



# THE FIELD NATURALIST

*BULLETIN OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB*

## FIRST QUARTER OF 1998

Note from the Editor: We begin the new year with a new management team to guide the Field Naturalists' Club (FNC) over the next 12 months. Judging by the forthcoming lectures and field trips for the first quarter it promises to be an interesting year both geologically and from a natural history point of view. Let's hope the membership responds enthusiastically to the programme of scheduled events.

Paul L. Comeau

### CLUB EVENTS

#### Field Trips

Friday to Sunday  
24-26 April 1998

Weekend camp, Tobago  
Merchiston Trail (No. 39 in "Trail Guide")

Sunday  
31 May 1998

Rincon Waterfall

Sunday  
28 June 1998

Pitch Lake; Rousillac Swamp

#### Lectures

9 April 1998

Natalie Boodran (U.W.I. student)  
BIODIVERSITY OF LITTLE TOBAGO

14 May 1998

Fitzroy Amour  
WHALE-WATCHING IN DOMINICA

11 June 1998

Richard Robertson  
SOUFRIÈRE, MONTSERRAT

## CONTRIBUTIONS

### **Inquiry: Sayings and Expressions About Animals**

From: Christopher K. Starr

In the proceedings of the 1980 Latin American Congress of Zoology, Pedro José Salinas of the University of the Andes presented 12 pages of Venezuelan popular sayings and expressions about animals. He recently told me that since then he has been working toward a book-length treatment of the subject with much broader geographic scope and would appreciate sayings from the West Indies, a region from which he has very little material.

That sounds like fun. I have sent him what I have from Trinidad & Tobago but there are undoubtedly many goodies that I missed. Below is a list of what I have so far. In books and articles of folklore one often finds the spelling of ordinary English words changed to emphasize that the pronunciation is not that of London, Toronto or New York, e.g, "you" rendered as "yuh", "don't" as "doh". I do not follow this idiotic practice. However, local grammatic habits, e.g. loss of the distinction between singular and plural or between infinitive and past participle, are accurately reflected here.

I would be happy to receive any additional material to pass along to Dr. Salinas. In addition, if you think any of my interpretations is mistaken, please advise:

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The list of sayings (in bold face) and their interpretations so far:

**Those who eat the cascadu (or cascadura)**

**Will, the native legend says,**

**Wherever they may wander,**

**End in Trinidad their days.** (no explanation needed)

**a cat in a bag** Something accepted sight-unseen; compare the American "a pig in a poke".

**When cock get teeth.** It will never happen. When the moon turns blue. Admiral Nelson gets his eye back.

**Cockroach have no right in fowl party.** It is asking for trouble to step out of your social level into one where you do not belong. The first is evidently a translation of the French-creole "Wavet pa ni wézon douvan poul", of which I have noted several equivalents, e.g, "Mangous pa ni wézon douvan chyen." Are there similar variants in Trinidad?

**Cockroach never cross yard to see fowl.** (ditto)

**Corbeau can't each (sic) sponge cake.** You will look ridiculous if you try to mix in a higher social level than you belong. Much the same as the foregoing.

**Corbeau pee on you.** You are jinxed.

**Dog pee on you.** (ditto)

**Dog bite you.** (ditto)

**corbeau jawbone** Something of no economic or food value.

**corbeau luck** Nothing going right.

**play dead to catch corbeau alive** Pretend to be foolish in order to trick someone who thinks he or she is a lot smarter.

