



THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

January - March

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Panel Discussion on the Green Fund : A Summary

By Deosaran Maharaj, Assistant Secretary, TTFNC

The event was hosted by the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club. It was held on 2001 March 22 at 6.00pm at the Sir Frank Stockdale Building, Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, UWI, St. Augustine.

The programme was ably chaired by Yasmin Comeau and the panel included Dr. John Agard (Moderator), Karilyn Shephard (PAP Wild Fowl Trust), Professor John Spence and Dr. Dave McIntosh, Managing Director/CEO of the Environmental Management Authority.

Forty-six persons attended the discussion. Key participants included Molly Gaskin (PAP Wild Fowl Trust and President of CCPE), Gary Aboud (Fishermen and Friends of the Sea), Louis Guy (President of CFCA), Richard Laydoo (UNDP Small Grants Programme), Sarah McIntosh (SAD For Toco), Eden Shand, Anthony Ramnarine (Forestry Division) and Myrle Romain (President, Horticultural Society).

Nigel Gains, President of TTFNC delivered the opening remarks. He advised that the forum was designed to generate information and discussion on the genesis of the Government's Green Fund programme, the implementation process and implications regarding the role of environmental interest groups. He also gave a brief overview of the Fund.

- ◆ Brought into being by the Miscellaneous Taxes Act, 1999
- ◆ Tax of 0.1% on gross income of businesses, expected 2001 revenue is TT\$30m.
- ◆ To be used for reforestation, conservation and remediation
- ◆ Board will include a CEO, 3 EMA reps, 3 labour reps and 3 reps from the business community to be appointed by the Minister for a three-year term. There will be a technical committee
- ◆ A consultant, Dr. David Smith, is responsible for the implementation of the Fund

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- ◆ Projects for funding are to be proposed by NGOs, CBOs and individuals
- ◆ Criteria to include suitable history, minimum 2 years in operation with audited accounts.
- ◆ Funding :Small (TT\$90m), quick access, 1-2 months, 2-page application, approved by CEO; Medium (<TT\$600m), assessed by Technical Committee, approved by CEO; Large (No Limit), assessed by Technical Committee, approved by the Board
- ◆ Training to be provided in Accounting, Project Management and Report Preparation
- ◆ Legal definitions on CBOs and NGOs still not quite clear.

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IN MEMORIAM

A tribute to Denise Lee Hay by Glen Wilkes

I can clearly remember the day I met Denise. It was almost twenty years ago, and I had just joined the Club. The planned field trip was to the Madamas Waterfall, and since at that time I lived in Arima, I had driven to the junction of the Brasso Seco and Arima-Blanchisseuse roads to await the group's arrival. There I was joined by Denise and Richard, but it was only after a long wait that we compared notes and realized that we were waiting in vain for the same people. (For some reason the trip was changed at the last minute, and since we were not at an "official" meeting point, we had no way of knowing). We had a copy of French and Bacon, so we decided to try to find the falls on our own. Unfortunately, the description had different options for parking, and it wasn't clear which option the hike started from. Still, we gave it a try, but the uncertainty, lost time, as well as an encounter with a group of hunters,

all conspired to prevent us from achieving our goal. During the many subsequent years of Club activities, it became obvious that Denise was a true stalwart of the Club, as keen on a good hike as she was on serious scientific research, typified by her involvement in the Botany group and their work in the Aripo Savannah. Ironically, I got into the habit of calling her the "late" Denise Lee because of her regular unpunctuality. But a story I always tell whenever I want to demonstrate the attitude of somebody who is committed, is all about Denise and her lateness. The particular field trip was to Lagoon Bouffe in Guayaguayare, and by the time Denise got to St Mary's, everyone had left. Although all she knew was that Lagoon Bouffe was "somewhere" in the Guayaguayare oilfields, she drove all the way there, and asked the guard at the gate "which way the group had gone." She then drove until she saw the parked cars, and then set out to look for us. Paul Comeau had taken us into the Bouffe "through the bush", but when we got there I noticed a hunter's track. While everyone relaxed, I decided to explore the track with the hope that it might provide an easier way back. Sure enough, it soon came out on a dirt road, which I was certain was connected to the main road where we had parked. I decided to make sure, and was following the dirt road out, and there was Denise.

"Denise, you know where you going?" I asked. "No, but I figured I would meet all you," she replied.

