



# THE FIELD NATURALIST

*Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*

July - September

No. 03 : 2000

## We Made It To The Boiling Lake!

*Eurico Jardim reports on the TTFNC's field trip to Dominica, that took place during July 24-31, 2000. The entire report will be printed in two parts so that our readers could enjoy Eurico's refreshing journalistic style. Below is part one of his report.*

The T&T Field Naturalists' Club made an eight-day visit during July 24-31, 2000 to the Commonwealth of Dominica. The high-falutin'-sounding name has become necessary (or so I was told by one of its citizens) because so much correspondence was being missent to the Dominican Republic. Vibrant member Andrea Kelsick has parents who both hail from Dominica and she used her connections to arrange for us to stay in the Youth Centre, near the centre of Roseau. The tiny capital would fit comfortably into St James. We were told that there used to be a traffic light but after it was knocked down it was never replaced.

Dominica, a country of some 70,000 fortunate souls, came across as a nation of people who have little interest in making their lives a rodent competition. We Trinis could only envy with dumb amazement a country which has not experienced a

murder in several years!



*TTFNC Members pose with the late Roosevelt Douglas, Dominica's former Prime Minister*

We got into Roseau around lunch time and after settling into our quarters (double-decker bunks in one room for the men and similar accommodation for the women in another room, with a common dining room area) some of us made the short trip into town and had lunch at an eatery with the intriguing name of The Laughing Lobster.

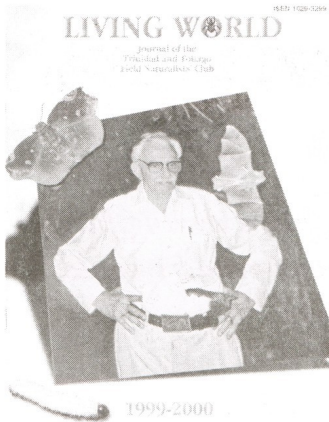
Apart from a freezer (specially brought in for us!) our common room had a TV and VCR with which we viewed the videotapes of our various trips shot by our indefatigable president. The standard of his work earned him the sobriquet of Cecil B De Mille from an impressed

Cont'd on Page 8

### IN THIS ISSUE

Revising the Trail Guide	2
Living World 1999-2000	2
Native Tree Book	3
: Secretary's Report	
Reports on Field Trips	4-5
: Marianne River	
: Tobago Overnight	
On Damselflies & Jumping Spiders	6
Book Review	7
: What's Brown and Sounds Like a Bell?"	
Dominica Trip, Cont'd	8-10

## Club Journal for 1999-2000



The 1999-2000 issue of the **LIVING WORLD JOURNAL** is now available from the Club at a cost of TT\$40.00 for members and TT\$60.00 at the bookstores. On behalf of the Club we extend our appreciation to the hard-working Journal Editorial Team headed by Dr. Elisha Tikasingh.

### JULY - SEPTEMBER 2000

The quarterly bulletin of the  
Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

Editors.....Rupert Mends  
Calista Pierre  
Contributors.....Anna Griffith, Haroon Husain,  
Dan Jaggernauth, Eurico Jardim,  
John Lum Young, Krishanta Maharaj, Chris Starr  
Photographs.....Dan Jaggernauth, Eurico Jardim,  
Krishanta Maharaj  
Design & Layout.....Calista Pierre

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation.

#### Management Committee, 2000-2001

President....Carrall Alexander, Vice-President....Nigel Gains  
Secretary...Anna Griffith, Treasurer.....Selwyn Gomes  
Asst. Secretary....Cheryl Lee Kim, Field Trip Team Members...  
Dan Jaggernauth & Sheldon Edwards, Junior Member....  
Krishanta Maharaj

#### TTFNC's MISSION STATEMENT

To foster education and knowledge on natural history and to encourage and promote activities that would lead to the appreciation, preservation and conservation of our natural heritage.

©TTFNC. 2000. All Rights Reserved.

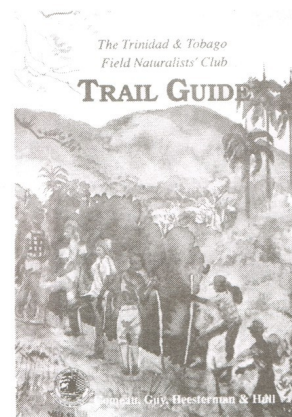
## Revising The Trail Guide

A project is underway to revise the book "Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club Trail Guide" which was published in 1990 and has been out of print for the last two years.

