



THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

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FURTHER ON THE ERIN SAVANNAS

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John LumYoung (2001) reported last year that a Club survey of the Erin Savannas had found the Western Savanna badly degraded by pine plantings, the Eastern Savanna not readily locatable, and the Middle Savanna still in a good, natural condition. In late January of this year, Denis Nardin and I visited the site, where we found conditions much as reported earlier.

The trails to the Western and Middle Savannas are overgrown, compared with just a few years ago, but we had no difficulty following them. We made no attempt to reach the Eastern Savanna. Degradation of the Western Savanna is indeed far advanced.

You may recall that some years ago the Forestry Division acknowledged to us that the planting of a great many (at that time) young pines in that area was a mistake and promised to undertake a graded removal of them. There has been no apparent intention to honour that pledge. On the contrary, we came upon two areas nearby with extensive plantings of very young pines.

The Middle Savanna, in contrast, is apparently beyond the reach of Forestry, and it was a pleasure to regard its apparently pristine condition. This area comprises several hectares. It bears mentioning that we found butterflies to be uncommonly abundant and diverse along the roads and trails in the area.

In two articles on savannas in Trinidad, Paul Comeau (1990) and Paul Comeau & Colin Clubbe (1998) remarked on the likely effects of fire in this habitat. On the whole, their view was that fire is damaging to savanna vegetation and that dry-season fires appear to result almost entirely from human interference. These

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findings were mainly based on studies of the quite different Aripo Savannas, but it is implied that, for the most part, they can be extended to the Erin Savannas.

While recognizing that Paul and Colin possess expertise in plant ecology far beyond what we will ever have, we suggest a different view. One of the striking features of the Erin Savannas is the alternation of relatively dense forest with almost treeless open grasslands. By "almost treeless", we mean that there is only a scattering of small, shrublike trees, mainly of two characteristic species. Furthermore, the borders between these two formations tend to be very sharp. There is no apparent basis in soil or topographic differences to account for this sharp alternation. This would seem to suggest a fire climax, a natural situation in which the balance between forest and

Cont'd, Page 3

CORRECTION...

*"As you wander on through life,
Whatever be your goal,
Keep your eyes upon the doughnut
And not upon the hole." (Anon.)*

This sound advice, unfortunately, does not apply to *Ophiomorpha*, which, as John Lum Young explained in his report on the September 2001 field trip to Point Radix, is the name given to the **fossilized burrows or tunnels** found in the sandstones at Point Radix and does not refer to the architect or creature that made the burrows. No preservation of the creature that made the burrows at Point Radix has been discovered.

The error was compounded by the inference that the Sea Scorpion was in some way involved in creating the burrows. In fact, modern callianassid shrimp make similar tunnels.

The editors apologise to John, who was not responsible for the error, and to those readers whom we may have confused. The error is timely, however, in that it should serve to remind the persons who are currently engaged in the revision of *"The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club Trail Guide"* to make the necessary correction to the reference to *Ophiomorpha* that appears on p.152 of the Guide and which was the source of our mistake.

January — June 2002

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

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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.

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**WE STILL NEED AN
OFFICE: CAN YOU
HELP ??**



We're looking for :

- ♦ Very cheap rent or purchase! (we would be willing to renovate an old building or share offices).
- ♦ Office location in, or on outskirts of, Port of Spain (a house would also be suitable)
- ♦ Room for 1-2 offices, library/educational room/meeting room/t-shop, workroom (ideally!!)

EDITOR's NOTE


Due to circumstances beyond our control, the publication of the bulletin for the first quarter 2002 was unavoidably delayed. We apologize to members. This issue, therefore, combines the first and second quarters 2002.

Trip, From Page 1 grassland is maintained by occasional fires. If fires are artificially prevented for a generation or so, the grassland will retreat before the advancing forest.

If this interpretation is correct, we are faced with a tricky situation. The complete elimination of fires from a natural fire-climax habitat does the very opposite of preserving it. It was just such a policy that contributed to the recent events in the forests around Sydney, Australia.

Even if Forestry can be kept out of Middle Savanna, suppression of fires for a generation or so might be enough to reduce its open area to nothing. Managed conservation of a fire climax requires occasional deliberately set, controlled fires, along with the suppression of accidental fires. Does Trinidad and Tobago have the technical and political expertise for this? We can all endorse John's point that the irresponsible transformation of the Erin Savannas into a pine plantation must be stopped. However, this may not be even close to enough to ensure their future.

References

- Comeau, P. 1990. Savannas in Trinidad. *Living World* 1989-1990:5-8.
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 LumYoung, J. 2001. Follow-up Report on Erin Savannas. *The Field Naturalist* 2001(3):1. 

‘FURTHER ON THE ERIN SAVANNAS’ — COMMENTS BY PAUL COMEAU

With reference to the article ‘Further on the Erin Savannas’, field studies have shown that the natural savannas in Trinidad, which include Erin, are edaphic climaxes and not fire climaxes. Fire is certainly an influential factor which contributes to a decline in fire-sensitive species and a proliferation of fire-tolerant ones. However, if fires did not occur, the nature of the soil would maintain a savanna and not a forest.

A good indicator species of fire-free savanna margins is Fat Pork (*Chrysobalanus icaco*) which is very fire-sensitive. It grows to tree size along sharp boundaries but disappears once fire ravages these areas. On open savanna Fat Pork occurs only as a stunted shrub. Another good visible indicator of fire-free savanna margins is the sharpness of the forest/savanna boundary. The sharper the boundary, the fewer the fires. Boundaries that are diffuse are prone to numerous fires where a gradual change from open savanna to dense forest cover occurs. In this transition zone a few fire-resistant trees may persist (eg. Moriche palm).

Paul Comeau, Dep't. of Life Sciences, UWI 

Annual General Meeting – January 10, 2002

Secretary's Report

1. INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period ending December 2001.

The Club has had quite an active year despite the fact that we have operated without the services of a Secretary. There have been no nominations to fill this post since an attempt to do so at the last AGM. The Assistant Secretary has carried out the functions and responsibilities of the Secretary with valuable assistance from the Treasurer.

2. ACTIVITIES

2.1 Lectures

Carrall offered the theme for the lectures. It centred on the foundation, history, activities and future plans of TTFNC offspring organizations. These included the Horticultural Society, the Zoological Society, Asa Wright Nature Centre, the CFCA and Environment Tobago. A presentation was also made on behalf of an affiliate organization, the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club of Canada. On behalf of the executive and members of the Club, I wish to sincerely thank once again all the heads of these organizations for the time, effort and information afforded at these sessions. They certainly proved very informative and at times quite amusing. This series did, in fact, set the stage for some TTFNC introspection on the part of the executive.

2.1.1 Green Fund Panel Discussion

The introduction of the government's Green Fund brought with it some controversy and confusion regarding its purpose, logistics and implementation. The executive therefore thought it fit to host a panel discussion on the issue and this came off quite successfully in March. This type of forum will be followed up with another one on the State of the Environment carded for 2001 March 14.

