



# THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

July - September 2009

Issue No: 3/2009

## Mapepires Galore

Victor C. Quesnel and Gail Abdullah

This is a record of nine encounters between humans and mapepire balsin (*Bothrops atrox*) all of which occurred on the 52 day period, 16 Feb, 2009 – 8 April 2009 and all in the relatively small area of Talparo and environs. Three people were bitten, all survived but not with equal ease.

### OBSERVATIONS

#### The three cases of snakebite

##### First Case

We start with a description of her experience by Gail Abdulla hereinafter called GA. From here on authors and victims will be referred to by initials only.

“At approximately, 4:45 p.m. on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2009 I was pruning some plants that were growing against a wall of my home at Leotaud Trace, Talparo, when I felt two sharp punctures simultaneously on my right index finger. I suspected the bite/sting was toxic as the wound tingled very mildly. There were two dots of blood at the site about 1 cm apart and the wound itself was not visible.

Initially I thought it was a scorpion sting or a spider bite and it felt like two sharp punctures that curved slightly upward as they entered the flesh and the peculiar sensation that it was happening in slow motion. I then retreated to the kitchen when I could not find the source of the bite while my husband continued to look for it.

I took 3 grams of granular vitamin C and very quickly began to feel nauseous and dizzy. About five minutes later my husband located the mapepire balsain which was about 30 cm long. At this point I had a bad headache.



*Bothrops atrox*

Photo courtesy Wikimedia commons <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bothrops-atrox--snake-hook.jpg>



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### Editors note

Much thanks to Karie-Ann DeGannes for assistance with the retyping of the cover article.

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Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

## July - September 2009

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## Mapepires Galore

Victor C. Quesnel and Gail Abdullah

Feature



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It took a further 10 minutes to change my clothes and then we paid a quick visit to our neighbour, VQ, to confirm that the Sangre Grande hospital is the one that normally stocked the antivenin. He confirmed that Sangre Grande was the place to go and offered to call to alert them to our planned arrival. Just before leaving, at about 5:15 p.m, I started to vomit (losing any benefit that might have come from the vitamin C).

On the way to the hospital I vomited six more times. From the fifth time (at about 5:45 p.m. blood was present. This persisted until Wednesday. We arrived at Sangre Grande at about 6:15 p.m. I was virtually immobile at this point and in excruciating pain through my body. I also felt I had a fever and was exhausted. Once I was in the Intensive Care Unit and the doctors satisfied about the identity of the snake I was given plasma and four vials of antivenin (10ml each). I was then sent to a ward. I seem to remember receiving antibiotics also but my memory is a bit hazy about that.

At about 12:15 a.m. on Tuesday I had an uncontrollable fit of shivering and I fell asleep before it was over. I slept for 2 ½ to 3 hours. On waking I had the most peculiar feeling that the venom was moving through my body. The pain seemed worse on Tuesday and I felt even more exhausted. I could not move my hand or body without pain. To ease this my hand was placed in a sling. My gums started to bleed. At about 7 a.m. the doctors informed me that the blood tests showed that I was not responding to the antivenin and they administered another four vials. As a result, later on Tuesday the blood tests showed a slight improvement.

My finger had a slight discolouration at the joint closest to the wound so the doctors requested the surgeon to check for gangrenous tissue. On

Wednesday morning the surgeon informed me that the discolouration was not a problem and that there was no need for surgery. By Wednesday morning the swelling in my arm and finger was much reduced and I could move without pain. The blood tests were favourable so I was discharged at noon on Thursday.”

### Second Case

The second person to be bitten (on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2009) was a 38 month old girl (SS) who was visiting a friend who lived on the main road between Talparo and Mundo Nuevo. We do not know the exact location but place it nearer to Talparo than Mundo Nuevo. The girl went into a clump of grass to retrieve a ball and was bitten on her left big toe. The child's grandmother who attended to the child throughout the ordeal, and who was our informant, did not see this and soon found herself with a very sick child and only a tiny wound to the left big toe as a clue to what had happened. She took the child to the Arima District Hospital from which she was sent to the Mount Hope Hospital. There one of the doctors recognized the signs and symptoms of a snakebite and sent the grandparents to the Sangre Grande Hospital for antivenin. The child had been bitten at about 5:00 p.m. She was given the first two vials of antivenin at about 10:30 p.m. and the remaining eight at about 3:00 a.m. She was hospitalized for a week but needed a further week for full recovery.

### Third Case

The third person to be bitten (on 28<sup>th</sup> March) was a strong, middle aged man (TleB). He was weeding the hedge in the front yard of his home in Talparo when he was bitten on the index finger of his right hand. He had a little earlier dug up and killed two small mapepire balsain which he did not recognize as such because of their small size which

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Feature



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was about 40 cm long. The third one he dug up bit him. He did not regard the bite as anything serious to start with but went to his parent's home next door to show them what had happened. He collapsed on the ground before he could reach the front door. He was taken to the Arima District Hospital by a brother and was sent from there to Mt. Hope. Mt Hope had no antivenin so his brother drove to the Sangre Grande hospital, procured some antivenin and returned to Mt. Hope where the victim was eventually treated with it several hours after the bite. By chance VQ visited him on 1<sup>st</sup> April (four days later) and found him in bed unable to walk. His right hand was swollen and bandaged. His father assured VQ that his right leg too was badly swollen. VQ visited him again on 12<sup>th</sup> April and found him sitting in a chair with both right hand and right leg receiving extra support and both still swollen and extremely painful. He could walk only a few metres at a time and obviously the effects of the venom were still present 13 days after the bite.