**ABC, catch a crab** Very bad handwriting.

**crab-mash clothes** Rumples or disheveled clothes.

**crapaud-foot writing** Bad, hardly legible handwriting.

**crapaud going to church** (ditto)

**Crapaud smoke your pipe.** You're going to pay your dues.

**Crick, crack, monkey break he back for a piece of pommerac.** Traditional ending of folktales.

**Ashes cold, dog lay down.** With the crisis over, people are again at ease.

**Dog don't make cat.** Like father, like son.

**donkey's years** A very long time.

**put fowl to watch corn** Entrusting your interests to an enemy; compare: "put the fox to guard the chicken house."

**like hog love mud** Loves it a lot; compare the American "as happy as a pig in shit."

**Where horse tie, is there he have to graze.** Make the best of the situation in which you find yourself.

**backing a jackass in a horse race** Backing a sure loser in some endeavour.

**never too late for jackass gallop** Never too late to make a success of yourself.

**manicou man** Effeminate man.

**set like a mapipire** Coiled and ready to strike.

**monkey eye deep all about** Greedy man.

**Monkey know which tree to climb.** If you are weak-willed, people will know how to take advantage of you.

**Monkey don't climb gru-gru boeuf tree.** (ditto)

**Monkey don't climb picant tree.** (ditto)

**Monkey say cool breeze.** Sooner or later, you'll get yours.

**monkey face** Face contorted in a funny way.

**in monkey pants** In big trouble.

**monkey tricks** Cheap tricks or ruses.

**Do like monkey and find a tree.** Get lost.

**Follow-fashion kill monkey dog.** Sometimes following the fashion can land you in trouble.

**one more trick than a monkey** Referring to a very tricky person.

**Trouble make monkey eat pepper.** It can be hazardous to be too nosy. Comp[are the American "Curiosity killed the cat."

**mosquito drumsticks** Very skinny legs.

**When rain does fall, sheep and goat does have to mix.** In a shared calamity, differences are forgotten. Compare the French-creole "Zafè mouton pa zafè kabwit."

**bad skylark** Crude or rough practical joke.

**If snake come out of bush and say snake there, he there.** If someone in a position to know tells you something, you would do well to believe it.

**Snake is snake.** All snakes are alike and should be treated alike. Is this always to be interpreted literally as being about snakes?

**Every zandolie must find they hole.** You need to know where you belong.

Reference:

**Salinas, P.J.** 1983. Refranes, decires y expresiones referidos a animales en Venezuela. *Actos VIII. Congr. latinoamer. Zool.* 2: 1509-21.

## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### **Chacachacare Overnight Camp: 25/26 January 1997**

By: Dan L. Jaggernaut

Pleasant faces and cheerful people greeted us at the Island Property Owners Association, Chaguaramas, the meeting point for the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club's overnight camp to Chacachacare. The security officer on duty, Lennox Fraser, indicated it was \$15.00 per vehicle for overnight parking and \$8.00 entry fee per person. Our boatman, Gary, charged us \$30.00 per person for the return trip. Twenty-seven (27) persons joined us on Saturday and many more were expected on Sunday morning. With some members arriving late, we left the depot at 10:20 a.m. with two boats cruising along.

During the outward journey, Sheldon Edwards identified Centipede Island, and Dr. Victor Quesnel said he was interested in doing some research there. Maybe, if someone can make the necessary arrangements for Dr. Quesnel, the research would be done in much quicker time. In the distance we saw the historical island of Chacachacare with its many abandoned buildings and rusted roof-tops. Arriving at the jetty at 11:30 a.m. some fishermen helped us to off-load the luggage. As we walked up the steps, Selwyn Gomes pointed out the building for the overnight camp.

Walking back to the jetty I had a short conversation with the fishermen who were curious about our purpose on the island. I told them we are on some environmental research for the weekend. The humble young fishermen complained about the hard times inflicted on them by the trawlers which are depleting their fish stocks and making life miserable for them.

As I walked back to the house, Juanita Henry and others swept and cleaned the building. Other members who preferred to stay in the large wooden building behind, did the same. Though the foundation and structure of the buildings remain firm, some serious vandalism is taking place in Chacachacare. Windows, doors and glass panes were stolen. Also missing were toilet sets, both tank and bowl, face basin, mirrors from walls, kitchen sink, door frames, locks, water taps, flooring boards and many other things too numerous to mention. In the large wooden building at the back, extensive areas have been removed, including flooring boards and sill supports. Vandals have been operating for quite some time and if security and patrols are not stepped up, the destruction will continue. As six (6) boats were seen anchored offshore, one field naturalist said that the strong pitch pine boards are used for boat repairs.

Victor Quesnel not wanting to waste any time began research work at 13:00 hrs. Our first stop was at the Nun's Cemetery and we saw ten (10) grave sites, all marked according to each nun's country of origin. These humanitarians had dedicated their lives to others who were afflicted with Hansen's disease, or leprosy as it is commonly called. The cemetery was well maintained with an iron fence, all painted white. We also saw a fresh flower on one of the grave sites. Walking up the trail we came to a turning point, the left branch headed for the Salt Pond and the right to La Tinta. We took the right turn, telling members we would be taking a left turn on Sunday morning.