A Committee, coordinated by Haroon Husain, has met and has proposed that:

- ♦ Four or five teams, comprising 4-5 members be formed to check two trails per month during a six-month period.
- ♦ A workshop on trail orientation and training be conducted for all the team leaders and members, before the trails are checked, in order to standardize the reporting format.
- ♦ The recommended team leaders are Edmund Charles, Sheldon Edwards, Murray Guppy, Michael Herrick and Dan Jaggernauth.
- ♦ TTFNC Members who were not present at the last monthly meeting and are interested in, and capable of, serving on the teams, are asked to contact Haroon Husain at 657-3707.

As a follow-up to the above report, a meeting with interested members was held on October 3, 2000. An initial briefing and orientation trip will be made on October 21, 2000. Members have been assigned to groups but the membership of these groups is still open.



## TTFNC Publishes Native Trees Book

The Secretary, Anna Griffith, reports on activities for the last quarter...

The months of June, July and August were almost completely given over to the planning and execution of two events: the eight-day field trip to the island of Dominica and, the launching of Victor Quesnel, Frankie Farrell and Paul Comeau's book "Native Trees of Trinidad and Tobago."

Thanks to the unceasing efforts of the Committee for the Dominica Trip, most everything went off quite well, and I heard from more than one source that everyone was glad that they went. Managing such a varied group of people in a strange place is not always easy or successful and requires a good deal of accommodation on everyone's part. It was disappointing that the goal of assisting the people in Dominica to set up their own Field Naturalist's Club could not be addressed on this trip. Hopefully, we can lend our support from a distance. As can be ascertained from the report by Eurico Jardim in this bulletin, there was an invigorating sense of adventure on the outings, heightened by the feeling that outcomes were not always predictable.

The book launching of the Native Trees of Trinidad and Tobago was to my mind a resounding success, marked by a sincere outpouring of appreciation to the authors for their resourcefulness, tenacity and insistence on a high standard of scientific journalism. The launching took place at the Trinidad and Tobago Horticulture Society building on Lady Chancellor Road on the evening of August

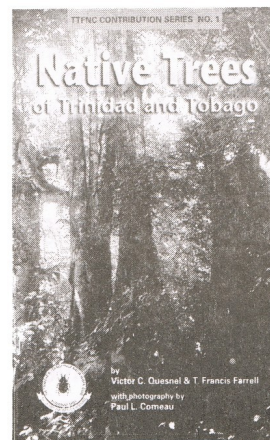
12. Five speakers, representing BP Amoco, the University of the West Indies, the TTFNC, and including two of the authors delivered addresses. The Club was fortunate to have the visual use of the masses of flowers which are brought daily to the hall, and which lent both their dignity and loveliness to the occasion. Club volunteers had transformed the hall with their decorating efforts and I know I am not alone in commending and thanking them for that.

Sales of books were quite brisk at the event and have continued to be so at the many venues where they are available. Video footage taken in Dominica by the President, Carrall Alexander, which was shown after the formal program was finished, was very interesting to several of us. Refreshments were served to nearly 100 people.

Two overnight field trips will be undertaken in August and October after which we shall be into the pre-Christmas season.



*Victor and Frankie autographs copies of their book. Looking on is Murry Guppy. Seated on the left is Andrea Kelsick.*



## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Trekking up the Marianne River,  
Blanchisseuse – July 30, 2000.

John Lum Young – Member

Once more we enjoyed another pleasant outing. The convoy left Port of Spain at 7:00 a.m. At that hour with the morning air still fresh and crisp, the hour and a half drive to Blanchisseuse was most relaxing.

We drove along Saddle Road through the Maraval Valley and along the scenic North Coast and Paria Main Roads. Through Maracas, Rincon, Las Cuevas, La Fillette, Yarra and finally Blanchisseuse. All villages with exotic names that betray our history. Spanish names like Maracas and Las Cuevas. French names like La Fillette and Blanchisseuse. Amerindian names like Yarra.

The more observant would have noticed that in La Fillette the milepost numbers were decreasing as one drove towards Blanchisseuse. The North Coast Road, which started at the Pillars off the Saddle Road in Maraval, ends at the 72 milepost on the Paria Main Road. These mile marks actually indicate the distance from Sangre Grande via Toco, San Souci, Grand Riviere, Matelot, Madamas, Grand Tacarib, Petit Tacarib, Murphy Bay and Paria Bay.

We stopped near the mouth of the Marianne River. At this point the water is brackish, as the river is in a constant battle with the encroaching sea. One would not believe that cold fresh water lies a short distance up river.

After parking we walked east along the Paria Main Road and quickly arrived at the Spring Bridge spanning the Marianne River. This is

the last functioning bridge of its kind in the country. There was a spring bridge across the Moruga River on the way to La Retraite Bay but it collapsed a few years ago (in the mid nineties) and was never repaired or replaced. Gardeners going to their holdings on the other side of the river have to hire one of the many fishing boats that moor there.