### The remaining four mapepires

Having dealt with five of the nine mapepires we now describe the observations on the remaining four in chronological order. On 30<sup>th</sup> March 2009, Lawrence Quesnel was bush-wacking at VQ's home approximately half a kilometer from GA's home when the wacker threw up a small snake which he did not recognize. VQ identified it as a mapepire balsin (*Bothrops atrox*), Number six of the nine. The snake, already injured by the wacker was decapitated and measured. It was 42 cm long and the distance between the fangs was 7 mm. A piece of skin about 10 cm long was cut from the mid-body region and preserved.

As recorded earlier, VQ visited TleB on 1<sup>st</sup> April, four days after he had been bitten by a mapepire balsain. Members of his family were busy digging

up the soil around the hedge at the front looking for more mapepires. They found two more making a total of five from the hedge. These were, once again, about 40 cm long.

The ninth mapepire was found on the property adjoining and south of VQ's home on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2009. It was killed by a workman at about 5:30 a.m. and was measured later that day by VQ. It was 115.5 cm long, slightly less than three times the length of all the others. Its head was so thoroughly battered the fangs could not be found.

### DISCUSSION

What immediately stands out in the account above is that the Mt. Hope hospital is not a good place to go to for the treatment of snakebite; it seems not to stock the necessary antivenin whereas the Sangre Grande hospital provided antivenin for all three victims. GA, the victim who recovered the fastest, was also the one with the shortest interval between receiving the bite and the beginning of treatment. In our view this is not accidental. Although others factors also influence the speed of recovery we think that getting treatment started quickly is the most important.

Another factor influencing the outcome is the internal chemistry of the victim; some people will be more resistant to the toxin than others. The question then arises: Can we influence the body's chemistry in favour of resistance? The answer seems to be yes. Stone (1972) describes the treatment of three snakebite victims with ascorbic acid (vitamin C). The victims were first treated without success by applying tourniquets, incision of the wound and suction. Then they were injected intravenously with two grams of ascorbic acid every three hours. Immediately after the first injection of ascorbic acid " a very favorable response was noted and, after subsequent injections

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there was a complete elimination of all symptoms. The patients were observed up to a week later and showed no general or local complications”.

For many years VQ has taken with him on every field trip 30 grams of ascorbic acid for oral use in the event of snakebite without knowing that vomiting is a common feature of it. This changes everything. An antiemetic taken with the ascorbic acid may not act fast enough to prevent vomiting and the loss of whatever benefit the ascorbic might have brought. Field naturalist, unless they are also medical doctors, should not be messing around with intravenous injections and so are restricted to oral treatments. For us, the treatment of snake bite must begin by influencing the body **before** the bite occurs.

The question then arises: How much ascorbic acid should we take, and when? Ascorbic acid has a peculiar property; for every person there is a dose at which it has a laxative effect when reached or surpassed. For people “in ordinary good health” the dose will fall in the range 0 – 15 grams per day. Ill health causes the critical dose to increase so that a person with a severe viral disease could tolerate a dose of 200 grams per day without reaching the critical lever (Pauling 1986). For most of our members 4 grams a day should be perfectly safe to take without the unwanted laxative effect and it should be taken one hour before the hike begins. Our “super-fit” members who run marathons and half-marathons might want to test that dose of three grams on a day when they are at home and can run to the toilet in a hurry if need be.

We know of no one being bitten by a mapepire on any field trip of the TTFNC. Isn't it odd that in a period of eight weeks three cases of snakebite have occurred in a small rural community? Could it be that our field trips take us to their haunts

when they are asleep or inactive? It is unlikely that VQ will ever forget a trip to Tucuche when 80 or 90 persons climbed to the top and later came back down in single file. Just off the top the last person, Luisa Zuniaga, uttered a scream and came to a dead stop. There, just 20 cm from the trail that everyone had used, was a full-grown mapepire balsain coiled up and seemingly asleep. No one else had seen it.

The mapepire balsain is a prolific breeder: litters of 64, 65 and 71 have been recorded (Boos 2001). One gravid female at the Talparo Junction could have been the mother of all the small mapepires that were seen. The only information we have on the size of this species at birth comes from Mole (1926) who measured them as falling between 16.75 cm and 27 cm, the majority been born dead between 30<sup>th</sup> September and 14<sup>th</sup> October to a mother who also died on 14<sup>th</sup> October



Tissue necrosis following bite from

*Bothrops asper*

Source Wikimedia Commons

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tissue\\_necrosis\\_following\\_bite\\_from\\_Bothrops\\_asper\\_PLoS\\_Medicine.j](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tissue_necrosis_following_bite_from_Bothrops_asper_PLoS_Medicine.jpg)

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having been bitten by another mapepire in the cage with her. They may therefore have been a little under the normal size at birth.

