



THE FIELD NATURALIST

BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

FOURTH QUARTER OF 1997

Note from the Editor: It was not my intention that the second and third quarters of the FNC Bulletin for 1997 be combined as they were in the last issue. The mix-up occurred in the printing process. We would like acknowledge the valuable contribution of Dan Jaggernaut in the final preparation stages of the quarterly bulletins. Getting them to the printer and ensuring they are posted to members is due mainly to Dan's efforts.

Paul L. Comeau

CLUB EVENTS

Field Trips

Friday to Sunday
23-25 January 1998

Matelot to Madamas

Sunday
22 February 1998

Salybia Waterfall

Sunday
29 March 1998

Yara River

Lectures

8 January 1998

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

12 February 1998

Caroline Alexis (Ministry of Health)
EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

12 March 1998

Yasmin Comeau (National Herbarium)
BROMELIADS

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Caroni Swamp: 24 November 1996

By: Dan L. Jaggernauth

Mangroves and wetlands are not 'wastelands' but a valuable resource for our people. The Naturalists Club's last field trip for 1996 took us to the vast area of mangrove forest known as the Caroni Swamp. The field trip was led by Nanán Tours and 47 persons joined us on the trip. Early that morning as one of our members drove up, she saw a Spectacled caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*) crossing the roadway. This caiman was approximately 1.2 metres long.

The first boat left at 05:35 am with twenty-seven (27) naturalists and bird-watchers aboard. As we awaited some members who experienced transportation problems, officer Auburn Nash saw a Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) as it caught an Egret in mid-air. This was certainly a clean kill for the falcon. The second boat left at 07:05 am with twenty (20) persons aboard. Field naturalists felt more comfortable with Nanán Tours as life jackets were provided for everyone. Lester Nanán gave us a warm welcome with extensive details about the Caroni Swamp. As we rode along he identified a crab which was seen climbing the mangrove. Thirs Mangrove tree crab (*Aratus pisonii*) is also called the Jumbie crab. Some bamboo traps used for catching crabs were also seen along the banks of the river.

Our first stop was at the Visitors' Centre, although incomplete, the foundation and other works done so far seem to be well constructed. Scaffolding lay around the building but work had stopped a few weeks back. Some field naturalists proclaimed that millions of dollars were allocated for the building and completion of the Centre and feared that most of the money, if not all, had already been liquidated. Some members questioned whether negotiations could not have been made to use the vacant Texgas shed closeby, which has a concrete base and a large covered structure. One member said that the firm which was awarded the contract to build the Visitors' Centre is Construction Services Limited. This firm is the same as KP's Quarry which has devastated large areas of the Scientific Reserve of the Aripo Savanna. Though the quarry had ceased operations, members remained suspicious as the gravel used on the roadway to the Visitors' Centre looked much like the same quality as from the Aripo Scientific Reserve.

We left the Visitors' Centre and as we continued along the river, we counted ten (10) Scarlet ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*) feeding inside the mangrove. As Lester Nanán switched off the boat's engine, the scarlet-coloured birds came closer. Others were seen also as they flew overhead. Cruising across the estuary we met with the other boat of field naturalists (Figure 1) viewing the Cooks tree boa (*Cascabel dormillon*). The snake was asleep on a branch of the Red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*). Field naturalists said it was a mature boa or *Cascabel*, approximately 1.5 metres in length. A

short distance away we sighted the Common potoo (*Nyctibius griseus*). This bird stood upright on the trunk of the mangrove.