2.1.2 Format for General Meetings

It is observed that our meetings are very long. We seem to spend a lot of time talking without significant achievements. For volunteer work, this is a lot of time wasting. It was agreed that, on a trial basis, we revise the format of the general meetings as follows: 1) Announcements, 2) Field Trip Report, 3) Upcoming Field Trip and 4) Lecture. The new format will be assessed soon.

2.2 Field Trips

The Club hosted eleven field trips for 2001, which included four overnights. Initially, the intention was to use the monthly trips to examine and evaluate trails selected for the Trail Guide revision exercise. This turned out to be virtually impossible for logistical reasons. The Trail Guide Committee's report has already been presented quite separately in our last Bulletin.

Many of our trips continue to be plagued with problems related to planning and management. Several members have expressed their concerns regarding these logistics and we have been asked to keep the trips more technical and educational and less in the nature of a hike or "lime". More volunteers need to come forward to assist in this, else a completely fresh, new approach to field trip management will have to be adopted.

Of particular note was the trip to the Erin Savanna, where we were surprised to find that pine trees continued to flourish, despite an arrangement with the Forestry authorities to reduce the area under growth by cutting the trees and selling them to the public. The area was subsequently visited by John Lum Young, Paul Comeau and Clayton Hull and this resulted in a letter of recommendation for action being prepared by John for the attention of the relevant authorities. We await their response.

The Guyana trip was rescheduled for 2002 March 24 through April 03. This came about due to the unstable political situation there at the time of planning, coupled with the fact that we were advised to do the trip in the dry season.

This is a ten-day trip. We plan to visit the Field Station of the Iwokrama Project with excursions within the Iwokrama Forest and the Rupununi Savannas. The leaders of the trip, Selwyn and Deo, will provide further details.

2.3 Membership

The Club welcomed twenty-eight new Ordinary Members and one Junior Member. Three Ordinary Members converted to Life membership. The current financial membership stands at 190.

2.3.1 Insurance

An invitation was sent out to various insurance companies requesting proposals and quotations for accident insurance for our members while in the field and when on foreign trips. There have been tentative offers that need to be followed up by the new executive.

2.3.2 Club Journal

The Journal will now be provided to the members as an additional member benefit. Foreign members will pay appropriate shipping charges.

2.4 Publications

2.4.1 Quarterly Bulletins

Four Quarterly Bulletins have been published for the past year. Once again, we express our deepest gratitude to Calista for her dedication to this production and urge members to assist by contributing to the Bulletin.

2.4.2 *Living World Journal*

The 2001 issue of the *Living World* was recently published. It was decided to issue this publication now on an annual basis. The executive has recognised the significance of this piece of literature and has decided to take steps to allow for more research and educational work to be presented on a more regular basis. The actual production process is also being addressed and this includes design, layout, pre-press and funding. The new executive is to consider its production in electronic format.

2.4.3 *Proposed Guppy Foundation*

The past year saw the production of TTFNC literature in the absence of a publications committee. In fact, the Chairman of the last committee, Laurent De Verteuil, in recognition of the importance of the Club's Journal and of the wider context of research and education in a sustained, effective and meaningful manner, proposed the establishment of a TTFNC foundation, the Guppy Foundation. He argued that structural change is required for the Club to leap forward in realizing its aims and objectives. The proposal seeks to establish a totally autonomous arm of the Club having full power to develop, fund and execute programmes including, but not necessarily limited to, all publications, research and studies.

The executive unanimously adopted the principles of the proposal. The fact is, however, that it has taken us one whole year to digest this proposal. It now requires firm collective will and conviction to execute it, or at least take it in a direction that will extricate us from the doldrums of running hikes and holding lectures. The new executive must follow up on this proposal.

2.4.4 *Native Trees Book*

Victor Quesnel made a presentation of the books to schools at Amcham's Environmental Conference last year.

2.5 *TTFNC Accommodation*

The Club continues its quest for accommodation. In the early part of the year, various avenues were explored which included the Ministry of the Environment, Caroni Ltd., the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, the EMA, APETT and a possible arrangement with the Horticultural Society. All of these initiatives proved unsuccessful. In mid-term we set up a committee for this purpose and they were given basic guidelines. Some initial investigations were carried out with Fernandes Ltd., Angostura Ltd. and Neil Seepersad, a consultant and broker of international funding. Unfortunately, again, volunteerism being what it is, no significant strides have been made.

2.6 *Awards Committee*

An Awards Committee was established for the purpose of investigating, identifying and nominating persons and organizations for the receipt of annual awards from the Club. Awards will be presented based on significant contributions to research, education and preservation of natural heritage, the environment and biodiversity. Due to the timing of its appointment, the committee was unable to adequately carry out its mandate in time for our annual dinner. Hopefully, the new term will see this committee complete its first assignment.

2.7 *Distressed Members' Fund*

There was a call for the establishment of a fund to handle aid to needy senior members of the Club. The executive then attempted to establish a committee to fulfill this function but no one accepted the responsibility for this committee.

2.8 *Other Activities*

2.8.1 *Exhibits*

We successfully hosted a booth on the occasion of the Maple Leaf International School's Environment Day in March and continued with our support of the Orchid Society's Annual Exhibition, by manning a booth at their show at the Ambassador Hotel in October.

2.8.2 *Club's Journal 1892-1896*

Selwyn acquired this publication from Luisa Zuniaga. Due to its fragile condition, he immediately took steps to preserve it by taking it to the National Archives where it was treated to prevent further disintegration. Deo is currently scanning it electronically for long-term availability.

2.8.3 *Banners*

New Banners were made for the Club.

2.8.4 *Vandalism at Chacachacare*

Nigel submitted an article, which appeared in the *Trinidad Guardian*, shedding some light on alleged vandalism of the Nuns' Quarters on the island. He sought to remind readers that a 1993 plan to convert the quarters into an eco-lodge has not yet materialized and he also questioned the natural history and preservation efforts of our own security forces.

2.8.5 *Strategic Planning*

The executive dedicated some time this year to some introspection, triggered mainly by Laurent's proposal for the establishment of a foundation, the EMA (NBSAP) questionnaire and frequent calls by the membership for better planning and execution of field trips. Strategic planning sessions were recommended but these are yet to be executed and should be one of the main objectives for the incoming executive.

OPINION

Raising funds, fine, but consciousness?

It is probably safe to say that we are all in favour of fund-raising for the Club. And the occasional expensive dinner/dance is a proven way to bring in the bucks, if it is done competently. We have now had two such fund-raisers, which I am told netted the Club about \$33,000. That is a nice sum, yet I am far from satisfied. The problem is not so much the size of the bottom line as the tone and pitch of all those other lines. The whole style of our fund-raising events calls for some fundamental reconsideration.