It seems to us plausible that snakes born in September-October 24 – 27 cm long could be 40 – 42 cm long in the succeeding April-May. We therefore propose that all the small snakes were the offspring of a single female at the home of TleB. If this seems implausible to the reader, what is the alternative? Surely that the five snakes at the home of TleB were formerly scattered about and came together to live in a community. To us, this is more implausible and we believe them to be the offspring of a single female. This interpretation too has its problems for it implies that young mapepires will live in the same place for months.

Will they?

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BG 

## Insect Guide



Photo

*Sympetrum flaveolum*

(source: Wikipedia

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sympetrum_flaveolum_-_side_)

[File:Sympetrum\\_flaveolum\\_-\\_side\\_](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sympetrum_flaveolum_-_side_)

[\(aka\).jpg](#) )



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### Dragonflies

A **dragonfly** is a type of insect belonging to the order **Odonata**, the sub-order **Epiprocta** or, in the strict sense, the infraorder **Anisoptera**. It is characterized by large **multifaceted eyes**, two pairs of strong transparent **wings**, and an elongated body.

Dragonflies are similar to **damsel**flies, but the adults can be differentiated by the fact that the wings of most dragonflies are held away from, and perpendicular to, the body when at rest. Even though dragonflies possess 6 legs like any other insect, they are not capable of walking.

(source: Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragonfly> )

Kingdom:	<a href="#">Animalia</a>
Phylum:	<a href="#">Arthropoda</a>
Class:	<a href="#">Insecta</a>
Order:	<a href="#">Odonata</a>
Suborder:	<a href="#">Epiprocta</a>
Infraorder:	<b>Anisoptera</b> <a href="#">Selys</a> , 1800

## Grande Riviere - May 17 - 18, 2008

Kathleen Hinkson

Birding Trip



**O**n a hot, sunny Saturday, 4 persons in the birding group of the TTFNC, set off around midday, with great expectations for a rewarding overnight stay in Grande Riviere; a pit stop here and there for ice-cream, gas and something to cool the throat as we cruised to our destination, arriving around 3 p.m. at the Loft.

After sorting out the sleeping arrangements, we were now all ravenous, so we warmed the chicken pelau a la Juanita, plantains and green salad from my garden, pumpkin and bhaghi was Monica's contribution. We were now sated, so a stroll to the river, along the newly constructed road (which we learnt was for agricultural purposes) was in order. Along the path was a 1ft. baby mapapire balsain, tripping the light fantastic and almost underfoot (mine) were it not for Francis's alert. A slumbering sibling lay a few feet away on the slope. Above, were our ever faithful tropical mockingbirds, corn birds and tanagers. The water in the river looked cool and inviting, but as it was already going on to 5 p.m. we returned to the homestead area in case a stray Pawi was lurking and also to await the arrival of another 4 persons who were to be camping.

We lucked out, so gave up the Pawi vigil. At 6 p.m. Lester Doodnath phoned to say that he was in the vicinity with a party of 3 other persons who were involved with the staging of the Endemic Bird Festival. Lester hitched his wagon to ours since one of the activities during this period was a presentation to the Nature Tour Guides Association in that area. A reshuffling of sleeping arrangements, dinner and then a walk to the beach followed. The sky was illuminated by the almost full moon, and the warm air was filled with the noise of crickets and other night insects. A big-ish scorpion on night patrol, picked its way over some stones on the moon-washed road and some blue-eyed beetles played hide and seek in the under brush.

As we approached the village, Kerry, the lecturer at our last meeting, invited us into her lodging, while she readied herself to join us. Those in the group who had never witnessed the ritual of the leather back turtles, obtained passes and proceeded to the viewing area at the already crowded beach. The others hung around the beach facility where film clips were being shown on turtles and other interesting environmental documentaries. Camping in an old cocoa house on the compound were some CFCA members, so we paid them a short visit. At 10 p.m. we retraced our steps to the Loft, with the expectation that the next day would be more rewarding.

The earlier promise of rain, which fell during the night, brought some respite from the unremitting heat of the day. At 5.30 a.m., as I opened the front door to await the arrival of more members, there was the whirring sound of wings in the coconut tree, which signalled the presence of that elusive Pawi. It was still too dark though, to discern anything. Nicholas, the Nature Tour Guide for the area, arrived shortly after our group. He works with the Association but also does his P.J's. He indicated that "he's been in the business of birds for 4 years" and seems quite knowledgeable on the subject.