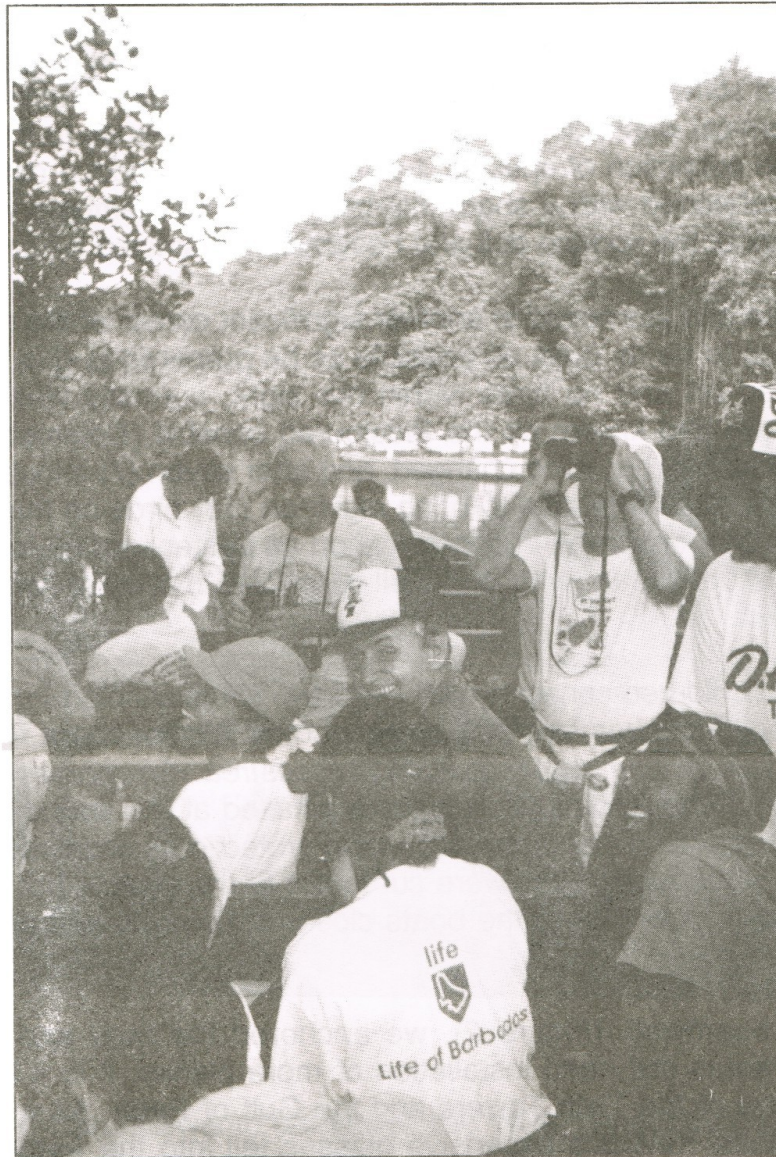


Figure 1. Naturalists in the Caroni Swamp (24 November 1996). Photo by Dan J.

The mangroves gave us great shelter from the hot sun that Sunday morning. We then passed through "The Tunnel of Love", a romantic channel through the mangrove, reaching the place where thousands of Scarlet ibis roost at night but they had all gone out to feed. Two (2) large aircraft passed overhead, and as we looked up we saw a bird with something in its mouth. Excited about the bird, officer Auburn Nash used his powerful binoculars and identified the bird as the Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) also known as the Fish hawk, and it had a *Talapia* fish in its mouth.

Heading further along, we took a respite and Lester identified the Black mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*). Here we began an adventure inside the mangrove. The roots of the mangrove were very strong and we climbed over a long way without touching the soft mud. More Scarlet ibis were seen feeding in this part of the swamp. As explorers sat amidst the beauty of the mangrove forest, they said that more stringent regulations and stiffer penalties must be given to those big industries who deliberately send toxic chemical waste down the river, creating imbalance to the fragile ecosystem and resulting in extinction of species. I also collected a voodoo doll in the swamp and this doll was beheaded with a sharp instrument. Some members were frightened and superstitious about the voodoo doll and I eventually restricted it from my collection.

We left this area and journeyed to another significant corner of the swamp. Here Lester Nanan asked us to be as quiet as possible as he prepared to give us a surprise. With engine switched off and no birds within our sight, curiosity was high. Then Lester began imitating a bird known as the Bicoloured conebill (*Conirostrum bicolor*). Using the palm of his hands, his voice changed, and after seven (7) minutes the dynamic and talented Lester Nanan was able to bring eighteen (18) birds on the mangrove close to us. Some members remained in consternation as Lester said he learned the skill from his father, Winston Nanan, who is a well respected naturalist, wild life photographer and ornithologist.

As we left the Bicoloured conebills, we heard two (2) gunshots further in the mangrove which indicated that birds are still being hunted by poachers. On the way to the boardwalk we saw thousands of oysters (*Crassostrea rhizophrae*) stuck in the roots of the mangroves. Some field naturalists were amazed at the abundant resources of the mangrove and said the swamp should get the protection it deserves. Lester said in the past the roots of the mangroves were cut to get to the oysters but it is illegal to do so now. The oyster vendors bring the boats close to the roots and use gloves to collect the oysters.