Let us note some peculiar features of the first dinner/dance. (I managed to avoid the second, but I am told that it was much the same thing). First, it was held in a venue that under normal circumstances caters to the dregs of Trinidad society. Then, as part of the strategy to pull in people with more dollars than good sense -- please don't deny it, I have heard as much from a number of organizers -- the programme paid explicit homage to at least one person whom, you will privately admit, we neither respect nor trust. And the main door prize -- get this -- was a free trip to a place of no natural-history interest whatsoever, on an amateur airline with an attitude.

These bizarre features all make sense when we realize that our fund-raiser had the form and style of one put on by, well, anyone. We made no attempt to put our own stamp on it. Any Club event should have natural history written all over it. It should be distinctive, so that anyone who walks in the door will know right away whose show it is. Ours was not. It could have been anybody's.

I have complained about this in at least one Club meeting, and the general response was "Well, we have to do what works to bring in the money." Now, let's think about this. It is certainly a popular argument. One hears it from those OECS states whose people do no whaling, yet who vote along with Japan. "The Japanese are going to give us two new highways for this." Or a fleet of trucks. Or But, really, field naturalists, is this the best we can do?

I would like to see the Club put some vigorous creative thinking into fund-raising, if we're going to do it at all. Let's be frank: a dinner/dance at a Chaguaramas night spot is just copying everyone else. For us to hold a public event that has nothing to do with natural history is to abdicate much of what we are all about. We have a lot of messages, and every public event must be about getting those messages across, even if it is also about raising money. Can we make it a rule that no Club event will ever again be empty of what we are about? Is that asking too much?

The question of last year's door prize introduces a very discouraging note. When I pointed out how preposterous it was that we should be offering a trip to Barbados on BWIA -- as if we want people to think that this is actually worth winning -- the excuse was that we had to take what we could get. I hope this was a misconception, that it reflects nothing more than lack of drive and imagination. Because if the Club is really so little respected out there that we have to take such measly crumbs and say thanks, then there is a much bigger problem than the take at our next dinner/dance.

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LETTERS

Thank You...

Dear Dr. Starr,

As the new Secretary of the TTFNC and as a relatively new member of the club, I would like to thank you for your observations and comments concerning TTFNC fund-raising ventures thus far.

You have given me (and I am sure other TTFNC members) some 'food for thought' as I missed the meeting where Club fund-raising was discussed. Though I cannot as yet give any assurances about future fund-raising events, I would appreciate all the ideas that you can give to me that will enhance our fund-raising ventures to more than just events to gain much needed funds. In addition, any other ideas you may have to increase the popularity of the TTFNC will be welcomed.

If all our members feel the way you do and if everyone is willing to assist, then I'm sure that future Club activities will be an even greater success than those in the past.


Thank you again

Carla Smith
Secretary
Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalist Club 

What? An Entomology Group?

At the February monthly meeting, President Carrall Alexander noted that the Club has long-standing, active groups devoted to field studies of birds and plants, but none for land arthropods. He raised the question of whether enough members have a serious interest in insects and/or arachnids to justify formation of an Entomology Group (by whatever name) and suggested that I might like to organize it.

I'm all for it. I have been a devoted bug watcher for almost 50 years and don't see why everyone shouldn't share my attitude, but I don't know if there is enough interest in them in the Club to support a regular subcommittee. If some of you would like to participate in more or less regular field trips for the study of land arthropods, modeled on the Bird Group and Botany Group's activities, please get in touch with me. My own interests are focused on social insects, with a second-line interest in spiders and other arachnids, but I am certainly willing to lead a more broadly-based group of enthusiasts.

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FIELD TRIP REPORT

Cumaca Cave – November 25, 2001

John Lum Young

Cumaca Cave, located at the head of the Oropuche River, has its history and mystery. It is home to a remarkable bird. It also contains a pool, reputed to be "bottomless," that has generated much speculation on whether its source is in Aripo or Cumaca.

The Club first visited the caves in 1895. That was a leisurely trip that took more than four days. That group overnighted in Valencia on Friday, set off on foot the following day arriving at the house on Leotaud Estate (10 minutes from the cave) on Saturday afternoon with the intention of exploring the cavern on Sunday. A member of the party, however, refused to enter the cave on Sunday due to the belief of the time that the spirits of the dead inhabited those dark recesses. As a result, they did not explore the cave until Monday. Much of Sunday was spent collecting shells in the Oropuche River. Imagine collecting shells at a place other than the seaside.

Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States, and a renowned naturalist and explorer visited the caves in 1911. Incidentally the Churchill Roosevelt Highway is not named after this US President. It is named after Franklin Roosevelt, the 32nd President of the US and Winston Churchill a former Prime Minister of England.

Thus we eagerly set off on Sunday morning for Cumac situated in the mountains north east of Valencia. It must be noted that though the official name of the area is Cumaca, its residents and others from the surrounding districts only re-

fer to this locale by its Patois name, Cumac. Interestingly, "Cumaca" is the Amerindian word for "silk cotton" and it is said that the native Cumacuna tribe once inhabited the area as evidenced by relatively regular findings of pottery and stone tools.

After crossing the Quare River on the Old Valencia Road we turned north into Cumaca Road. The road surface was in dire need of repair and the 9¼ mile drive took about an hour and a half. The procession was slow enough to facilitate observations along the way.



Steatornis caripensis — Oilbird

Cumaca Cave Nov. 2001

Photo : Dan Jaggernauth

It must be pointed out that farmers were the next settlers of the Cumac / Platanal valleys and, as a result, Cumac and Platanal are not villages in the conventional sense. That is, houses are not clustered together. The residents of Cumac and Platanal dwell on their own estates or that of their employers. In addition, most of the houses are not built near the road. So one can easily drive through Cumac and not see a soul.

After a few hundred yards on the Cumaca Road one reached the only cluster of houses along this route. This village developed with the decline of agriculture because some residents of Cumac/Platanal wanted to be closer to the larger towns where they sought employment. Recently, people have started to call this community Cumaca Road Village.

After about 2½ miles we drove over Morne Croix. From Morne Croix the road descended to the pristine Ture River, with its characteristic, swift meandering among the large boulders downstream from the bridge. After roughly one mile we got to "Backaday". The proper spelling is probably "Embacadere" because Embacadere in San Fernando is similarly pronounced "Backaday". Along

this section the bearded bellbird (*Procnias averano*) was heard. A female rufous-tailed jacamar (*Galbula ruficauda*) was perched on the roadside here on the return trip.

The abandoned government quarry was reached after a further 1½ miles. Right after the quarry should have been the Old Cumaca Road but like many agricultural access roads in other parts of the country, the entrance to this road was completely overgrown and in passing by one could never know that it once existed.

Cumaca Road climbed to the top of Mount Manac where there was a neatly made concrete cross on the right hand bank. More than sixty years ago a man from the area was bitten by a mapipire zanana or bushmaster (*Lachesis muta muta*). On the way to get medical attention he collapsed and died on the Old Cumaca Road. He was buried where he collapsed. When the new Cumaca Road was constructed this cross was erected on the roadside in his memory.