...breakfast on the run for those who didn't want to miss a thing.... hoping that every shadow or movement was a Piping-Guan. Some members waited at the Loft while the others joined Nicholas on a walk to a different location through the estate. A plumbeous kite was overseeing our approach by making a serious dive. At this time, we surmised that the overcast conditions probably contributed to the slow morning, but this was not a deterrent in our quest for success. Around 8.30 a.m. the day brightened, and our feathered friends were out in full flight. Appearing on the scene as listed were:

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## Grande Riviere - May 17 - 18, 2008

Kathleen Hinkson

Birding Trip



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Violaceous Trogon, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Zone-tailed Hawk, Crimson Crested Woodpecker, (tapping away) Channel Billed Toucan, White tipped Dove, Rufus breasted Wren, Purple Honeycreeper, Black-throated Mango, White-bellied Antbird, Silvered Antbird, Giant Cowbird, Smooth-billed Ani, and a Cocoa Thrush whose call is similar to the bay-eyed thrush only a quicker version, but still no Piping Guan.

We decided to split up. Nicholas took the left path, which dead-ended at a quarry, while 4 of us took the right just before the river. Success - lights, camera, action, approximately 100 metres away, lingered two Pawi in a Bois Canoe tree feeding on the fruit. At this moment, Nicholas also called out "PAWI", so we hustled over to his

location where there was that distinctive drum-beat of wings, and up close and personal, alighted two more of the birds - a warm satisfaction to relish. Those at the Loft were also fortunate to have seen one.

After the main event we regrouped at the observation platform where Lester made a presentation to Nicholas. The contents consisted of: a T-shirt, a poster, a manual on the Birds of Venezuela, in Spanish (if one cannot translate, then one can look at the pictures), a copy of a print of the Pawi from the Society of Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds, a copy of the TTFNC news letter and programme of activities.

At 11 a.m. the group dispersed, some bound for home and some to the beach.



## Photo Corner

Photos from the TTFNC – Cave Group - Trip to Sandersons Cave  
March 2007



Photos L-R

Club members hike along the trail, Cave entrance?, Marabunta nest under a Balisier leaf.

(Photos courtesy Shane T. Ballah)

## The Beating Heat of the Amazon TTFNC Trip to Suriname April 2 - 8 2004 (Part I)

*Matt Kelly*

*Feature - serial*



**T**he biggest obstacle with Surinam is getting there. The flights are difficult, and if you are not a CARICOM Citizen, like me, you need to apply and pay \$45 (US) to Suriname in advance for a Visa. Traveling to the interior? Your luggage limit is 6 to 8 kilos. Just a camera and binoculars can take over ½ your allowed weight! But for an avid naturalist, it's definitely worth it!

### DAY ONE (Friday, April 2):

Our group of nine TTFNC members met at Piarco in the later evening on April 2nd for the BWIA 11:00 p.m. flight to Paramaribo. Our group included; Selwyn Gomes, Roger Edghill, Graham White, Alison White (Graham's Mom), Dr. Stuart Millar, Dr. Feroze Omardeen, Carrall Alexander, Natasha Isave, and myself. We were also met by Deo and Sandra Maharaj of "Travel Plus Services", our local travel agents, who came to see us off. Selwyn gave me my supply of mephaquin, which is used for malaria protection. I took some right away to get it in my system. There is presently a threat of both malaria and yellow fever in Suriname.

The regular BWIA #883 flight leaves around 10:45 p.m., and takes 1 ¼ hours flying time but in that time, we crossed into the next time zone to the East. Therefore, when we landed at Johan Adolf Pengal International Airport (also called Zanderij) in Suriname, it was 12:00 a.m. Trini-time, but now 1:00 a.m. local time. The drive to Suriname's capitol, Paramaribo, is one hour. Therefore, we are checking into our hotel at 2:00 a.m., getting to a bed by 2:45 a.m., and will be expected up by 6:00 a.m., packed and ready for departure to the interior for 7:00 a.m.! Oh, man!

The trip from the airport to Paramaribo passed through a lot of very flat lands with a lot of white sand. The road was very straight and narrow, and most of the traffic was heading from the airport to

town; therefore, our maxi, and the other traffic whizzed along on both sides of the two-lane road. The moon was shining very bright, and it was easy to see details clearly. By moonlight, we passed many (closed for the night) mosques and temples, and many shops, mostly all Chinese. We passed a large fete going on, with lots of people spilling into the road, which held us up for a few minutes.

My first impression of Paramaribo upon arrival that night was not good, but I later changed that impression after having a chance to look around. We checked into the Karansapolsky Hotel just after 2 a.m.. It is really quite a grand place. By this time, I believe we were all more interested in catching some z's than looking around though. I roomed with Graham, and we set our alarm for 5:55 a.m.

### DAY TWO (Saturday, April 3):

We actually got up at 5:55 a.m.! Groggily and a bit discombobulated, I ate a quick breakfast in the lobby, then I sprinted back to the room for a quick shower, just for sanity's sake! Many of us exchanged some money for Suriname currency. The rate the hotel gave us was 2.7 Suriname Dollars for 1 U.S. Dollar (they wouldn't take TT Dollars). Suriname is just changing over their currency to dollars from Suriname Guilders. 1000 Suriname Guilders equals 1 Suriname Dollar. Both series of banknotes are simultaneously in circulation.

