassik is about 90m in diameter and had only one cone, half a metre in height, near the centre. This was dormant at the time of our visit. Near the margin of the tassik adjacent to the surrounding forest were two actively bubbling mud holes. The highly inflamable gas venting from these holes was set alight using burning tissue paper. The

gas, which is almost pure methane, is both colorless and odourless, but burns with an orange flame. One other dormant cone was observed in bush near the tassik margin. The mud surface of the tassik was cracked through desiccation into myriad polygons which provided a firm footing. Scattered over the surface were numerous small rocks and pebbles known as exotics, which have been brought to the surface by the mud from underlying strata.

The surrounding forest revealed a variety of plant species. In addition to the Bravaisia there were several tall Roystonea oleracea (Palmiste) and numerous Crescentia cujete (Calabash) trees. Fruits, flowers and leaves from the latter were collected to determine if this species represents a varietal form of the typical Calabash. Another handsome tree noted in the surrounding forest was Bursera simaruba (Naked Indian). The only species attempting to colonize the marginal areas of the tassik was Rhabdadenia biflora, a shrubby vine sending long trailing shoots out towards the centre of the tassik. This member of the Apocynaceae has attractive white tubular flowers. Rhabdadenia is more typical of coastal areas, its presence inland attesting to the high salinity content of the mud. Several woody climbers were observed amongst the marginal vegetation. These included two plants belongng to the Bignoniaceae family, Arrabidaea sieberi, and Ceratophytum tobagense, as well Combretum fruticosum (Combretaceae) and Paullinia pinnata (Sapindaceae). Other species observed: the Composites, Mikania cordifolia, a herbaceous climber, and Pluchea symphytifolia (Geritout), a shrub, as well as the herbs Cyperus ligularis (Cyperaceae) and Enicostema verticillatum (Gentianaceae), and, another shrub, Solanum jamaicense (Solanaceae).

Due to the heat of the day faunal activity was minimal. Graham White reported seeing a Plumbeous Kite (Ictinia plumbea) and Bob Brown may have spotted a Black Hawk-Eagle (Spizaetus tyrannus) but this was not confirmed. In addition, deer and agouti tracks were seen on the surface of the tassik mud.

After having lunch at the site, members departed around 1:00pm for the return trek to the vehicles, having enjoyed a short but pleasant stay at Karamat. On our way back throuh the forest Red Howler monkeys were heard in the distance.

P.S. My appeal for Lna Campbell netted $534.80 which I passed on the Lana by draft No. 1045248 on May 24th. She has asked me to thank you for your kindness. I also thank you and advise that the account has since been closed. L.Z.

Luisa Zuniaga
Honorary Secretary
June 27, 1990.