Descending from the summit we had a panoramic view of the Mathura coastline in the east. In Cumac the Group separated at Platanal Junction. The lead cars had already passed the Junction when Gary Aboud, the latest owner of Leotaud Estate (where the cave was located), stopped that section of the convoy and advised them to park and follow him from there. Those unfamiliar with the area might not have realised that it was a major junction, as at this point Cumaca Road became a bench trail continuing uphill, and Platanal Road began.

Not aware of the development to the rear, the lead cars continued along the Platanal Road and shortly thereafter passed Paponette Road on the left. By the way, it seems that almost every other person one meets from Cumac is a member of the Paponette Family. This should not be surprising, however, as the first farmers were 3 Paponette brothers. (At some time the "u" was dropped from the original spelling.) The brothers were hunters who recognised that the fertile valley would support viable agriculture. (Tucker Valley and Platanal are reputed to be the two most fertile valleys in Trinidad.) In the late 1940's three quarters of the population in the area were descendents of the Paponette brothers and Houlier, an early

planter of Platanal. The misspelling of surnames occurred when the population was less literate. In fact, there are Paponette brothers and sisters whose surnames are spelt "Pamponette" and "Paponette" on their birth papers.

After a little more than 9½ miles we passed the Cumaca R. C. School on the left. This building also served as R. C. Church, Community Centre etc. Electric power is supplied by solar energy.

The members that walked from Platanal Junction heard a troop of howler monkeys (*Alouatta seniculus*) in the forest. The lead bunch followed the old tractor road that was cut by Maharaj Bros, the previous owner of Leotaud Estate. The tractor road enabled a jeep to drive to the estate house. This road has deteriorated over the years and is now no more than a track through secondary growth vegetation.

Butterflies observed included the blue emperor (*Morpho peliedes insularis*) and the 89 (*Catagramma astarte antillena*), so called because the coloured pattern on its wings represented the number 89. Some call it P8. Perhaps it depends on the angle from which you see the butterfly. Also seen was the scarce bamboo page (*Philaethria dido*) with its bright green wings looking fluorescent in the sunlight. The walkers regrouped at the estate house that, as previously noted, was 10 minutes walk from the cave.

On the river banks before the entrance to the cave were stands of wild tannia over 7 feet high, a favourite food of the quenk or wild hog (*Pecari tagacu*). Also, strewn about the riverbed were huge slabs of rock. On the left hand wall outside the cave was a plaque in memory of two divers who had drowned while searching for the source of the river.

In March 1964 the Club and the Trinidad chapter of the British Sub-Aqua Club (BSAC) hiked to the cave together. Tragedy struck on that field trip. Most of the Club's members had left the BSAC team in the cave preparing for the descent into the tunnel from which the river flowed. It was reported that a ball thrown into the Aripo Cave was found by BSAC in the Cumaca Cave. Two BSAC team members first went down and resurfaced after the

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planned ten minutes. They did not reach the end. Victor Abraham (aged 24) and Adam Richards (aged 23) went in next. They did not resurface in the planned 15 minutes and another team went down and returned after 10 minutes finding no trace of the men. Search parties were summoned.

The body of Abraham, wedged in rocks 250 feet into the tunnel, was recovered. The searchers reported seeing the body of Richards some 350 feet along, almost at the end. Richards was partly buried under debris. His hand and leg could be seen and the aqua-lung was still on his back. It appeared that every time the air bubbles bounced against the sides of the tunnel the walls kept collapsing. The falling debris also snapped the lifeline they carried. Malcolm Brown, a professional diver in the rescue team warned, "the walls of the cave are falling and it will be dangerous for anyone to go down there". The father of Adam Richards agreed to leave his son's body in the cave because of the risk posed to rescuers. Victor Abraham had founded the Trinidad chapter of BSAC three years earlier and was a member of the Club.

These two locals were not the first to die in this cave. It is said that an adventurous native tribesman once ventured into the pool and never resurfaced. In the early 1930s two thrill hungry Venezuelans dived into the same hole and were never seen again. The fourth victim was an American visitor who was lured into the cave by its aura of mystery and danger.

The cave's mouth was set in an almost vertical cliff wall of limestone about a hundred feet high. The summit of the cliff was covered in thick forests. The opening was about 25 feet high and 15 feet wide. From this cleft emerged the Oropuche River. Inside the cave was absolute darkness, impossible to penetrate without light. We entered the pitch-black interior. This triggered a lot of squawking from the oilbirds (*Steatornis caripensis*) that inhabited the cave. The noise reverberated through the cave creating a terrific din. Scores of birds left the ledges and cracks in the walls of the cavern and circled above. Hot droppings of excreta from the circling birds landed on us as we waded through the river.

S. caripensis, also called diablito and

guacharo, is entirely nocturnal and lives in colonies inhabiting dark caves. It comes out at dusk to find the oily fruits of palms and other forest trees whose fruits have high oil content. The bird swallows the fruits whole and subsequently regurgitates the indigestible seed. It roams vast areas to feed. Flying in total darkness the oilbird emits a series of clicks. The echoes from these clicks enable it to navigate by sonar. This is the only nocturnal fruit eating bird in the world. The fruit is located by smell.

On the rocks we saw a bamboo rod, no doubt left by hunters who used it to break down the nests in the hope of catching young birds. More often than not they destroy nests with eggs. Only the unfeathered young (really balls of fat with a beak) are taken. They are considered a delicacy. Actually, if the youngsters are fried long enough they melt into an odourless and colourless oil that can be kept for over a year without becoming rancid. The oil is used for cooking and lighting.

The second cavern was of a similar size to the first and also contained guacharos. One of them was resting about 3 feet away; it did not fly off when the beam from the torch illuminated it. This *S. caripensis* was about the size of a 2lb chicken with a hard-looking, curved beak. There were prominent bristles on each side of the beak between the nose and the forehead. Its feathers were generally brown with white oblong spots on the wings. An adult male is 18 inches in length with a wingspan of 42 inches.

Guano accumulated on the slopes, away from the river current, and these were alive with cockroaches and beetles. There were seeds among the guano some of which germinated and produced sickly, yellow stems about 15 to 20 inches in height before the seedlings withered from lack of light. It was difficult to tell the number of birds but a reasonable guess may be about 200. Past the oilbird colony bats, though they were fewer in number, inhabited the back of the second cavern. In both caverns there were well-developed stalactites hanging from the roof and sides of the cave; some reached down to face height.

At the end of the second cavern the ceiling dipped to about 18 inches above the flowing river. One had to crouch very low for some 25 feet to wade through to the third cavern. There were no bats or oilbirds here. A short walk around the bend in the

river brought one to the end of the cave where the stream welled up from the ground. This was the spot referred to as the source of the Oropuche River. The pool was no longer "bottomless" due to silting of the water channel. The water in the hole reached waist height and was refreshingly cold. There are "blind" catfish in this pool but on this occasion they were not seen. The writer saw one in March 2001 on a previous visit to the cave. It must be noted that standing right up under the slanting wall the sand was soft and "quicksandish".