Anil Gopi, our Tour Guide, was punctual, waiting for us to depart in our maxi-bus for 7:00 a.m., which we did. Anil, who is extraordinarily knowledgeable, is of East Indian descent, (but locally called Hindustani). Paramaribo has some really interesting old-fashioned buildings with intricate woodworks. We picked up "our most important member", Alna, our Javanese Cook. We drove the same road we had just traveled a few hours

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## The Beating Heat of the Amazon TTFNC Trip to Suriname April 2 - 8 2004 (Part I)

Matt Kelly

Feature - serial



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ago, back to the international airport. Many houses were quite nice, fenced, and ritzy, while many others are of simple slab, and have palm thatch roofs. Many of these more traditional houses shared a common characteristic of having a covered joint and open structure in the center of a cluster of homes, maybe a common dining area?

As we traveled along, Anil gave us a verbal sketch of Suriname. The country is comprised of about 40% Maroons (formerly escaped slaves of African descent, who formed several of their own cultures here), about 40% Hindustani (they run about 60% Hindu and 40% Muslim), 10% Javanese (imported from Dutch colonies in olden times), and about 5% Amerindians. We passed a large bauxite mine, which is the main industry of Suriname. The white sand is indicative of the savannah. We are seeing some good bird life now. Many of the birds are similar to those in Trinidad.

When we reached the turn for the international airport, the paved road turned to hard, red-soiled, bumpy, pot-holed, dusty and occasionally soggy. We saw many cacique and oropandola colonies. Our driver stopped often, so we could get out and check out the wildlife. Significant sightings included; Brown-throated Parakeet (flock), White-winged Sparrow, many Caciques, Swallow-winged Puffbird, Black-tailed Trogon, Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, Red-throated Caracara (these birds cry out when they see you, and make lots of

racket). We heard the Screaming Piha and stopped for a snake about 7 feet long, crossing the road. He was light brown, slightly mottled on top, and yellow on the bottom.

Our driver stopped at the Saramacca Bridge, and paid a toll for us to cross this olden wooden span across a coffee-colored river. We were in the deep forest now and getting deeper. More sightings; Paradise Jacamar (with a beautiful long tail and iridescent blue back), Long-tailed Hermit, White Hawk, Long-tailed Tyrant (with a long beautiful forked tail. We watched a few of them as they perched on a dead branch, then suddenly became airborne, snatched at insects, and returned them to expectant beaks protruding from a cavity high up in the dead tree). We stopped again to watch a Paca cross in front of us.

After about 5 ½ hours of bone-jarring, dusty travel, and passing through what I would hesitate to call "potholes", rather deep muddy pits, (which I had doubts about getting out of alive), we arrived on the banks of the coffee-colored Coppename River (pronounced: cop-en-ahm). Anil said in the rainy season, this trip can take over 7 ½ hours. I was extremely relieved that we were not going to venture across the approximately 300 meter bridge in our bus, as there

were two very large car-sized holes in the wooden bridge patched by some wooden slabs placed over them.

We lunched on the riverside, in the shade. It was

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## The Beating Heat of the Amazon TTFNC Trip to Suriname April 2 - 8 2004 (Part I)

*Matt Kelly*

*Feature - serial*



*(Continued from page 10)*

hot. We are at 5 degrees North latitude. It is 12:45 p.m., and we are not even casting a shadow over our feet. Anil says the difference between the longest and shortest days of the year here is 23 minutes.

After a nice portable lunch made by Alna, we piled ourselves, our gear, and our supplies into two long hand-carved dugouts, with outboard motors. Each boat could potentially carry 15 to 18 passengers, sitting two-by-two, plus gear, plus two boatmen on each boat. We departed upstream at 1:10 p.m.. I was lucky to land the seat next to Anil, so I could hear everything on the 3 ½ hour trip to Foengoe (pronounced: "fun-goo", and also spelled Fungu) Island, our destination. Without motors, the trip is 2 to 3 days with strong arms. Our boatmen were expert in knowing where all the obstacles were in the river, and deftly kept us from harm's way.

Motoring along in the open oppressively hot sun, we saw; Black-collared Swallow (over the water), Amazon Kingfisher, Ringed Kingfisher, Pygmy Kingfisher, (many) Swallow-tailed Kite, King Vulture, many bats clinging in open colonies on the shady sides of exposed large riverside dead tree trunks, two unidentified turtle heads pop up in the water, (a few colonies of) Yellow-rumped Cacique (with longer hanging nests), and Red-rumped Cacique (with shorter hanging nests), a Giant River Otter (close to our boat), Greater Yellow-headed Vulture, (two) White-necked Heron (beautiful), Anhinga (several), Green Heron, Capped Heron. So far, I have seen more beautiful butterflies than I have ever seen in my life. I wish I knew more about them. We were really out of the world of man now.

Anil said; There are three species of Cayman here; many Anaconda lie along the shores (out of sight); Tapir, Jaguar, and many other forest animals follow

many of the visible paths to the water's edge to drink; there are five species of Vulture here. Much of my information presented here is from Anil.