A short trek (half an hour) along the banks of the Marianne River through old cocoa estates brought us to our destination, one of the Three Pools. Most of the group stopped here but the more sure-footed went further upriver to the first pool.

Advancing to the next pool meant climbing along a relatively precipitous riverbank of stone that was damp and slippery. Dan, the tour leader, hooked up a rope along the rock face. This rigging allowed the treacherous slope to be negotiated.

Between these two pools there is a narrow area of smooth rock where the water spills over. The locals refer to this as The Slide. A few members had some fun on The Slide.

At the head of the first pool are a mini gorge and a boulder as big as a house. At the head of the gorge is a small waterfall about eight feet in height. The current was too strong and prevented us from getting close enough to determine the exact height of the waterfall. There was also a lot of debris at the base of the fall that made it dangerous to go nearer.

A few of us swam into the gorge and managed to climb on top of the boulder. We then went further up river climbing above the waterfall. On the way back some of the lads jumped off the boulder into the deep pool below. A jump of eighteen feet! Exhilarating perhaps?

*Marianne River...(from Page 4)*

There were some ladies who swam into the gorge and one was able to climb the boulder. She did not need the thrill of the jump however and so returned the way she came.

The area where the middle pool collects the spill from the first pool is about ten feet deep. At this spot locals will dive deep into this pool and be pushed along with the strong current until they surfaced lower down stream. The day was hot and Three Pools was truly refreshing. We left at midday with some members electing to knockabout and enjoy the local beaches and cuisine.



## Overnighting in Tobago : April 29-30 2000

Krishanta Maharaj & Claudelle Lewis, Junior Members

After a scenic trip on the MF Panorama, we arrived a little before 11:00 p.m. on Friday night at the guesthouses where we were staying in Speyside. Saturday morning we met at 8:30 a.m. and started our drive to Cameron River Estate. On arrival, we were greeted by the estate's owner, Mr. David Ross. He indicated that the 300 acres, formerly known as Roxborough Estate, had been in the possession of his family since 1968 and was now being cultivated with cocoa, broccoli and ginger. All the water for irrigation came directly from the Cameron River.



*Breathtaking View from Cambleton Tobago*

We then set off on a trip up the river. On the way, we identified the following birds: the Blue-Crowned Motmot (*Momotus Momota*), commonly known as King of the Woods, the Rufous-tailed Jacamar (*Galbula Ruficauda*),

commonly called King Hummingbird and the Rufous-Vented Chacchalaca or Cocrico (*Ortalis Ruficauda*). We also came across the fruit of the Bois Flot tree, a dead crab and a beautiful Blue Emperor butterfly.

Soon we arrived at a beautiful pool with a small waterfall, where many members decided to stop and bathe. A few people decided to brave the steep climb ahead. I was among those who ventured up, but without my shoes, which I had left behind, I didn't get very far. Returning from the river, we drove up to the Forestry hut on the Main

Ridge. This recreation site and hiking trail is located in the oldest forest reserve in the Western Hemisphere, dating back to 1765. The view was absolutely spectacular but, unfortunately, so were the prices of the cakes and drinks which I must admit looked pretty tempting.

Cont'd on Page 6

## An Edifying Incident

My 10-year old son Francis has exactly one central, overriding concern in life: His coolness. He is determined to develop and maintain his coolness by any means necessary. One day a few weeks ago, Dan Jaggernaut and I were doing a job up the Caura Valley requiring repeated trips in Dan's truck. Francis rode with us. During the second trip, he suspended his usual stream of chatter and was evidently deep in thought. After a while, we learned what was on his mind. Turning to Dan, Francis inquired in all seriousness, "Are you cool?" Well, that called for a definite answer. Not waiting for Dan to speak, I informed Francis that our Dan was widely and rightfully regarded as just about the coolest of the cool, a stalwart naturalist, energetic explorer and outstanding expositor of the right kind of field trip, not to mention a much appreciated cook. It's good to have such examples available when the kids are optimizing their coolness.

Christopher K. Starr  
Caura Village

## On Damselflies & Jumping Spiders

1. Some time ago a Club member asked me about the helicopter damselfly, *Mecistogaster ornata*. To my annoyance, I have forgotten who asked. If you will identify yourself, I (Chris Starr) have some information for you.