In 1987, the Tourist Board put on a "Natural History Festival." Members of the Club acted as guides for paying groups, and apart from my own kayak trips to Bush-Bush, Dave Ramnarine and I were down to do an overnight hike from Blanchisseuse to Matelot. After a Club meeting, Denise mentioned that she would really like to do the hike, but couldn't afford the Tourist Board's price. Dave and I didn't hesitate, "We need a third guide." It turned out to be a bad weekend for such a trip, and by the time we got to Paria, it was obvious that the only thing we had to look forward to was rain and more rain. I gave the group the option of aborting the trip and heading back to Blanchisseuse. "Don't worry Denise, we'll do it some other time." Two months ago, I stood at a bed in Living Waters, looking down at a frail, sleeping figure. The only thing I could find to say was "Sorry Denise, we never did get to do that Blanchisseuse-Matelot hike."

In mourning her passing, I wonder if we are not also mourning the passing of an attitude and spirit with which Denise was synonymous.

JANUARY - MARCH 2001

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

Editor..... Rupert Mendis
Asst. Editor..... Calista Pierre
Contributors..... Selwyn Gomes, Cheryl Lee Kim,
Deosaran Maharaj,
Averil Ramchand, Christopher
Starr, Glen Wilkes
Photographs..... Averil Ramchand
Design & Layout..... Calista Pierre

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

Management Committee, 2001-2002

President.... Nigel Gains (629-2496), Vice-President.... Carrall Alexander (633-3373), Secretary..(vacant), Treasurer..... Selwyn Gomes (624-8017), Asst. Secretary.... Deosaran Maharaj (672-3758), Committee Members... Juanita Henry (624-4046), Kay Hinkson (637-9601) & Dan Jaggernaut (659-2795).

Website: <http://www.wow.net/ttfnc>

Contact: The Secretary, c/o P.O. Box 642, Port of Spain.

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.



SUMMARY REPORT ON THE AGM MEETING - 2001

At the TTFNC's Annual General Meeting held on January 11, 2001, a new executive was elected unopposed, consisting of the following officers: Nigel Gains, President, Carrall Alexander, Vice-President and Deosaran Maharaj, Assistant Secretary. Selwyn Gomes retained the post of Treasurer, Juanita Henry and Kay Hinkson joined Dan Jaggernauth as Committee members. The Club is still looking for a volunteer for the post of Secretary.

The Bird Group's report was presented orally by Courtenay Rooks, chairperson. This Group was very active for the year and made a number of very successful trips. In all over 50 species of birds were sighted. The introduction of a Bird Alert feature on the Club's website by Floyd Hayes and Clayton Hull was a major achievement and it is hoped that this will attract the young people to this Group.

The Assistant Secretary, Cheryl Lee Kim, gave a written report on the year's activities. She reported that since the expiration of our tenancy at the premises at #3 Keate Street, Port of Spain in February 2000, the majority of the Club's records and equipment are temporarily housed at the Treasurer's home and a few are at the home of Juanita Henry, member. Letters requesting accommodation were sent to the Prime Minister, the Minister of the Housing and the Minister of the Environment. No favourable reply has been received. Efforts are still being made to locate a building.

The Publications Committee, chaired by Laurent De Verteuil, had a successful year with the publication of "Native Trees of Trinidad and Tobago" by Victor Quesnel, Frank Farrell and Paul Comeau, with sponsorship by bpTT. The book launching received good coverage in the daily newspapers and on local television. The Trail Guide team, headed by Haroon Husain,

has begun the checking of trails—in preparation for the re-publication of the Trail Guide.

The Assistant Secretary also reported on a number of successful field trips held for the year, most outstanding of which was the Dominica trip. Dan Jaggernauth, Field Trip Coordinator, received a special commendation for taking a group of students from Leicestershire, England on a trip to the Aripo Caves in July.

Registration of new members was slow amounting to only twenty-six. A few long-standing members have passed away: Roger Barnes, Mary Bain, Jane Boyle and Denise Lee Hay.

The Club was represented in a number of external activities. The President represented us at the Caribbean Conservation meeting in Barbados and, as a COPE representative at the Global Environment Funding Dialogue Workshop. Rupert Mends represented us at a meeting on the environmental impact of the extension of the Port of Spain docks, Richard Wallace and Krishanta Maharaj represented us at the Citizens Conference on Potential of Youth. Victor Quesnel was our representative at the Technical Committee to Consider the Establishment of a Zoological Park.

Yasmin Comeau also gave an oral report of her tenure on the following Committees:

- 1) The Ad hoc Committee to advise on those species or genera of plants that should be listed under Section 8 of the Act for the protection of new varieties of plants, 1997
- 2) The Wildlife Conservation Committee which, in 2000, focused mainly on dialogue with hunters and State Agencies, and
- 3) The Museum Board where her main function is the examination and re-arrangement of the Museum's natural history collection. Ms. Comeau will continue to serve on these Committees during 2001.