Just after 4:30 p.m., we were greeted by Comorants and Black Vultures at Foengoe Island. We landed in some still water aside some huge granite rock. After carrying all of our stuff through the Maroon Village to our Eco-lodge, we were ready to cool down with a swim in a granite lagoon. It was heavenly.

Our Eco-Lodge was about 20 to 25 feet wide, 50 to 60 feet long. It was made of bare wood, open, and with palm thatch for a roof (watch for bats and tarantulas on the ceiling). It was in three main sections; first, a common/dining area of about 20 feet by 15. a double row of double bunks, each with mosquito netting. Finally, a kitchen section in back of about 20 x 15 feet. Flush toilets and showers were in an adjoining structure connected by a covered walkway. Fresh water is pumped from the nearby river. There is an electric generator, which powers electric lights until 8:00 p.m., after which it shuts down for the day.

All of Foengoe Island's rustic development is in one small neighborhood, which also includes an airstrip cleared from the forest. The Maroons are paid government workers, and are principally here for upkeep and administration of the buildings, grounds, trails, boats, and airstrip. There can't be any more than 30 people living here. This is not their permanent settlement. Officially, no one lives permanently in the Central Suriname Nature Reserve, not even Amerindians. The Maroons here dwell in huts, situated together, made from slabs, with thatched palm roofs, with a common area in the center of the huts. They speak their own language, and for the most part, we did not interact with them very much.

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## The Beating Heat of the Amazon TTFNC Trip to Suriname April 2 - 8 2004 (Part I)

*Matt Kelly*

*Feature - serial*



*(Continued from page 11)*

Since landing, we saw; Silver-beaked Tanager, Great Kiskadee, Swallow-winged Puffbird, Black-collared Swallow, (many) Black Vultures, Rusty Margin Flycatcher, 3 toucans (unidentified), Spotted Sandpiper, Scarlet Macaw (2), White-throated Toucan (2 - which make a sound like a miniature dog's bark), Black Nunbird (2), Red and Green Macaw (4), Blue and Gold Macaw (2). We then took a walk up the hill to the flat, grassy airstrip cut from the forest. We saw; Green Oropandola (2), Red and Green Macaw (4), Plumbeous Kite (2), Black Nunbird (2), Blue-throated Piping Guan, heard roaring and then saw Red Howler Monkeys, saw a flock of about 20 (Lilac-tailed?) Parrolets, heard the Buff-throated Wood Creeper. We also saw a lot of Capybara scat on the runway. I saw three Morpho Butterflies today. We hope to see some of these animals while we're here. Overall, it was quite a day for animals and birding!

Dinner was served, and Alna didn't let any of us down. Not knowing what to expect, Feroze and I were treated to special sumptuous vegetarian repast, with Javanese flair, at this meal, and every other to come. Everyone else also feasted well at all mealtimes. Alna was great. We also had a large supply of bottled water for our expedition.

We turned in by 9:00 p.m.

**DAY THREE (Sunday, April 4):**

Who needs sleep anyway? I was up with the gray light before dawn. I think I was dreaming of Howler Monkeys, or maybe it was the loud snoring from under \_\_\_\_'s mosquito net! I met Graham outside with the same intention, and we walked up to the runway. Saw; Blue-throated Piping Guan, Green Oropandola (2), Little Chacalaca, Common Tody Flycatcher, Violaceous Euphonia, Painted Parakeet (about 20).

After a nice breakfast, about 7:00 a.m., the group took a five minute dugout trip up the river to the head of the trail to Volzberg Mountain. Anil brought a local Maroon, who called himself "Captain" for extra security. Captain was a pleasant, chap. He was usually very quiet, and didn't speak much English at all, until you mentioned his deformed right pointer finger. Then he wanted everyone to see it, saying, "Look. My finger, gone. Big peer-an-ya. He bite my finger." We disembarked in the large granite outcroppings and boulders which line the river, and are still heated from yesterday's sun.

Once on the trail, we came to a stand of wild pineapple bromeliads. This is the original ancestor of our modern pine. The shape of this wild fruit is a miniature of our modern cultivated hybrids. We passed many large buttressed-rooted trees in this vast primary rainforest. We soon came upon a Yellow-footed Tortoise, or locally, "Morrocoy", eating a fallen Hog Plum. Judging by his concave lower dorsal shell, he was a young male. He was about 30 cm., and they are said to grow up to 80 cm. here. We passed a huge *Ceba*, or Silk Cotton Tree. In contrast to Caribbean Folk Lore, Amerindian Lore believed these trees to be sacred, and home to the deities. In many places the forest floor was littered with a red seed pod, about 2-3 cm. with a sweet white fruit inside, called "Camba". There was a tree dropping a miniature cornucopia-shaped bowl, about 5-7 cm. long, called "Indian Pipes", which Amerindians were said to fill the bowls with tobacco, and use them as a pipe. The inner bark of this tree also peels off in paper thin strips, and it is said to be used for rolling cigarettes.

Morpho Butterflies skitted along the way. If you can even imagine it, the Morphos here are a much more brilliant blue than the ones we see in T&T. Anil and the Captain alerted us to the fresh smell

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Matt Kelly

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of a Collared Peccary. We passed many holes in the ground, some as recently cleaned out as today, of the Giant Armadillo.