So where does this body of water that supports a flowing river come from? Heather Dawn Herrera, walking in the Oropuche Valley with a member of her Nature Trailing Outfit, explored a natural shaft, about 15 feet high and 15 feet wide. The tunnel descended a considerable distance into the earth at a steep 135 degree angle. With the use of ropes and torches they finally reached the bottom on the banks of a large and apparently "bottomless" pool. This pool was the last part of an extremely large river flowing through the mountain. At this point the river went further underground. They believed that this pool was "next door" to the spot where the Oropuche River emerged from the ground. They explored upstream. The river was about 12 feet wide at its narrowest point and double that in places where there were deep pools. They reported seeing a number of catfish. This was probably the "blind" catfish, the denizens of these underground rivers. There was no other apparent life at this depth. No bats or oilbirds. They went upriver for quite some distance. The banks were of sand or gravel and made walking easy. Where the sides were too steep they swam up river to get past the obstacles. They turned back at the point where fallen rocks were scattered about the banks of the river and in the river itself, which hinted that the roof may be unstable.

Heather Dawn Herrera may have found an upriver section of the river that feeds this mystery pool. BSAC found a ball at Cumac that was thrown into the Aripo Cave thus supporting the theory that the waters of Aripo and Cumac met somewhere underground. Both are pieces to the puzzle that Abraham and Richards tried to solve in 1964. The speculation remains and with the silting of the channel in the Cumaca cave the question may remain un-

swered.


We retraced our steps and exited the cave without incident. Though it was difficult to judge distance in the darkness it was probably 150 yards from the mouth of the cave to the point where the river emerged from the ground. After a brief rest at the estate house all returned home safely.

The field trips in 2001 have provided good opportunity to learn about our natural history and the management must be commended. One word of advice: the next visit to the Cumaca cave must be scheduled in the dry season. In the rainy season water levels in the cave can rise suddenly and without warning.

Acknowledgements:

The writer thanks Selwyn Gomes for his assistance in gathering information on the Cumaca cave.

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FIELD TRIP REPORT

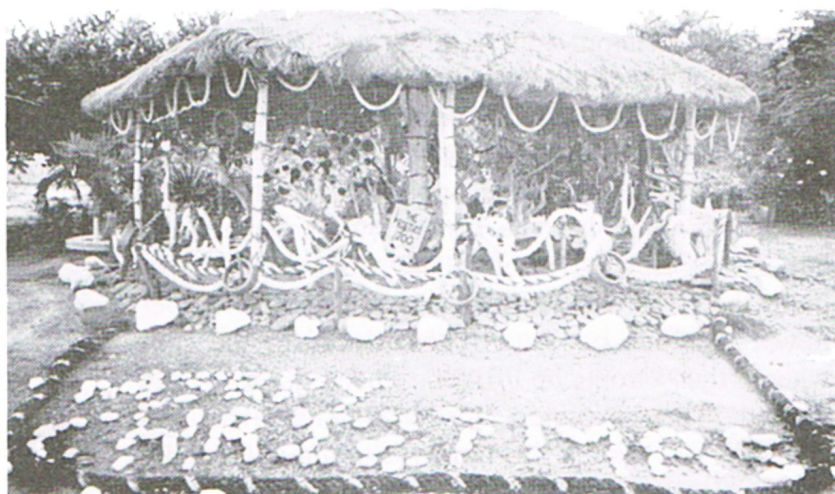
Rampanalgas Falls – January 27, 2002

John Lum Young

An eager group set off for Rampanalgas Falls in northeast Trinidad. The falls are west of Rampanalas, a village located on the Toco Road just north of Balandra Bay. As a matter of interest, Rampanalgas won the national competition for environmental sanitation in 1977.

We parked at the Driftwood Zoo located after the 18¼ mile post and immediately before the culvert with railings numbered C/1/19. Fifteen years ago, Dolly Ramirez started gathering driftwood that was shaped like animals, from the nearby beach. There are more than 50 pieces currently in the collection.

After the trail briefing we accessed the bush via Rampanalgas Road. The terrain was hilly and the trail was initially through secondary growth. As the lastro gave way to forest, trees along the track included juniper or monkey apple (*Genipa americana*), mango (*Mangifera sp.*), wild chataigne (*Pachira insignis*), balata (*Manilkara didentata*) and bois mulatre or fineleaf (*Pentaclethra macroloba*).



Rampanalgas "Drift wood zoo"

Photo by Dan Jaggernaut

We passed a lek of the stickman or white bearded manakin (*Manacus manacus*). The lek is an area where the male birds of the species display courtship rituals. Each male clears a portion

of the forest floor (about one or two square feet) by removing all leaves and twigs in order to establish his spot in the lek. The size of the lek therefore depends on the number of males displaying in the communal centre. The *M. manacus* is about 4.5 inches in length. The male's crown, upper back, wings and tail are black. The lower back is grey. The rest of the head, neck and underparts are white and the legs are orange. The female is olive green with longer, orange coloured legs. The male makes a number of high-pitched chirps but included in the routine to attract the female is a rapid series of loud claps made with the wings. Display movements include "sliding" head first down a sapling and leaping quickly from a perch to the ground and back again. Some males spend up to 90% of daylight hours showing off at these communal display grounds.

Proceeding further into the forest we entered a magnificent stand of mora (*Mora excelsa*). Mora is a big evergreen tree. It can attain a height of 150 feet and a girth of 13 feet. *M. Excelsa* is one of the few native trees to grow in almost pure stands. This is because the ripe seeds are too heavy to be widely dispersed from the parent so they simply drop from the branch when the pod splits open and bounce a short distance away. The kidney shaped seed, which is about 2¼ by 4¼ inches and weighs about 8 ounces, contains a large food supply and this gives the mora seedling a significant advantage over other seedlings on the forest floor. Mora saplings therefore dominated the ground cover though there was a scattering of tirite

(*Ischnosiphon* sp.) and saplings of bois mulatre. *M. Excelsa* thrives well on poor soil and is probably a better plant for reforestation than the more popular non-native *Pinus caribaea*. It simply needs a lot of moisture. Mora is a hardwood used in construction. In fact nails bend when you try to hammer them into dried mora planks. As a matter of interest, although mora is native to Trinidad it is not found in Tobago.

Other large trees among the mora included the cajuca or wild nutmeg (*Virola surinamensis*) with its supporting stilt roots and the white olivier (*Terminalia obovata*). Although common in Trinidad the white olivier is another tree not native to Tobago. The bois mulatre was also seen trying to compete with the mora though it is a medium sized evergreen tree with a height of 50 feet and girth of 10 feet. Hanging from some of the lower branches of the canopy were ants' nests about 4 feet in length belonging to the *Azteca* sp.