FIELD TRIP REPORT

Report on a visit to Chacachacare Island

January 26-27, 2001.

by

Averil H. Ramchand - Member

Our field trip began on Saturday, January 26, 2001 when we boarded a very trim coastguard boat at Staubles Bay. The boat was pewter grey, the sailors in blue and the officers in dazzling white. The Trinidad and Tobago flag was lowered smartly before we sailed. And we were off - except that there were more of us than were on the list and we all had to disembark. At least there is some order in T&T, I thought.

We trooped off to much laughing and grumbling, only to find that some of our

executive members were at fault ("Cheups, all you wasting time", one was heard to say) and had not put their names on the right list. We enjoyed the smooth ride, innocent of what was to come: the arduous (for some) trek from La Tinta to our quarters at Marine Bay along the coastal path.

I had a garbage bag enclosing two sleeping bags as well as other luggage. By the time we arrived, the bag had been ripped to shreds by the prickly bushes which, with cacti, and succulents called "mother-in-law tongue", abound in this arid landscape. I had learned that there were no natural springs, wells or rivers on this island so we were all carrying our large bottles of drinking water as

well. Mutterings were heard about this being the hike for the day and no more walking but in the end the majority made it out in the evening for the walk back along the track to La Tinta and then up the paved road to the lighthouse.

Most of us chose to bed down in the abandoned Dominican nuns' quarters. The building immediately fronting the sea at Marine Bay was built for The Sisters of Mercy who came in 1944 and 1945 to help the French nuns with their leper patients. It seemed at first glance to be the house of choice but the amount of garbage around put us off and we beat

a hasty retreat back to the first, higher on the hill. Between these two buildings was the church, in front of which was a very old poinciana tree with an interesting gnarled trunk.

Some sweeping of the floors was required with Dan's broom but it was dust and wood debris, not garbage and, therefore, less of a chore.

The jetty at Marine Bay was a peaceful place to rest and contemplate the world. A few braved the waters but most were put off by the proximity of a yacht, so we swam on the other side of the bay where there was a small coral reef. There was another yacht unfortunately and I did see some very suspicious bubbles and a dying puffer fish floating on the surface. Are there any regulations for the yachts that anchor in these bays? The snorklers saw some small schools of attractively striped fish. And on the following day some of us were privileged to see a large sting-ray in the harbour. Personally, all I saw in the sea, apart from the dying puffer fish, were shoals of beautiful white parachute shaped jellyfish as we sailed to and



The Dominican Nuns' Convent and the other buildings where we stayed can be seen in the background.

from the island. I saw, however, a Blue Emperor butterfly which seemed to be mistaking the pile of garbage accumulating beyond the high water mark for flowers as he persistently hovered over it. It was an interesting contrast. I read later, in my research from an article by David Tindall in BWIA magazine (May/June 2000), that the Chaguaramas Development Authority was now in charge of the island and had at one time thought of developing casinos there. Mercifully the idea was abandoned but we can only hope that they may do something about the accumulation of litter.

We passed the nuns' cemetery on our way to the lighthouse. It did not look neglected. Flowers on the grave were artificial but gave the feeling that the Church to whom these nuns belonged has not forgotten them and their dedicated work for these unfortunate outcasts of society. Only one nun was born in Trinidad, another was from Portugal; the rest were French. When I returned to Trinidad I found a book by Marie Therese Retout about the work of the Dominican nuns, *Called to Serve*, and there were a few chapters on their work among the lepers.

The nuns were in charge of the Leprosarium at Cocorite, which was instituted in 1845 but moved to Chacachacare in 1922. This happened by force and by stealth. The nuns testified to much understandable distress among the patients; a great many of whom set up a wailing, some fainted, others had fits and some managed to escape by hiding in a coal bin. The Dominican sisters followed their charges soon afterwards.

According to a past inmate, there was no coming off the island after you were on it, even to attend funerals, and there were other restrictions like enforced separation of males and females even in chapel. This was true until after the war when the medical superintendent, a government officer, was more lenient. There was also no bathing in the sea and no fishing. For those caught breaking these rules there was the prison built at La Tinta. One of the nuns, Mother Rose, contracted this painful and wasting disease, and had to stay for eighteen years in a small cottage at Sander's Bay (the male lepers



Gnarled Poinciana Tree in Front of the Church

had their quarters at Coco Bay) till she died in 1937. We did not visit that side of the island but we could see the bays from a vantage point on the opposite side and could imagine the nuns' daily trek across. According to Sister Marie Therese, "The Sisters would experience bouts of seasickness when the seas were rough. In the launch there was accommodation for eight sitting and four to five standing — one day a sister fell overboard".