Some bird sightings along the way; White-plumed Ant bird (beautiful), Double-toothed Kite, and (many) Screaming Pihas (mostly heard; “weep-weep-YO”) who are also known here as the “Bush Police”, because they loudly inform the forest of your presence. We also passed some areas of large boulders in the forest, where many Guinean Cock-Of-The-Rocks mate and nest during it’s season (which is not now).

The walk was long and it was quite hot outside. Thank goodness for the shade of the forest. We came to the base of Volzberg. There was a large expanse of open granite near the base, on which we found the intact bleached-white sun-baked shell of a Morrocoy, and another freshly smashed Morrocoy shell. Anil thought this broken shell the recent work of a jaguar.

Volzberg is a tall bare saddleback jutting right out of the forest canopy. It rises 240 meters, in a very, very short time. At 1.9 billion years old, it has been geologically designated as the second oldest surfaces on the face of the Earth (the first also in Suriname). It is internationally recognized for this significance. The track up it is very steep, and becomes open and oppressive in the beating sun. The vegetation changes. There is a large type of ground-dwelling orchid, with large pods, and as we climbed, we found *Oncidium* Orchids, some with flower stalks well over a meter long and covered in beautiful tiny brilliant mottled yellow flowers by the dozens. As we gained elevation, the vegetation subsided into Turk’s Head Cactus, and lots of low scrubby brush. As we came to the exposed granite surface, the temperature soared to nearly unbearable degrees. We reached the summit by 12:45. There were two

species of dark grayish rock lizards living here.

The view from the top is magnificent. Miles of unspoiled rainforest canopy vanish into the void in every direction. To the west, a line of low black clouds opened up, dumping a heavy rain over the forest around Bakhuis Gebergte Mountains. Tafelberg Mountain loomed to the South. More mountains could be seen really far south heading towards Brazil. We saw a troupe of Black Spider Monkeys below. It was hard to stay up here long, because of the heat. I don’t know how the lizards could stand it.

We headed back down to the shelter of the canopy for our lunch break. Graham caught some species of *Gonotodes* Lizard, and I took a photo of him. We were greeted there by a heavy down-pour for a quarter hour, which did feel good. We headed back by 1:30 p.m..

Significant return sightings; (2) Black-bellied Cuckoo (up close and spectacular), (2) Black Curassow (close and thrilling). Due to the rain, many frogs were now singing. We had some great music for the return. We now also had some real heat. I believe most people did not have enough water. I had drank over ½ liter before I started, and I brought

1 ½ liters, which I shared out. I could have easily consumed 3 liters myself on this trip. I think everyone’s water was gone near the start of our 2 ½ hour return trip.

I walked most of the way back with Carrall. We found two Yellow-footed Tortoises mating. Saw many more beautiful butterflies. Who knows how many of Suriname’s 8 species of monkeys watched us from their napping stations up above. On the trail today, I saw 18 Morphos; 13 of the larger pure fluorescent blue, and 5 smaller (6”-8”) with a black band running across the mid-section of the

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## The Beating Heat of the Amazon TTFNC Trip to Suriname April 2 - 8 2004 (Part I)

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dorsal wing pattern.

We caught up with the rest of our group soaking under a tropical waterfall. We immediately joined in, and it was heavenly. Even better yet, Alna appeared out of nowhere on the scene with plenty of cold fruit drinks and snacks for everyone. The snacks were Suriname favorites; Plantain Chips, Cassava Chips (both in "Suriname-style"), and "Peje" (a sweet fried combination of flour and peanuts; kind of like peanut brittle). After this interlude, we took the dugout back to Foengoe "Eitland" [Dutch].

Did we rest after all this? No. A group of us hiked up to the airstrip, to see; Red-fanned Parrot, Orange-winged Parrot (many), Red-throated Caracara (a few), Green Acari (3), Plumbeous Kite (2), Blue-throated Piping Guan, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Little Chacalaca (with a slightly different call than Tobago's National Bird), Red and Green Macaw (2), Blue-headed Parrot (2). Also had a good view of a troupe of Red Howler Monkeys, with a huge male, and many young present. The males are more reddish than the females.

After another great dinner by Alna, Anil gave us a talk about Suriname: The Coppename River surrounds two-mile long Foengoe Island, situated within the Volzberg-Raleigh Vallen Nature Reserve, which is part of the Central Suriname Nature Reserve. The Central Suriname Nature Reserve, designated as a "World Heritage Site" by UNESCO in 2000, comprises over 1.6 million hectares of unspoiled Amazon-basin rainforest, and is administered by the governmental agency known as STINASU. Volzberg-Raleigh Vallen Nature Reserve was founded in 1961 as a reserve, and also protects Volzberg Mountain, one of the oldest places on earth. STINASU was founded by the government in 1969, for the preservation of Suriname's natural heritage, and now oversees 12 Re-

serves, 1 Nature Park, and 1 Multi-Purpose Zone.