Reaching the boardwalk (Figure 2), we anchored the boat and walked up on the planks. Some areas still need installation of more planks. It is a beautiful picnic site with a good view of the Twin Towers and the Gulf of Paria. As we walked along the boardwalk, Andrea Kelsick's expensive glasses fell into the water. Two of her male friends who were with her all day long disappeared into the boat when this happened. After ten (10) minutes of speculation, Anthony James and this writer went down in search of the glasses. The murky water created poor visibility for a quick find, however no task is too difficult to accomplish for a charming young lady, and after fifteen (15) minutes of searching and various cuts from sharp oysters stuck to the mangrove roots, Anthony James got his hands on the glasses and brought it to the surface. Andrea Kelsick was extremely overjoyed and shared her cheese sandwiches, which she had packed in a large plastic kit, with everyone except the two 'friends' who had disappeared in the boat. Re-entering the boat, the tide was going down so we had to push the boat to the deeper section to get out from this point.

Returning safely to the jetty, information from the other boat of field naturalists indicated that on the day's trip two (2) Spectacled caiman, two (2) Common potoo and two (2) *Cascabel* snakes were seen. Walking out from the boats one lady forgot she still had the life jacket on and was heading for her vehicle. I then unlocked the jacket and returned it to Lester Nanan and again expressed our thanks for a successful field trip.



Figure 2. Boardwalk, Caroni Swamp (24 November 1996). Photo by Dan J.

NOTE FROM SELWYN GOMES

Club T-shirts are now available in four (4) sizes
at a cost of \$40.00 each for members.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Via: Christopher K. Starr

The Animal Construction Company

An exhibition of animal building, Glasgow University Hunterian Museum.
In celebration of Glasgow City of Architecture and Design, 1999.

A list of nests of birds of Trinidad that are important to the exhibition.

Contact: Dr. Mike Hansell, IBLS, Glasgow University, G12 8QQ, Scotland.

e-mail: m.hansell@bio.gla.ac.uk; Fax 0141 330-5971

List A. Nests showing particularly important or unique features of nest design:

1. Fork-tailed palm-swift (*Reinarda squamata*). Feathers stuck to palm with saliva.
2. Bearded bellbird (*Procnias averano*). Cup nest of specially selected twigs.
3. Golden-headed manakin (*Pipra erythrocephata*) or White-bearded manakin (*Manacus manacus*). Small hammock between forked twigs.
4. Yellow-olive flycatcher (*Tolmomyias sulphureus*) or Yellow-breasted flycatcher (*T. flaviventris*). Hanging grassy bag with entrance tube.
5. Yellow-bellied elaenia (*Elaenia flavogaster*). Cup of roots, bark, silk, feathers.
6. White-winged becard (*Pachyramphus polychopterus*). Hanging vegetation ball.
7. Rufous-browed peppershrike (*Cyclarhis gujanensis*). Hammock in twig fork.
8. Slaty-capped flycatcher (*Leptopogon superciliaris*). Ball suspended under bank.

List B. Nests illustrating particularly well some important features of nest design.

1. Ruddy ground-dove (*Columba talpacoti*) or any dove species making a flimsy twig platform nest.
2. Rufous-breasted hermit (*Glaucis hirsuta*). Nest bound to frond with silk.
3. Green hermit (*Phaethornis guy*) or Little hermit (*P. longuemareus*). Nest attached to frond.
4. Pale-breasted spinetail (*Synallaxis albescens* or *S. cinnamomea*). Twig mass with side entrance.
5. Black-crested antshrike (*Sakesphorous canadensis*) or other Antshrike species. Hammock between forked twigs.
6. Bran-coloured flycatcher (*Myiophobus fasciatus*). Deep cup of stems and silk.
7. Bare-eyed thrush (*Turdus nudigenis*). Cup of rootlets lined with mud.
8. Crested oropendola (*Psaracolius decumanus*). Deep hanging bag.
9. Sooty grassquit (*Tiais fuliginosa*). Untidy ball of grass.
10. Gray seedeater (*Sporophila intermedia*) or Variable seedeater (*S. americana*). Flimsy cup of vine tendrils.

TOWARD A NEW WILDLIFE BILL

Nadra Gyan & Christopher Starr

A major criticism of the draft *Bill for the Establishment of a National Parks and Wildlife Authority*, when it went out for public comment earlier this year, was that it dealt with two different matters and should be treated as two separate bills. Accordingly, the bill was withdrawn and the wildlife component removed for re-formulation. We report here on the work of the committee convened to prepare a new wildlife bill.

The committee has met fortnightly since late July of this year, convened by Pamela Ford, Legal Adviser to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land & Marine Resources. It is a broad-based committee of representatives from a number of governmental bodies and NGOs, with a hard core comprising the Wildlife Section of Forestry Division, Caribbean Forest Conservation Association, Field Naturalists' Club, Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust, and various hunters' groups. This is supplemented from time to time by various other organizations as needed.