2. For a paper on jumping spiders (*Salticidae*) of Trinidad, Bruce Cutler of the University of Kansas needs to locate a paper by George & Elizabeth Peckham, published in volume 2 (1894) of the Journal of the Trinidad Naturalists' Club. None of the professional arachnologists seems to have the paper, and Bruce is hoping that somewhere in T&T there is an archive of the Club's earliest publications. Anyone who can help, please contact:

Christopher K. Starr  
Dep't of Life Sciences  
University of the West Indies  
St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago  
Tel: (868) 645-3232 x-3096  
Fax: (868) 663-9686 or 663-9684

Tobago, From Page 5

After a delicious Tobagonian lunch at Parlatuvier, we drove to Englishman's Bay for an invigorating sea bath. Later that evening, Rohan, Guppy and Tony made such an excellent fish broth for dinner that I, even though I am not a fish lover, just couldn't get enough – There is nothing quite like a Field Naturalists' fish broth! I slept wonderfully that night. Sunday's trip took us up to Charlotteville, then to Cambleton and afterwards to Hermitage Bay, a scenic and unspoilt beach. Of course, it was deserted, probably due to the obstacle course we had to complete in order to reach the beach. The walk forced us to manoeuvre through innumerable piles of cow dung, and avoid getting in the way of the cows themselves, but the beach was definitely worth it.

After lunch at Charlotteville, we headed off to Pirate's Bay to bathe in the calm, clear green waters. Later that evening we left Speyside around 7:00 p.m. to return to Trinidad, safe and sound on the MF Panorama. It was a truly delightful weekend and I already look forward to next year's trip.



Englishman's Bay, Tobago

## BOOK REVIEW

Christopher K. Starr, Dept of Life Sciences, UWI, St Augustine: ckstarr99@hotmail.com

### WHAT'S BROWN AND SOUNDS LIKE A BELL?

Review of: Ralph A. Lewin 1999. *Merde*. London: Aurum 164 pp. ISBN 1-85410-634-1.

I am always trying to get my students to think biologically. One aspect of this is thinking about natural selection all the time. What difference does it make that a given organism has this particular feature and not something else? Another aspect of thinking biologically has to do with breaking down anthropocentric presumptions, trying to see the world from another species's point of view.

It is an outstanding fact of nature that what is useless or even noxious to one species is often a valuable resource to another. Nowhere is this plainer than in the subject matter of Ralph Lewin's attractive little book. All organisms give off waste products of their metabolism, and almost certainly every organism's waste is someone else's bread and butter.

This was impressed upon me one insomniac night long ago in a village in Southeast Asia, when I went out for a walk after all decent folk had retired. I came to a spot where a toddler had pooped beside the road not long before. A pig was greedily eating it up. A while later I came back past that same spot to find that the pig had moved on, but not before leaving a deposit of its own. A dog was eating it up. (If you are in the habit of kissing your dog, please stop, especially if you have any intention of ever kissing me.) The dog moved down the road and took a little dump of its own. I knew from past observations that that offering would take much longer to disappear, but even doggy-doo has its takers.

*Merde* is a compendium of facts about animal excrement. The author's brisk, very readable style makes it easy to pick up his enthusiasm for the subject. Moreover, he has a wonderful way of posing the kinds of questions that should come naturally to any biology student or naturalist coming upon the processes or products associated with getting rid of what is no longer wanted. Why do some animals produce occasional, great big, sloppy faeces, for example, while others emit them rapid-fire as hard, little, uniform pellets? How do dung beetles do what they do? And why, after all, do we fart?

The reviews that I have seen of the book all praise it highly for just these virtues. However, I have a basic dissatisfaction. *Merde* is a very fine start that doesn't go nearly far enough, and the author does little to indicate where the subject can and should go from here. From both a physiological and an ecological point of view, excrement is serious business, and this is not a very serious book. The subject of coprology deserves a much harder-core treatment.

Let me give one example of the research potential in this area. Arising out of my observations of the pooping mammals in Southeast Asia, I started asking about the nutritional value of different kinds of excrement. Is there a general pattern linking animals' trophic levels and the value to other animals of what they waste? There probably is, and it should be found in the relative caloric content of faeces from a broad spectrum of animals of known feeding habits.

For some years, Indar Ramnarine and I have included just such a topic in the options of our department's final-year Research Project course, hoping that a student, thinking biologically and eager to find out something new, would choose it and produce the definitive work on this question. So far, I regret to say, this hasn't happened. It looks like nobody gives a shit.



viewer. Dominica has had cable TV long before we in T&T did: with all the mountains around, it is the only feasible system. But there was no cable connection to the TV, for which I was very grateful: I was nearly always the first to bed around 9 p.m. after the exertions of the day, but it was not unheard of for younger members to be liming up to 1 a.m. in the adjacent common room.