Walking down this trail, Victor Quiesnel identified the saltfishwood tree, *Machaerium robiniifolium*. On reaching the sea he also identified the button mangrove, *Conocarpus erectus*. This beach was cleared up by the Naturalists' Club and Solid Waste Management a few years ago, but hundreds of styrotex plates and cups, plus cans and bottles have since swept up onto the site.

Some sections of the trail had eroded into the sea forcing us to take higher ground for our safety. At 15:25 hrs. we saw a bird which resembled the turkey vulture, but which was later identified by Paul Christopher as the zone-tailed hawk, *Buteo albonotatus*. Along this part of the trail some cotton trees were seen with their white, soft cotton. We hailed some campers, and arriving at La Tinta, two birds flying overhead seemed to be deeply disturbed by human presence. These were identified as the yellow-headed caracara, *Milvago chimachima*.

At La Tinta, as we took a respite under the shady trees, Victor, Frankie and Luiza told us they were not too sure whether they would join us on the trip to the lighthouse. Closeby, I collected a beautiful piece of driftwood and hid it in the bushes to collect on my way back. We then continued the strenuous walk in the hot sun up to the Chacachacare lighthouse. At the lighthouse field naturalists hailed us to climb up the steps forthwith. After ascending 48 iron steps we reached a platform and walked around the secured railing. At this elevation all field naturalists were wearing hats or caps in an attempt to protect themselves from the u.v. rays of the sun but had to abandon the idea due to the breezy environment. With good views of Patos Island, Venezuela looked just like a short swim away. Flying overhead were four (4) of the magnificent frigatebirds, *Fregata magnificens*. Using the binoculars a cave was sighted on one of the islands. The Chacachacare lighthouse was well maintained, recently painted and well constructed by British engineers of the Chance Brothers and Company Limited in 1896. As we walked down the stairs, Sheldon Edwards expressed thanks to the caretaker.

Returning from the lighthouse, Paul Christopher identified the copper-rumped hummingbird, *Amazilia tobaci* and the sooty grassquit, *Tiaris fuliginosa*. Reaching La Tinta at 17:56 hrs., Sheldon Edwards was mesmerized by the glowing beauty of the setting sun and took many photographs, capturing a rare moment in time. I then went into the bushes to collect the piece of driftwood I had hidden on the way up to the lighthouse. After an extensive search, I realized that someone had stolen the driftwood. However, as we walked up to the campers I saw the same piece of driftwood stacked away neatly under a table. As we neared the camp, Sheldon and myself called out for the guys and told them thanks for bringing along the driftwood for us. They did not hesitate to give it to us, as one man said he did not know we had put it under the bushes. They even offered Vicky Blanchard some hot coffee which was boiled in a rusty Klim can, but Vicky said "no thanks". Darkness crept on us quickly and using our flashlights, we walked along the rest of the trail, arriving at the house at 19:00 hrs. After the interesting afternoon trip, we walked down to the jetty and took a refreshing bath.

At 19:20 hrs, Sharon and Juanita dished out hot food and boiled corn for everyone. As we sat together having dinner as one large, happy family, we remained

alert for the call of the white-tailed nightjar. By this time, Mariana and other charming young ladies sat quietly in the half-lotus posture concentrating and awaiting the full glory of the moon to come over the mountain. At 19:30 hrs. Dr. Victor Quesnel walked across and alerted us to the call of the white-tailed nightjar, *Caprimulgus cayennensis*. The call of this bird cheered up our spirits at Chacachacare.

At 19:45 hrs. the moon came over the mountain and across the trees in all its magnificent splendour, creating an extraordinarily beautiful sight. Two ladies who sat contemplating the moon and enraptured by its beauty, said that the moon was dispersing romantic lunar vibrations. Then a medical doctor from one of the boats came across, speaking to our members. We offered him food and hot coffee and he ate the food with great relish. Speaking with the doctor he told me that the main reason for coming across to the house was to do the "sand dance". I inquired about the "sand dance" but he said I would not be able to see the sand dance as it must be done in solitude. He told me that vibrations in the house were positive and different from the vibrations in the cemetery. Shortly after, the doctor left saying he must do the sand dance in 15 minutes time.