The evening of our first day was chosen for the walk to the Bocas lighthouse. It was an uphill push after La Tinta along a proper road. We noticed a lot of cotton trees as well as the prickly bush, one of which was "puni" (*Pithecellobium unguis-cati*). I discovered from the same BWIA magazine that there had been tobacco and cotton plantations on the island in the nineteenth century. A member of one of the planter families, General Santiago Marino, was also involved in the Venezuelan Wars of Independence against Spain and planned a revolt from this island in 1813.

The Bocas lighthouse is an important, manned one and thus was provided, via the paved road, with all the necessities for its existence.

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MANAGEMENT NOTES & NOTICES

Fund Raising Dinner & Dance

The 2nd Fund-Raising Dinner and Dance will be held on October 13, 2001 at Pier 1. Cost: \$125.00.

CONTACT: Selwyn Gomes, Treasurer or any other member of the Management Committee.

Membership Fees

Members are reminded that their yearly membership fee is due for payment by March 30, 2001.

South Arm Under Discussion

The formation of a southern branch (or equivalent) of the TTFNC is being examined by the Management Committee.

Programme of Activities : 2001-2002

The programme of activities for the period April 2001– March 2002 has been finalized and is included as an addendum to this issue of the quarterly bulletin.

Sub-Committees

The following are the Sub-Committees to be formed for 2001-2002 :

Publications—a proposal by Laurent De Verteuil is under discussion.

Botany— Nicholla Johnson & Mike Oatham, Chairpersons.

Educational Outreach—Chairperson to be finalized.

Exhibition— Chairperson to be determined.

Photography—Carrall Alexander, Chairperson.

Distressed Members' Fund—Hans Boos, Chairperson

Greater POS Plan & Tree Mapping exercise

Glen Wilkes has volunteered to represent the TTFNC in: 1) a public consultation on an Interim Plan for Greater Port of Spain and, 2) assistance to the Friends of the Botanic Gardens in a tree-mapping exercise.

Thank\$!!

To the 1999-2000 Lecturers

To the Outgoing Management Team

OPINION

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

HIKING IN AND OUT OF PERSPECTIVE

What does the Field Naturalists' Club have to do with hiking? Over the years I heard a great deal of talk about this, most of it casual and confused. At a recent monthly meeting, however, the question was posed much more sharply. It came in the form of a strong criticism of a field trip on which members took a boat to get from one point to another, when they could have walked. The critic spoke of damage to the Club's "moral authority" as a result of this outrage.

Most of us like walks in the country. For some people, the walking is an end in itself, but let us hope that this is not true of most of us. Sure, it's fun, but it must remain above all a means to get where we are going, to bring us into proximity with the rocks and plants and animals that form the Club's reason for being. Otherwise we degenerate into a mere hiking club.

So, on that particular field trip the people took a boat when they could just as well have walked. Did the boat enable them to more readily reach their destination -- where the rocks and plants and animals were to be found -- so that they could spend more time in the kind of place that makes field trips worthwhile? If it did, then the boat was a good idea. After all, field trips are about exercising the mind.

If we forget that, no amount of physical exertion and "moral authority" will bring it back.

Christopher K. Starr

University of the West Indies



Chacachacare,
From Page 5

Most of the hikers celebrated reaching the top of the hill by also climbing to the top of the lighthouse and enjoying the magnificent view of Venezuela, Patos and the horseshoe shape of Chacachacare itself. Kay Hinkson signed the visitors' book on the club's behalf, expressing our thanks. As we climbed we noticed a meandering line of heaped earth across the road. Someone knowledgeable disturbed the end of the line to show us the termites madly scurrying about. We were assured that they would mend their tunnel before morning. We heard the fine sound of small birds, probably bananaquits, and the rustling of lizards in the dry undergrowth but did not see many of them. Kay spotted a white heron in the vicinity of the lighthouse but I only saw a corbeau perched regally on the high branch of a dead tree.



View from the Bocas Lighthouse

Other birds that were seen at different times were the caracara or chicken hawk, the blue-green tanager, the white line tanager and of course the frigate birds flying high and pelicans diving into the sea. Nicholla and Lester also saw an orange-winged parrot. Our stay in the house was very convenient in many respects, despite the expected lack of furniture and toilet facilities; and a few made it even more so by constructing a bench out of bits of lumber lying around. And there was a lovely view over the bay. I wish to compliment once more the cooking of Dan and his helpers in the makeshift kitchen. I looked longingly at the hammocks strung up in the gallery by people-in-the-know and managed to survive an uncomfortable night. Juanita Henry came very well equipped with an extra oil lamp and clothes pegs which she graciously lent us.



