



# THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

## SECOND AND THIRD QUARTER OF 1997

Note from the Editor: Apologies for the late turn-out of this issue of the FNC Bulletin due in part to my absence from Trinidad. The club wishes to acknowledge the contribution of Shachindra Tripathi who manages our web site.

Paul L. Comeau

### CLUB EVENTS

#### Field Trips

Sunday  
27 July 1997

Cap de Ville tree nursery and pine plantations, teak  
at Quinam.

Sunday  
31 August 1997

Blanchisseuse to Paria

Sunday  
28 September 1997

Brasso Seco

#### Lectures

10 July 1997

Sheriff Faizool (Forestry Division)  
FOREST PLANTATIONS

14 August 1997

MEMBERS' EVENING

11 September 1997

Courtenay Rooks (IMA)  
COUNTRY/NATURAL HISTORY TALK



## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### **Charlotteville, Tobago (overnight camp): 25/26 May 1996**

By: Dan L. Jaggernauth

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club's trip to Tobago took place on 25/26 May 1996. The location was Charlotteville and twenty-seven (27) persons registered for the trip. Boarding the M.V. Panorama at the Cruise Ship Complex in P.O.S., the boat was delayed in leaving at 14:40. Once underway and passing by Monos, Sheldon Bleasdel identified some erosion of metamorphic rocks on one section of the island. The boat was filled to capacity and channa and nut vendors were kept busy with their trade. During the six hour trip, someone threw an empty rum bottle overboard, thousands of jelly-fish were spotted floating near the surface of the sea, and club members speculated on the play-whe numbers for the next draw. We arrived in Scarborough at 20:25.

Walking from the boat to the port, we waited for two members to off-load their vehicles which contained our food supply and cooking utensils. Port officials did some careful checking for illegal drugs, and vegetables that might be contaminated with the pink mealy bug (*Maconellicoccus hirsutus*). Selwyn Gomes and myself sought out a maxi-taxi driver. Returning to collect the group, we boarded the taxi (HAY8601) and headed for the other end of the island. After a long journey, we slowly drove down the steep road, viewing the shimmering lights of the village of Charlotteville. Arriving at 22:45, we off-loaded our luggage and reminded the driver to return at 18:00 Sunday evening.



Figure 1. Charlotteville, Tobago (25 May 1996). Photo by Dan J.



Some of us stayed in the building that was previously used as a library, while others stayed in the government beach facility next door. Early next morning I spoke to the caretakers, Bernard and Joseph, who gave us permission to stay over the weekend. They also gave us a room to put our bags in, and Eric (Ignacio) supplied a lock for the door. After an early morning bath, we strolled around the recreation ground and Selwyn Gomes identified the green-backed heron (*Butorides striatus*). Walking back to the beach facility members had breakfast, hot coffee and other foods which were prepared earlier. After eating, many went for their luggage, deciding to stay at the beach facility, being closer to the sea.

At 08:45, we began walking to Pirate's Bay, hike no. 46 in the FNC Trail Guide. After descending some steep steps, we arrived at the clear waters of the bay. As snorkelling lovers made observations of the coral reefs, other field naturalists lay on the sand. The vegetation on the fringes of the bay showed no signs of bush fires, illegal cutting or destruction. Swimming in the refreshing waters, the hours quickly passed by. Someone commented that time was too short for this place. Most of us left the beach at 13:20. On the return walk, Eric Ignacio and myself conducted an interview with a villager, Charles Cardinal Dillon, who had reached 101 years of age. Mr. Dillon has an old time shop and does his own vending, handles his own money and is a well respected man in the village. We asked him the secret for his long life and success. His reply: "Honour thy mother and father so that thy days may be long in the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee." The contented and healthy-looking Mr. Dillon encourages young people to work hard, never give up, and the road to success becomes easy.

As we passed by the newly built jetty, we saw the laughing gull (*Larus atricilla*). Across the roadway the small shops sold a wide variety of items. We spoke to a proprietor who talked with a local accent. Eric asked her how are things in Tobago, to which she answered, "We always try to make it O.K., but the fishermen work a little harder going further out to sea to make a good catch." In her shop we saw oranges and tomatoes from Trinidad. She went on to say that she has not seen ochroes for the past four months. Eric and myself asked her if tourism has done much good for her, but she said "very little". She indicated that yachts would stay on the bay for two (2) weeks without going out to sea and feared that they are letting out their waste closeby which will eventually destroy the coral reefs and other forms of marine life in Charlottetown. She then asked us how are things in Trinidad. We told her the crime rate is escalating and unemployment is on the rise, contributing to many problems. The cheerful lady told us that if work is hard to get in Trinidad, we can always come across to Charlottetown and help the fishermen and we won't starve if we live across here.

At 13:40 we stepped across to the fish market and purchased some salmon and tuna. Walking back to the beach facility, the fish were cleaned, seasoned and a nice fish broth was ready in forty-five minutes. Some of the fish were later fried to go with two (2) large bakes.



At 17:05 I began a solitary walk to Wild Cow Trace, hike no. 48 in the Trail Guide. The long journey was more than I bargained for. On my return, I heard the call of the common potoo (*Nyctibius griseus*). As I sat on the concrete curb wall the musical voice of this bird continued. After fifteen minutes, the voice came from a different direction. Arriving at the beach facility at 19:50 I joined other field naturalists sitting on the concrete benches. After a "dramatic night" we took our early morning bath.