We followed a ridge for some distance that eventually descended to the river. After following the crystal clear stream downriver, we soon arrived at the double waterfalls of Rampanalgas. The falls were set in a mini gorge about 75 feet high. Forest covered the tops of these hills. Trees that managed to cling to the steep sides included the mountain rose (*Brownea latifolia*) and bois mulatre. Each fall was about 12 feet high.

After a refreshing swim the Group returned to the cars via a trail that followed the river through thick lastro. Plants along the trail included the wild ixora (*Ixertia parviflora*). Some members remained to sample the local cuisine, while others headed for Toco. Not a bad trip to start the year.



Botany Group Field Trip to Nariva Swamp: March 16, 2002

Photo: Dan Jaggernaut

My Fringe Field Trip to Cumaca


Richard Wallace

The November field trip also involved what I will call the fringe field trip. Some members, particularly the “over the hill” age group, may suspect that a specific trip might be more difficult than expected. A thought process falls into place. Should I go on the trip? I want to go out into nature. I always wanted to go to that location. All these questions and short sentences flow through one’s mind. Eventually one decides: I am going on the trip. One arrives at this trip, in this case the November trip to Cumaca Cave.

Our host was Mr. Gary Aboud, who has a direct association with the caves and the adjoining estate. Gary gathered the group, a large one by my standards, and he proceeded to give us an introduction to the cave and a plethora of rules and regulations. At this point I became circumspect and took heed of his suggestions of steep hills, bat shit, mud, bat pee getting into one’s eyes, guano and the big one— the mapipire balsams — lodged in every small patch of bushes. He particularly warned: those who had sneakers and no socks instead of high boots were specifically vulnerable to these deadly vipers. This comment scared the s—t out of me as I had on no socks, my sneakers were short and my track pants had space at the ankles. I was certainly not that adventurous to take any chances whatsoever with those treacherous, supposedly venomous snakes. At that point I decided to do my fringe field trip, go into the forest for about ten minutes and then return to the equally pleasant settlement area and encounter the surrounding “civilized” neighbourhood.

All by myself, I returned to the car park area and scanned the neighbourhood identifying the village school, Cumaca R.C. Primary, the ravine with flowing water and the stream further downhill. The area was overflowing with hawks, humming birds (purple), bell birds and butterflies. My amateur status prevented me from formally identifying the avifauna. The lush vegetation comprised splendid tropical rain forest cover and a wide variety of flora. As I toured the main road, Platanal Road, I met an elderly retired Roman Catholic villager, Mr. Paponette, with a distinctly French Patois accent. He claimed to be a second generation Venezuelan refugee. His father, he said, had fled Venezuela from would-be assassins and settled in Cumaca, Trinidad. Maybe his French name suggests Huguenot connections who settled in South America in the 1700s influencing Simon Bolivar, who later on established Trinidad as friendly. I found this old man most fascinating. He offered to take me to see his garden of plantain, peas and corn. On our way there, we encountered on the Platanal Road a snake which he said was a coral snake—he killed it with his walking stick. I kept the snake as a specimen and turned it over to Nelson Andalcio who in turn took it to UWI for formal identification.

On our way back from the garden Mr. Paponette talked about his nephew who was a politician/councillor with the NAR party. This person turned out to be Mr. Solomon Aguilera, President of the Nature Seekers Turtle Group at Matura. Small world isn’t it? On further conversation, I found out he was the cousin of one of my students at Valsayn Teachers’ College — Joan Paponette.

My fringe field trip turned out to be quite interesting, with a specimen for the TTFNC—a coral snake. I understand that the main group that went to the cave encountered a dead oilbird which was thrown into the flowing stream. Maybe we could have preserved that specimen also, to be housed in our proposed, new clubhouse. 

MANAGEMENT NOTICES

HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY ANNUAL FLOWER SHOW

The Trinidad and Tobago Horticultural Society's Annual Flower show takes place on July 26-28, 2002. Venue is the Centre of Excellence, Macoya. The TTFNC has been invited to host a booth.

Your valuable assistance is needed in either or both of the following areas : 1) Building and mounting the display 2) To man the booth.

GUYANA FIELD TRIP SLIDE SHOW

Members and Guests are invited to a slide presentation on the Club's Guyana Expedition to be held at the Horticultural Society's headquarters, Lady Chancellor Road on June 15, 2002, at 5:30 p.m.

REMINDER!!

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE
Deadline: March 31, 2002.

TTFNC Badges

Our sister organization, the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club, has donated badges to the TTFNC. The cost is TT\$5.00 each. A limited supply is available.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

John Frampton
Arnold Balgaroo
Wendell Hislop
Francis Castillo
Ved Seereeram
Lisa Seales-Dass

Sharon A Lans
Savtri Ramkissonn
Shazard Ghany
Abigail Williams
Rajiv Seereeram
Ronald Lee Kam

Rashid Ali
Fasil Mudden
Jo-anne Nina Sewlal
Michele Morrison
Francine Johnson
Sharon A. Lans
La Vonne Winter-Roach
Narisa Abdool
Marcelle Goindoo
John Agard
John Frampton

Publications

THE PALM BOOK OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO INCL. THE LESSER ANTILLES
by Paul L. Comeau, Yasmin S. Comeau and Winston Johnston

The TTFNC is accepting pre-publication orders for the above named book at the discounted price (25%) of TT\$200.00. The final cost (exclusive of shipping and handling) will be US\$40.00.

This offer is valid up to August 1, 2002. For additional information visit the website at <http://www.wow.net/ttfnc>.

Members are also asked to note that copies of the *Native Trees of Trinidad and Tobago* are still available for purchase at TT\$80.00 per copy. Also, back issues of the *Living World Journal* from 1991-2000 are also available. Contact Selwyn Gomes, Treasurer.

BOOK REVIEWS

A WORLD OF OUR OWN

Review of:

John Kricher 1997. *A Neotropical Companion*. 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press 451 pp. ISBN 0-691-04433-3 hb US\$55, pb US\$19

This is an expanded edition of an extremely successful book first published in 1989. It was so well received that it now seems very odd that nothing like this was done before, although several earlier books together sort of filled the same need. It is, quite simply, an extensive introduction to the neotropical environment and biota.

The main market for the book is evidently North American ecotourists, so that the translation of all measures into the peculiar, archaic American system and the occasional irrelevant asides on the North American biota are forgiven. There is much here of interest to armchair naturalists, but it is clearly directed at those who actually plan to visit this region as serious ecotourists. The 14 chapters (plus an appendix on safety measures against scorpions, altitude sickness and local politics) are serious fare. There is an extensive bibliography and a list of references. Blessedly, it is a good read, so that one is led through this substantial material with relative ease.

The 16 pages of colour photos are not a strong feature. The photos are mostly of indifferent quality and too small to have much impact. The book's main strength lies in its introduction to neotropical ecology, with selective attention to particular topics, such as the various roles of fruits, plant defensive compounds, and why rivers are so centrally important to the region. It makes sense that Kricher devotes a chapter to birds -- his specialty -- but the next chapter on "A Rainforest Bestiary" is so cursory as to be out of tune with the rest. And three-quarters of this chapter are devoted to land vertebrates, an insignificant fraction of the total fauna. It might be suggested that these are the animals of main interest to most ecotourists and naturalists, but surely one of the book's purposes is to lead enthusiasts to a more realistic view of the whole biota.