View of the Salt Lake

On Sunday was scheduled a trip to the Salt Lake, which is an interesting phenomenon being forty feet from the sea. On our journey there along the tracks we noticed a lot of crab holes of different sizes. We also saw the dreaded manchineel tree (*Hippomane mancinella*) and heard stories of its victims. The fruit, the latex and even the bark for some are all poisonous. When we arrived, I tasted the water of the lake with Dan's encouragement. It was much saltier than sea water.

It is probably getting progressively saltier as the sea water seeps in through the sand and then evaporates. There were many insects hovering over the water but they were of the non-biting variety. Nicholla took out her portable microscope and had a look at some larvae which could not be identified. The water of the lake was clear, the bed silty. Two varieties of mangrove were seen, black and another, (either red or white). My expert was not sure. We saw the greater yellowlegs on the other side of the lake, identified with the help of binoculars; and a sandpiper



Pebbly Beach on the way to the Lighthouse

flying over, as well as the ubiquitous corbeau. We swam near the lighthouse at what was for me the most beautiful beach in the bay. This beach was composed of the most varied pebbles I have ever seen, all shapes, colours and textures. The water, as usual, was clear and calm and this time there were no yachts in sight.

At our last bathing opportunity at La Tinta beach, before we boarded our coastguard boat, I met Kerry Ahow who was busy reintroducing the ground orchid, *Cyrtopodium punctatum*, on the land near the beach at La Tinta.

I also spoke to our two orchid experts who were working on the Species Identification Project, Carlyle MacMillan and Gregory Lee Kin. They were occupied as field workers for the United Nations, updating and correcting the identification of orchid species.

They were taking back one indigenous orchid plant to the herbarium at UWI, the madonna or virgin orchid, (*Diacrium virginale*). They seemed to have had a successful expedition, having spotted five other varieties of indigenous orchids. At La Tinta we met the Pier 1, a pleasure cruiser, belting out Carnival music while waiting for the mixed group of Venezuelan tourists and 'Trinis' returning from their beach lime. We not only enjoyed the music but also the sight of our coastguard boat nosing in, making imperious signals to the much larger cruiser to make way, which of course it did.

After the inevitable roll call, we were off. The water was much rougher than it was the day before. When we hit the wake of another boat we shrieked with delight, or mortification, as the waves lashed and soaked those of us sitting on the windward side of the prow. All in all, it was an enjoyable and interesting trip.



TTFNC members on the way to the lighthouse



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

Key Issues

The following are some of the major concerns and reservations expressed by both panelists and floor members:

1. **Relevance:** Is the fund really needed? With an efficiently run EMA that meets the desired environmental objectives of the country, there really shouldn't be any need for another fund or programme to take corrective action against environmental irregularities.
- 2.. **How Much Will be Done:** TT\$30m per annum is inadequate to conduct meaningful programmes.
3. **Co-operation from the Business Community:** If businesses have to make mandatory deposits into the fund via the levy, then owners may very well adopt the position that they do not have to make any further contributions towards environmental programmes. Then we are stuck with a tax on businesses that cannot even service a reforestation programme.
4. **Top Heavy Management:** Concerns were raised over how much of the Fund will be expended in salaries and other administrative overheads.
5. **Pollution:** Gary Aboud would like to have the Fund address the disposal and treatment of toxic waste. He suggested that funds should also be allocated to assist persons adversely affected and actually dying from environmental pollution.
6. **Red Herring:** There is the general feeling that the fund is a *red herring* and that the government does not have a clear and articulated environmental policy.
7. **Holistic Approach:** Anthony Ramnarine of the Forestry Division noted that finance is not the only problem and that there must be a holistic approach to reforestation. We must have tabs on how much of T&T should be forested, where to plant, how much and what types. There must also be wildlife, watershed and other considerations. He added that some of the problems are really social and political.
8. **Umbrella Organisation:** There is dire need of a strong body or organization that represents the interests of all NGOs and CBOs that would aggressively lobby government towards a clear and effective environmental policy. Communication among environmental groups leaves a lot to be desired.

In closing, Nigel Gains remarked that there was a strong need for the various groups to work more closely together. In order to achieve this, we must share information freely by taking advantage of the electronic communication technology available to us.