A maxi had been contracted to provide transportation to our various destinations and I joked with our driver that there was scarcely enough flat ground to play football on. With so many mountains there are waterfalls all over the place. We trekked to a few of them but enough remain to make a future visit desirable. The term mountain is not too much of an exaggeration: the highest in Dominica is Morne Diablotin, just over 4700 ft, which must be the highest in the Eastern Caribbean.



Taking in the view and a rest stop

After lunch on the Monday of our arrival, we headed for Scott's Head at the southernmost tip of the island from which a view of Martinique eluded us because of the haze. We then moved on to the Grand Soufrière sulphur springs. Some of our fruit-loving members kept hollering for the driver to stop every time we passed a mango tree with scores of luscious fruit lying abandoned below. This behaviour was a feature of all our subsequent rips through the countryside.



Emerald Pool

Next day, Tuesday, we went to Sari Sari Falls. We never got an explanation of the name in spite of several enquiries. The trip involved a tricky, steep hike down a hillside followed by several crossings of the river in which our guides blithely hopped across on conveniently-placed, stepping-stone boulders with a sure-footed agility which I admired but made no attempt to emulate. Several of us braved the frigid waters of the pool at the foot of the falls but nobody ventured across to make closer acquaintance with the towering torrent.

Back on the road we retraced our route somewhat to go to the Emerald Pool, a big favourite with locals and visitors alike because it is so easily accessible. Here I had a dip and a bit of a water massage under the small waterfall which empties into the pool. We were soon aboard our maxi for a trip to Carib Territory and a visit with a surprisingly young-looking Carib chief, who

fielded with impressive ease all the questions our group could come up with. Later we stopped for a shopping break at the roadside stalls of Carib craftwork. I bought two of what the seller called "red figs", which several more knowledgeable members of our group informed me are called "mataburro" in T&T, (a name redolent of lethal implications) and I was given dire warnings of the consequences of eating them if I didn't follow precise instructions about the way they should be consumed.

Our indefatigable president had scouted out the territory a few days before our arrival, and realising that our Wednesday timetable had us returning to the northern end of the island where we would be ending our Carib visit, had thoughtfully arranged with the proprietor of the Purple Turtle Beach Restaurant for us to bunk down on the second floor and mezzanine balcony of his establishment and thus avoid a tiresome trip to Roseau and back up the following day. Now the Purple Turtle is at the northern end of Portsmouth, the early capital of Dominica, situated on Prince Rupert bay, but the capital had to be re-situated in Roseau because nearby insect-infested swamps made life difficult for the inhabitants. The tourist literature insisted that the swamp problem had been solved but we were to find out otherwise!

At 9.15 p.m. after listening to a welcome from the Mayor of Portsmouth (*he didn't know the meaning of Sari Sari either!*), I sneaked off upstairs while another politician was holding forth at length if not *ad nauseam*.

I had not been as clever as some ladies who had commandeered the score or so of padded chairs upstairs to put together (four facing four) quite comfortable-looking beds. I applied some insect-repellent to feet and ears and allowed my aching muscles to be enveloped by all three millimetres of the industrial carpeting on the mezzanine balcony. My more polite fellow-campers, who had heard out the politician, must have been as considerately quiet as the proverbial mice when they came up later as I heard not a sound! But at about 12.30 I had to make a visit to the restaurant bathroom on the ground floor and saw a profusion of the padded chairs crying out to be used! I quickly put eight together, forced my complaining



In Carib Territory, members pose with the Carib Chief



Garden of Novelist Jean Rhys

Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club  
P.O. Box 642, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

---

---

muscles to negotiate the two flights of stairs back up to the mezzanine to transfer bedding, torchlight and repellent, and settled down for the second time, soothed by the gentle sounds of the wavelets lapping on the beach nearby.

I have no idea how long I "slept" before spray from a sharp shower of rain managed to bypass the huge tarpaulin which hung from the top floor down to the restaurant level. I quickly abandoned my "bed", arranged another eight chairs on the leeward side, and settled down for the third time. But by this time the mosquitoes and sandflies at sea level were making mas' with my repellent-protected and sheet-covered body. When I felt a particularly vicious mosquito bite *through* my tee shirt (it couldn't be a sand fly, could it?) I decided it was time to beat a retreat back to the mezzanine, where I would be only one among several prospective meals for these determined tiny terrors. After taking three photographs of my sleeping companions (nobody was disturbed by the flash!) I settled down for the fourth time.

The soothing waves were more distant and the flapping tarpaulin more insistent but I slept fitfully and filled my waking moments by studying the snoring patterns of my neighbours.

***To be continued in next issue...***