Kricher has evidently gotten around. Still, there are unavoidable geographic and habitat biases. To judge by the occasional personal notes, he knows the northern neotropics better than the Southern Cone, and the lowlands better than high-altitude habitats. He wisely makes no pretence of including the sea in his treatment. He has evidently visited Trinidad at least once.

If the mainstay of the book's intended readership is temperate-zone visitors, why do I bother to review it for T&T-based naturalists? Because *A Neotropical Companion* has much to teach us. Very little of the material is necessarily familiar to us just by virtue of our year-round residence in the neotropics. In reading this book, I rarely found myself thinking "Yes, yes, I know that; now, please get on with it."

In short, this book should be read by all Club members, and many will want to have personal copies.

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PEERING INTO THE PAST, FONDLY

Review of: David E. Allen 1994. *The Naturalist in Britain: A Social History*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press 270 pp. ISBN 0-691-03632-2 pb US\$25

This is a reprint of a book first published in 1976. Its subject matter might at first seem removed from the Club's concerns. To be sure, the word "naturalist" in the title is compelling, but of what possible interest to us are the long-ago goings-on in a remote and dying society?

In fact, the topic is far from esoteric, as it provides a window into the origins of our own organization. The Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalists' Club, founded in 1891, is a manifestation of the British amateur tradition in natural history. The eight founding members evidently modeled it consciously on counterpart groups existing at that time throughout the British Isles and in some overseas colonies, such as the Bombay Natural History Society.

Most of us probably take it for granted that amateurs can make significant original contributions to the life sciences, but it bears emphasizing that this is very much a British attitude. There are also fairly substantial, long-standing amateur traditions in France and Germany, but nowhere else have serious amateurs formed a sufficient mass to produce a durable culture of amateurism. And even France and Germany have not rivaled Britain in this respect.

Let us be clear on what we mean by "amateur", a French word that we can translate literally as "one who does it for the love of it." A professional, in contrast, is paid to do it. "Amateur" sometimes carries the pejorative connotation of "not up to standard," but in natural history the word is almost always meant in its positive sense.

The Naturalist in Britain is a straight-forward history, beginning with the first natural-history organizations in the early 17th century. It is organized around the rise and (usually) demise of the various generalist and specialist societies, but this is not institutional history. Rather, the written records of the groups are taken as the most accessible and abundant source of evidence, with the real focus being on natural history as a social activity. There is appropriate attention to the impact of particular publications (especially Gilbert White's classic *The Natural History of Selborne* of 1788, still in print from several publishers) and events.

Alongside the shifts in fashion and emphasis, consideration is given to two questions of special interest to me: natural history subjects as part of the formal school curriculum, and the rise of professionalism in biology. Each of these is closely bound up with the career of Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895). Huxley's life is a fascinating and richly instructive topic by itself, and we have recently been blessed with a full-treatment scientific biography, Adrian Desmond's (1997) *Huxley: From Devil's Disciple to Evolution's High Priest*.

For anyone with an appetite for the living past, *The Naturalist in Britain* is a very rewarding read.

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Donation From Page 5

2.8.6 Donation

A request was received from Detta Buch for the Club to assist her in defraying expenses to attend the 24th Annual Conference of the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council to be held in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, 2001 November 14-17. The executive approved an amount of TT\$1,000 to be applied towards airfare. Detta had quite a successful conference and she has furnished us with a report on her experience.

2.8.7 Book Launch

Congratulations to Hans Boos on the launch of his book *Snakes of Trinidad and Tobago* on 2001 November 16, 5.30pm at the Horticultural Society Headquarters. The launch was supported by the Club and seemed to be well received by all attendees.

2.8.8 COPE Outreach

COPE formed a Coordinating Committee to manage their GEF-funded outreach Programme. Nigel Gains is the Chair of this Committee and other members comprise Hema Seeramsingh, Sarah Mc Intosh and Maguerite Agard.

2.8.9 Caribbean Conservation Association

Carrall Alexander attended the CCA AGM held on 2001 October 4-6 in Barbados. The Board is made up of four organization members, two individual members and four regional government members. The TTFNC is an organization member and Carrall is the Secretary to the Board. It is proposed that the next AGM be held in Trinidad with the possibility of an accompanying conference. Congratulations to Carrall for facilitating this representation by the TTFNC on the CCA Board.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Strategic Planning

Very early in the year the EMA sent us a questionnaire on the Club's *raison d'être*. We had such difficulty in providing responses to many of the questions on the form that we eventually were unable to submit a response. The questionnaire forced us to look at our Club and initiated some introspection. These were the questions that needed to be answered if, for example, we were soliciting funding for any environmental project or research.

In these modern times of fulfilling material and physical desires, volunteerism alone in the conduct of our Club's affairs will not significantly grow the Club nor bring about major strides in realizing our aims and objectives. Whether we choose to go the way of a foundation, a fully funded Resource Centre, or a well-staffed secretariat, executive members, committee members and the general membership of the Club itself must all have a commitment to achieving these objectives. With volunteerism, we continue to stumble in our efforts to get accommodation, plan and execute our field trips, have vision and direction for our publications, research and education. The new executive must follow up on the Guppy Foundation Proposal and go through the process of active strategic planning.

3.2 Assertive Representation

We must continue to air our views on environmental anomalies whenever they do present themselves; we must actively provide that source for informing and advising government policy and decision-making. We must continue to encourage and promote research and education in the fields of natural history, environmental awareness and protection.

3.3 Executive Composition

More active participation on the part of executive members is desirable in order to more effectively and efficiently implement the Club's annual programme, especially in the areas of Public Relations, Publications and Field Trips. These functions may be assigned to committee members on the executive.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the executive and you, the members of the Club, I would like to express my deepest thanks and appreciation to all those members who voluntarily contributed to our activities during the year, in particular, those who served on the Fund-raising Committee, the production of the Bulletin and Living World, the Trail Guide revision exercise, field trip planning and execution, to all our sponsors, both corporate and individual, to those who prepared and manned booths, displays and exhibits, developed and maintained our website and, last, but certainly not least, those who took the time and effort to submit proposals to the executive for making our Club achieve strength and stability.

Deosaran Maharaj, Honorary Assistant Secretary

Annual General Meeting – January 10, 2002

Annual Reports of Groups and Committees

FUND-RAISING COMMITTEE

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club held its second fund-raising dinner this year at Pier 1 in Chaguaramas on Saturday 13th October.

This year's event included dancing with music supplied by DJ Production Sounds. It was to be the sole fundraiser for the year. The Dinner Committee, which included Selwyn, Juanita, Kay, Tony, Lee Kim and chairperson, Andrea, worked feverishly to ensure that everything was in place.