By 09:00 all field naturalists gathered at the beach facility. Some were very pensive while others discussed life's intricacy and how best to cope with it. When a crab vendor came by, our members purchased two (2) bunches of crabs tied up in strings. Later that morning some field naturalists visited Bobby and St. Giles Islands. Those remaining at the beach facility joined Kay Hinkson for the trip to Flagstaff Hill, hike no. 45 in the Trail Guide. Walking uphill steeply for twenty minutes we turned into Observatory Road and continued climbing. Along the way we saw extensive logging (see photo) with one log measuring fourteen (14) metres.



Figure 2. Logging in Tobago, Observatory Road (26 May 1996). Photo by Dan J.



Following Kay Hinkson we arrived at Margaret Hinkson's cabin at 10:52. As we sat on the veranda, peace and serenity, that only this special place can give, permeated our beings. The breath-taking views from Margaret's cabin prompted one member to say "I should have stayed here instead." From here we began walking again, heading for Flagstaff Hill. On the way I saw a beautiful purple flowered epiphytic cactus (*Hylocereus lemairei*) that was one (1) metre high. Reaching Flagstaff Hill at 12:30 we relaxed on the bench under the shed. Looking around we saw an old garbage bag which had burst with its contents spilling over. One caring field naturalist opened his sack, took out a new large garbage bag and placed all the spilt litter in it.

After viewing an old concrete structure and the communication tower, we began walking back. On our way we saw the blue-crowned motmot (*Monotus monota*) flying out from a hole in the embankment. Reaching back by the beach facility we walked further to the sea and witnessed a baptism. As the young boy was immersed in the water his mother kept dancing away, being filled with the power and glory of God. Baptisms similar to this one had appeared in a National Geographic magazine in 1994. Walking back, we joined other field naturalists as they took their last bath of the trip. We then began packing our luggage and swept and tidied up the beach facility and house. We gave the life guards and caretakers the extra food. The maxi-taxi came at 18:00 and we left Charlotteville with memorable experiences. As we rode along there was a heavy traffic pile-up at Delaford due to the Harvest. However, we drove slowly through and arrived at Scarborough in time to check in and return to Trinidad in safety.

### **Make Your Comments**

If you have access to the internet, check out the Club's web site

<http://www.wow.net/ttnc/>

Do you think changes are in order? Let us know please. Our E-mail address is [ttnc@wow.net](mailto:ttnc@wow.net)

At this point two draft bills which are out for comment are hosted on our web site: the draft bill for national parks and wildlife, and the draft bill for the Planning and Development of Land Act.

The comments that the club made on the draft bill for national parks and wildlife are also on the web site. This bill is now being reworked, ostensibly to incorporate public comments that were made. We have our reservations about the reworking process and think that ongoing debate is needed. We are meeting with Ministry of Agriculture officials on 20 August 1997 and would appreciate your inputs.

We hope that an ongoing exchange of views between the interested parties may be stimulated by hosting developing insights and positions on our web site.

Ewoud Heesterman  
President

The Club T Shirts available in 4 sizes at 40\$ each.

The photography group is having a work shop on the development of slides.

If you are interested contact your treasurer for more details.



## LECTURES

### **A Natural History Experience in Tobago (8 May 1997)**

By: Jesma McFarlane, Chaguaramas Development Authority (CDA)

At our May 8th monthly meeting, Dr. Jesma McFarlane shared a natural history experience with members and guests of the club. The experience involved a tomb in the village of Runnemedede, Tobago. As you are aware every village in Tobago can boast of some historical site given the turbulent history of the island. Runnemedede, a village next to Moriah, of Tobago wedding fame, was no different from the rest. As a child Dr. McFarlane went to the river for recreation, there being no television or video games. She passed by this tomb atop a hill everytime she went to the river. Within the last ten years she decided to investigate this tomb and its origin. With great difficulty due to weathering of the stone she was able to read the following inscription:

Sacred  
To the Memory of  
Christopher William Irvine  
Who died in this island  
On the 30th day of January (?)  
Age (?)

The question marks indicate illegible areas of the inscription.

She was able, however, to date Christopher Irvine through archival records and to place him in perspective. Among the many references she discovered are the following two: 1) Christopher Irvine was speaker of the (Tobago) House of Assembly in 1822, and 2) he also was agent for Tobago in London between 1829 and 1836. From the records she believes Christopher was approximately 58 years when he died.

But how did Christopher William Irvine come to be located in Gate Road, Runnemedede? From the records Christopher purchased lands known as Strawberry Hill and referred to as Lot 36 in the Parish of St. David in Tobago. This was the name of the area in Gate Road. Christopher purchased 300 acres of land from William Forbes and not getting a proper title took the matter to the House of Assembly. His claim was that he purchased the land, cleared 200 acres on which he planted sugar cane, acquired fourteen slaves and refurbished the sugar works and now he needed a proper title.

Why didn't Christopher get a proper title? It appears that in writing his will, William Forbes neglected to identify Strawberry Hill which he sold to cover his debts and to save his estate at Culloden, another part of Tobago. The matter was resolved, however, in 1849 while Tobago was under British rule. Remember, Britain captured Tobago from the French in 1793. The tomb and surrounding sugar works are undoubtedly of historical value.