The World Wildlife Foundation and Conservation International are also major contributors to the Central Suriname Nature Reserve. In this Reserve can be found about 450 species of birds and about 125 species of mammals (mostly bats).

Suriname is a very linguistically diverse nation. I would say probably THE most culturally diverse within the Caribbean basin. Being a former Dutch Colony, Dutch was formerly the official language. Surinamese, which is a mix of all the languages present, is now the predominant spoken language. Hindustanis speak their own languages, such as Sanskrit. There are six different cultures of Maroons, each with their own separate language. There are five different Amerindian tribes (including Arawak and Carib), each with their own language. Javanese is also widely spoken. Anil is very well endowed with many of these languages. He can travel anywhere in Suriname without a problem.

In the evening, I went with Graham, Alison, and Roger to look for Capybaras -- no luck. Back at our lodge, Feroze spotted a large Anaconda in the water. Carrall spotted 3 or 4 Spectacled Cayman also in the river. I turned in around 10:00 p.m.. Long day! My lower legs are itching a lot, but we haven't encountered many mosquitoes at all.

Look out for Part II in the next issue of the QB.



## Management Notices

### New members; Volunteers; Publications

Management Notices 

### New and Returning Members

The Club warmly welcomes the following new members:

**Ordinary members:**

### New Website

The Club has transferred to a new domain name and email address. The change allows us more space and greater control to reach out to the public and stay in touch with members.

**Website:** [www.ttfnc.org](http://www.ttfnc.org)

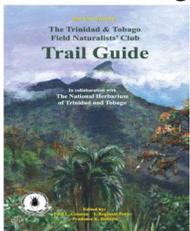
**Email:** [admin@ttfnc.org](mailto:admin@ttfnc.org)



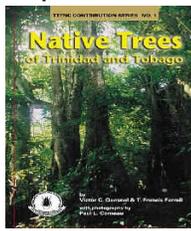
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Trinidad-Tobago-Field-Naturalists-Club/68651412196?v=info>

## PUBLICATIONS

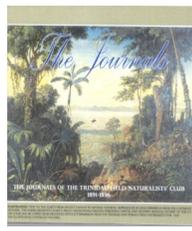
The following Club publications are available to members and non-members:



The TTFNC  
Trail Guide  
Members =  
TT\$200.00



The Native  
Trees of T&T  
2nd Edition  
Members =  
TT\$100.00



Living world  
Journal 1892-  
1896 CD  
Members =  
TT\$175.00



Living World Journal 2008  
Living World Journal back issues  
Members price = free



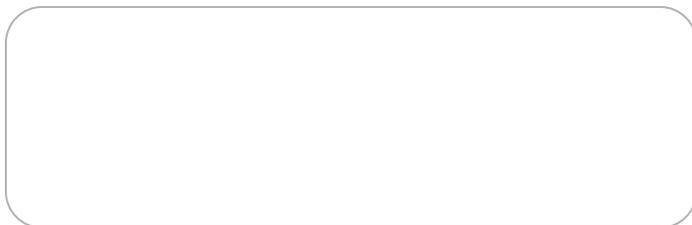
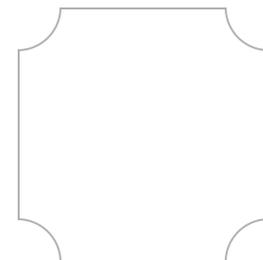
## MISCELLANEOUS

### The Greenhall Trust

Started in 2005, in memory of Elizabeth and Arthur Greenhall, dedicated artist and zoologist respectively, the Trust offers financial assistance to aspiring artists and biologists (in areas of flora and fauna) in Trinidad and Tobago. Full details are available on their website: <http://www.greenhallstrust-wi.org/link.htm>

### Club Polo Jerseys

Available Sizes: medium      Colours: Kahki and green      Costs: TT\$50.00



## NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS

### Guidelines for Articles and Field trip reports:

Contributors and authors are asked to take note of the following guidelines when submitting articles for inclusion in the newsletter

- 
- 1 Font Type:
    - Times New Roman
  - 2 Font Size:
    - 12 point
  - 3 Maximum Length:
    - 1,750 words (approx. 3 pages unformatted)
  - 4 Content
    - Field trip reports should include a separate table listing the scientific names, common names and families of plants and animals already identified within the body of the report.
  - 5 Photographs
    - Provide images in the following format JPEG, BMP, PICT, TIFF, GIF
    - Images **must not** be embedded into the word processing files.
    - Information on the image content including names of individuals shown **must** be provided.
  - 6 Format
    - Acceptable formats for electronic submissions are doc and txt.
  - 7 Deadline
    - All articles **must** reach the editor by the ninth week of each quarter.
    - Submission deadline for the 4th Quarter 2009 issue: **December 4 2009.**
  - 8 Email
    - Electronic copies can be submitted to the 'Editor' at [admin@ttfnc.org](mailto:admin@ttfnc.org)
    - Include the code **QB2009-4** in the email subject label.
  - 9 Hard copies
    - Hard copies can be delivered to the editor or any member of the Management Committee.
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