Following some last minute glitches, the programme opened with the playing of the National Anthem courtesy the QRC Scout Band. Celia Scott added that touch of class in her role as Chairperson or MC. Following her welcome address was our very own president, the quiet spoken Nigel Gains who briefed those present on the past achievements of the Club. His Excellency, President Arthur N.R. Robinson, unfortunately, could not attend on this occasion — however, seated at the head table, was our beloved past President, Sir Ellis Clarke, who graciously accepted an invitation to address the gathering. This he did with his usual flair. Professor Julien Kenny delivered the feature address. Past president Carral Alexander moved the Vote of Thanks to wrap up the formal part of the proceedings.

Then it was on to a sumptuous meal prepared by Boomerang Caterers and blessed by Luisa. Once again the QRC Scout Band swung into action, providing sweet background music with their varied repertoire. The presentation of door prizes took place during desert. These included a trip for two, courtesy BWIA, a pager, courtesy Illuminat, dinner for two, courtesy Joanne Williams, a hamper courtesy Kay and an original painting, courtesy Andrea.

It was then on to the dance floor. DJ Production Sounds took over and had everyone swinging. This was truly a night to remember. Our thanks to all those who assisted, including our sponsors as well as the embassies of France, Venezuela, Mexico, Suriname and Canada and last but not least our loyal members. Selwyn puts our profits at an estimated \$17,000. Not bad for novices! Our one wish is that more members would lend a helping hand. We can only hope that future fundraising efforts will receive far more support from our 200 plus membership.

A Christmas lime was organized and came off on 2001 December 15. It was fairly well attended and a good time was had by all.

BIRDING GROUP

2001 has seen yet another year of improvement of interest in the bird group. Participation in trips was steady and enthusiastic and all show interest in keeping the group going. We have stuck to the formula of half-day trips that are scheduled, and the schedule placed in the TTFNC calendar, which has worked well.

The year started with a trip to the Heights of Aripo that was led by Courtenay Rooks. Turnout was small (only 7) but very enthusiastic. Due to the poor conditions of the road, all jumped into 4-wheel drive vehicles and drove up to the birding area, then got out and started birding as they walked along the road. 53 species of birds were tallied on this trip, the highlights of which included: two Gray-Headed Kites, a Dusky-Capped Flycatcher, a Yellow-Legged Thrush, two Red-Legged Honeycreepers and a Trinidad Euphonia among many tanagers and other special birds.

The second trip of the year was to look for Gulls on the West Coast and was lead by Courtenay Rooks. The turnout for this was even smaller with only 6 participants, however they were just as enthusiastic ever. San Fernando produced several hundred Laughing Gulls among which were found a Franklin's Gull, two Lesser Black Backed Gulls, Egrets, Pelicans, Frigatebirds and others. One of the participants was Howard Kilpatrick who suggested that instead of going to Waterloo he would take everyone to Oropuche Swamp. All agreed. This was an excellent idea as it produced many excellent birds such as: Spotted Tody-flycatcher, Greater Ani, American Redstart, Scarlet Ibis, Black-bellied Whistling-ducks, Black-necked Stilts, Black-crested Antshrikes and Scrub Flycatcher.

In May there was a larger turnout with about 15 birders going on the trip of upper St Anns. For this trip participants walked along trails through the forest while looking for birds and they were treated to 50 wonderful birds. The highlights of which were excellent views of Violaceous Trogon, Streaked Xenops, Tropical Parula, Golden-crowned Warbler, Blue Dacnis, Purple and Red-legged Honeycreepers, also making an appearance were Chestnut Woodpecker and Trinidad Euphonia.

Martyn Kenefick led the July trip to Morne Bleu that produced 75 birds. The day started at Morne Bleu with excellent views of Hepatic Tanager, where the Hepatic's pale bill was pointed out. Though Speckled Tanagers were seen not all saw them, however everyone had excellent views of many birds such as Golden-headed Manakins, Violaceous Euphonia, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Black-tailed Tityra, Ornate-Hawk-Eagle, Pyritic Flycatcher and many more, as they went from Morne Bleu to Las Lapas and then did roadside birding on the way to

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

Trincity Ponds. At the ponds all saw Yellow-hooded Blackbirds, Least Grebe, Egrets, Herons, Yellow-chinned Spinetail and much more.

The September trip to Caroni rice fields and Waterloo was well attended and was our most successful ever. It was led by Martyn Kenefick and Floyd Hayes and produced over 80 birds! All saw Short-eared Owl (1st for T&T), Grey Heron (2nd for Trinidad), Maguari Stork (1st for T&T) and many other spectacular birds, which included Aplomado Falcon, Snail Kite, Least, Pectoral, White-rumped and other Sandpipers, Black-bellied, Collared and other Plovers, Long Winged Harrier, Black-necked Stilts and many more birds.

The final trip of the year was to Tucker Valley and Chaguaramas, then the Fort George Road. This was well attended with about 15 participants that were treated to 43 birds with excellent views of Squirrel Cuckoo, Golden-crowned Warbler, Golden Headed Manakin, Violaceous and White-tailed Trogons, Turquoise, White-lined, White-Shouldered Tanagers and many more. A White-bearded Manakin lek was also visited. Unfortunately the trip to Fort George did not produce many birds, as it was very hot by this time, hence it was decided to do Fort George as a trip by itself in 2002.

A schedule has already been done for 2002/2003 rotating trips between forest and wetland birding, thus ensuring a wide variety of habitats is visited. The group is also exploring the option of starting censuses of birds. This will provide much needed data on the status of birds in Trinidad. The group looks forward to an even more successful new year as interest increases.

BOTANY GROUP

Trip to Morne Bleu: Montane Forest/Cloud Forest

Location: Arima-Blanchisseuse Road, Date: Saturday 17th March 2001, Leaders: Doreen Jodhan-Oatham and Mr. Winston Johnson (T&T National Herbarium). Attendance: 10 persons

A thank you letter was sent in by one of the attendees, Prof. Nobloch, from Germany, who was a visitor and Professor of Ethnobotany.

Trip to Irois Forest: Seasonal Evergreen Forest, Location: Chatham Road, Date: Saturday 20th October 2001
Leaders: Mr. Wilbur Isaac and Mr. Ramesh Bissoon (Forestry Division South West Conservancy). Attendance: 27 persons

The group included a group of Dr. Starr's entomology students from UWI. Parking was kindly provided by Mr. Kalpoo who is also from the Forestry Division South West Conservancy. Mrs. Nadra Gyan of the Wildlife Section and Mr. Lakhani of Forestry Division approved the assistance of the foresters. Letters requesting their assistance were sent to them as well as Mrs. Jitta of the San Fernando Forestry Office and subsequently followed up by thank you letters. A handout for the trip was also produced with the assistance of Dr. Oatham and Doreen Jodhan-Oatham, who were unable to attend.

Itinerary for 2002

16th March 2002, Nariva Swamp

19th October 2002, Aripo Savannas 