The existing legislation in this area is the *Conservation of Wild Life Act* of 1958 and its subsequent amendments. However, the committee's mandate is not to reform what is in effect a law to regulate hunting. Rather, in line with the intent of the draft *Bill on National Parks and Wildlife*, it is to formulate a new wildlife policy and a draft bill for its implementation. The new policy will reflect a much broader view of wildlife, its significance to society, and effective measures for its management.

The Government has made it clear that the new bill is to go before Parliament during this legislative session, in early 1998. The committee's realizable goal is to present a completed draft bill to the Minister of Agriculture by the end of 1997. It must not only be good law -- in the sense of covering the right ground in a way that best serves the country -- but must also be in a form that can be presented to Parliament with little change.

The bill, as it is now taking shape, incorporates three rather sharp departures from existing legislation:

1. A much broader conception of wildlife, embracing not just land vertebrates and freshwater fishes but all organisms that are not normally domesticated or cultivated. To put it simply, wildlife is "wild life".
2. The view that hunting is not an individual's inalienable right but a privilege, to be accorded or not as it suits the interests of the wider society.
3. A considerably strengthened wildlife authority with greater autonomy.

[Editor's note: The Club is represented on the wildlife-bill committee by Detta Buch and Chris Starr.]

AMENDMENT TO THE RULES

It is proposed that at the coming Annual General Meeting of the Club, 8 January 1998, the rules of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club be amended as indicated in the draft that follows below.

Background to proposed rule change

The rules of the Club as they currently stand give Club members limited guidance with respect to their behavior during Club meetings and field trips. Where a member behaves in a manner that is not in keeping with the club's interests, the only means that the rules afford to influence such behavior, is censure by a specially convened meeting of the membership.

For some time it has been felt that it would be in the club's interest to elaborate the rules in order to:

- on the one hand to more closely stipulate what is required of members and
- on the other hand to allow the Club's management to enforce required behavior in a measured response to undesirable behavior.

The following proposed rules seek to address that.

Obligations of members and their guests during Club meetings and field trips.

It is proposed to augment the existing rules to stipulate that during an official club meeting, which includes the field trips that are organized by the Club, members shall be bound by the following rules.

General conduct of members

Members shall conduct themselves in a way that they do not imperil their safety or that of other club members or unduly burden other club members. Attention is drawn to the following;

- Appropriate clothing, shoes and baggage shall be worn and carried on outings to minimize the risk of bodily damage to participants.
- Meals and water shall be carried by each participant so as to be self sufficient.
- Small children shall be the express responsibility of their parents/guardians.
- All persons traveling offshore on boats shall wear appropriate flotation devices that are designed to keep their head above water in the event they lose consciousness while in the water.
- Everyone is responsible for what they bring on an outing and shall upon returning from a field trip leave no residue behind that is not compatible with the environment.
- No pets shall be allowed on field trips.
- No loud noises may be made by persons on field trips.

Signing the "list of participants" at the start of the trip

At the start of each field trip every participant shall sign the "list of participants" to ensure that there is a complete register of all participants. As such, a register may prove necessary in the event of an emergency. This list shall be lodged in a location where it will be accessible to all.

Signing off the "list of participants" at the end of a field trip

On return to the starting point of a field trip, where the vehicles are parked, every participant shall sign off from the "list of participants" to ensure that the register of persons still in the field is an accurate register.

Identifying the person responsible for the group

At the start of each field trip, the person responsible for the group shall be identified. If the group is large, the group shall be subdivided into smaller groups, each with an identified person responsible for that group.

Authority of the group leader

Participants to a field trip shall obey directives that affect the safety and nuisance affecting other members, from the leader assigned to their group.

Notifying group leader of intent to leave.

A member is not to leave the group without notifying the person in charge.

Settling of disputes

No ordinary member shall discipline any other member. Where a club member considers the behavior of another member objectionable, he/she may indicate his/her displeasure to a member of the management committee or person at that moment responsible for the group of club members. No member shall seek outside assistance to settle a dispute that relates to a club meeting, without first having sought to resolve the issue within the Club.

Suspension of members

The management committee may suspend a member from the Club for such a period as they see fit. The grounds for such suspension must be conveyed to the member who is suspended and placed on written record in the Club's archives.

Appeal to suspension

A member who has been suspended may appeal in writing to the Club's membership through the Club's secretary, who shall read out the appeal at the next monthly business meeting of the Club.

Ewoud Heesterman
President