After about 15 minutes, one of the ladies wanted to go across to her bags in the wooden building at the back, so I decided to accompany her. On the way up the stairs we heard some strange noises coming from a room and I remembered that someone had said that when the Coast Guard and Regiment men stayed in the building they reported that it was alleged to be haunted. Upon reaching the flooring I switched the lights off and told my friend to remain silent. Then I stepped up surreptitiously, heading for the door. Creeping like a cat I saw an open space in the door. Then I looked inside and to my amazement I saw the medical doctor doing the "sand dance". I watched carefully as he danced on one foot and shook the sand off the other foot. He then began making some weird unceremonious gesticulations. Then he used his right foot and kicked the partition seven times. While all this was happening, Selwyn Gomes was sound asleep on the other side of the same partition. Then I remembered what the doctor had said, that the "sand dance" must be done in solitude, so I stepped back about seven metres and put the lights on as though we were now walking in. Then the doctor bolted out of the room and told me he had just done it. So I asked him "what"? and he said, "I have just done the sand dance." As he briskly walked away, Selwyn Gomes woke up and said he was feeling something strange about the place. Word spread around like wildfire about the doctor and the sand dance.

At 22:55 hrs. we walked down to the jetty and saw the doctor speaking with the ladies. He gave them good advice about healthy living and used a lot of legitimate medical terminologies. He soon paddled away in his dinghy, across to his large boat. Before he climbed inside he hailed out saying, "Dan, please take care of the nice ladies for me until tomorrow." At this time I recorded the last call of the white-tailed nightjar. The conversation on the jetty continued with primary and secondary school teachers, all discussing ways and means to enhance performance and learning skills of students across the country. We also spoke about celebrating Frankie Farrell's 90th birthday later in the year on 29 December 1997.

Leaving the jetty at 12:45 a.m. we went to our respective buildings and the conversation went on late into the night. As we awoke in the morning some members said they had a short sleep as the heavy snoring of some field naturalists reverberated throughout the building. Then I saw Paul Christopher who said he saw the white-tailed nightjar under the tree and Paul took the early bird field naturalists along the trail to the Salt Pond. Others walked down to the jetty, took an early morning bath and awaited the arrival of other field naturalists who came in at 08:35 hrs. These were members who worked on Saturday and could not join us for the overnight camp.

The new arrivals walked up to the house and shared in our hot coffee. This last group for the Sunday morning trip started off at 09:05 hrs. On the way, Detta Buch identified the call of the mangrove cuckoo, *Coccyzus minor*. Walking along the well-constructed roadway, we arrived at the Salt Pond at 10:35 hrs. (see Figure 1). Clayton Hull tasted the water and said it was very salty. Field naturalists visiting the Salt Pond for the first time remained curious about the vast body of water collected in this area. Walking across to the beach, we continued along and put our bags under the shady but feared manchineel tree, *Hippomane mancinella*. Here we cautioned members about the dangerous milky sap of this tree. After a refreshing bath in the warm waters along this beach, we shared a large pot of fried rice with everyone.



Fig. 1 Chacachacare's Salt Pond (26 January 1997). Photo by Dan J.

On our return journey, Victor Quesnel identified a very healthy poui tree, *Tabebuia rufescens*. Returning to the house at 13:00 hrs. we began tidying up and collected two bags of garbage to be taken away. Walking down to the jetty, we expected Gary's arrival at 14:00 hrs., but he delayed us for more than an hour. However, when he arrived he expressed an apology which was accepted. On the way back the waters were choppy and our clothes got soaked. We arrived at the jetty at Island Property Owners Association at 16:30 hrs. and saw that our vehicles were all safe. Some members had made previous arrangements to be collected, and the tour leaders waited until everyone had been picked up before leaving themselves. After seeing the two bags of garbage we brought across put in the van, the security told us we are always welcome, and said, "please come again."



Fig. 2. Picture-perfect naturalists at Chacachacare (25 January 1997). Photo by Dan J.