# THE FIELD NATURALIST

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

**January – March 2016** **Issue No: 1/2016**


## Field Trip Report, November 29, 2015

## THE MAGIC OF LA FORÊT

*by Kris Sookdeo*

A good start is always important but when you have a good ending too then what more could you ask for? Our last field trip for 2016 provided just such an ending as about 20 members visited La Foret in north-west Trinidad. The convoy departed UWI as per usual and slowly snaked its way up to Toco. By 8:00am we arrived at the Toco Composite School where we met Dan Jaggernauth. From there we

*(Continued on page 3)*

**The shoreline at the end of the La Forêt hike, showing wind-shaped vegetation** *Photo: Kris Sookdeo*

## Inside This Issue



**Editors' note :**
Many thanks to all who contributed and assisted with articles and photographs.

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**January - March 2016**

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**FIELD TRIP REPORT - LA FORET 2015**

*(Continued from page 1)*

continued along the road to the beach. There is a rough track that turns off the road here, but because walking from this point to La Foret would have left us a bit too exposed to the blazing sun, several members parked their cars at the beach and rode with others in more durable vehicles.

Eventually we got to the start of the track to La Foret where we had our briefing. The whole area was covered with 'lastro' and there were no large trees, both observations suggesting the area was recently disturbed. Dan recalled that a large bush

**Members embark on the La Foret trail in the blazing sun** *Photo: Kris Sookdeo*

fire had passed a few years back. Obviously the fire had destroyed the area.

Other than the coconut trees (it was an active estate at some point), the most noticeable trees were Tobago sandbox, *Apeiba schomburgkii*, genipa, *Genipa americana* and one of the native sugar apples, *Annona sp*. all of which grew extensively.

Under the blazing sun signs of animal life were scant. Crested oropendolas, *Psarocolius decumanus*, smooth billed anis, *Crotophaga ani*, orange-winged parrots, *Amazona amazonica* and a zone-tailed hawk, *Buteo albonotatus* were seen. There was one distant raptor which was likely a broad-winged hawk. For some time now I had been on the lookout for a fallen nest of an oropendola to include in the Club displays and here along the track I finally found one. The coconut tree from which it had fall-

**Cashew flowers, fruits and nuts**
*Photo: Jeffrey Wong Sang*

en supported a meagre colony of oropendolas. Even the cornbirds must find life out here tough!

One interesting butterfly we came across was the Mexican fritillary or brown biscuit, *Euptoieta hegesia*. This is an uncommon open country species and I have only otherwise seen it in the lagoons of

**The skeletal remains of a snake, perhaps a boa constrictor** *Photo: Kris Sookdeo*

Fishing Pond. Another interesting find was the skeletal remains of a large snake in the track, perhaps a boa constrictor.

With the temperature climbing we were all happy when eventually we got to the coast. Here, atop a small cliff, was the abandoned remains of a small house which was said to have been started by the estate owner some time ago. There's a small

water-filled concrete cylinder here which was thought might have been a well, however on investigating with a long stick it was found to be just a few feet deep. We walked down to the beach just below the house and took a break. The badly burnt trunk of a sea almond, *Terminalia catappa* indicated that other visitors frequent the area. Sadly, repeated use of the roots to shelter cooking fires had done significant damage and more than half of the trunk was now gone.

There was a rocky headland off to our left which was our final destination, however the tide was high and some members opted to walk around rather that wade through the water. The short walk brought us to a magnificent spot overlooking the bay. The scene was truly breathtaking with the crashing waves on one side of the headland and a calmer cove on the other side.

Along the shoreline we found plants like the seaside grape, *Coccoloba uvifera* which is easily identified by its broad oval leaves. A few trees were in fruit and the grape like clusters make identification even easier (the ripe fruits are edible). Also growing

**Rock formations along the headland**
*Photo: Kris Sookdeo*

along the shoreline (and also edible) was the fat pork, *Chrysobalanus icaco*. This shrub produces a large globular fruit, the skin of which is generally pink. The pulp is soft, white and mildly sweet.

The waves have eroded the rocks along the beach, creating some fascinating formations including small sea arches and shallow caves. Lower down from the headland was an interesting area on the

**Pink-toed tarantula, *Avicularia avicularia***
*Photo: Kris Sookdeo*

shore covered with somewhat geometric rocks that seemed vaguely reminiscent of the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland. A large ringed kingfisher (*Megaceryle torquata*) uttered an alarm from higher up the beach and flew off shortly thereafter.

Meanwhile, some members were enjoying a refreshing sea bath and I soon joined them. After that we packed up to go, not wanting to wait longer for the sun to get even more intense. On the way back we came across a pink-toed tarantula, *Avicularia avicularia*. It had constructed its web 'nest' in between some heliconia leaves and, with a little coaxing, it came out for all to observe. The rest of the walk back was uneventful. Back at the cars some of us decided to stop off at the Toco lighthouse. Someone was fishing out on the rocks and had managed to catch an impressive cavali which we looked at enviously. After a short rest and some lunch we headed home. It was a thoroughly enjoyable day and we vowed to return soon for an overnight camp. A great way to end the year.

Survey Group Report Part I, October 3-4. 2015

# 'PLANT SCIENCE DOWN THE ISLANDS'

*by Ariel Mohan*

A team of eleven keen naturalists gathered at the Island Property Owners Association marina, in Chaguaramas. The boat left the marina at approximately 8:15am, tightly packed with passengers and packages. The boatmen pushed the boat away from the docks, and we were off into the vast, choppy waters of the Bocas. The boat became one with the sea, as it gracefully yet angrily roared through the ocean swells. The scenic beauty of each island elegantly situated in the midst of sea, graced with lush greens and the little variations of colour due to man's architectural additions.

As we passed the first of the Bocas islands, Monos, the wind caressed our faces, and the water droplets sprayed on board giving us a refreshing saline spell. The boat ride took approximately 20 minutes, and upon the journey's completion the jagged edges of the second Bocas Island, 'The Boca de Huevos' was in sight. Tortue bay, the only safe access to the island, was surrounded by uneven cliffs with vegetation inhabiting its crevices. The waters transformed as we approached the island, from dark blue to a clear, olive green. The island cliff was daubed with green cacti and shades of brown, where no vegetation grew. In contrast, the surrounding island slopes formed a green, vegetation filled landscape. The boat rocked with the waters of the Tortue Bay, as it closed in on the pier which once stood strongly against the beating waters, but with the passing of time, had become slightly broken.

The island is privately leased to the Boos family, who own the solitary house, situated by the pier, inhabited by a caretaker and his friendly canine. Upon arrival the team vacated the swaying boat, and carefully unloaded the bags, which were then transported closer to the house. Everyone proceeded to set up camp, selecting a camping ground most comfortable for the night stay. Tents of various colours and types were laid on the floor, before being brought to life by their rods and spikes. The camp in place, we proceeded to inspect and begin the sampling of this majestic island. Aidan Farrell and Joshua Spiers trailed up the somewhat steep slope along the seashore. Under the open canopy there were various species of cacti and terrestrial bromeliads as well as century plants (agaves). The island understory contains an unusual abundance of these drought tolerant plant groups, presumably due to the climate conditions - the island receives very little precipitation during the dry season. We soon found a location with a large number of *Agave evadens* plants near the seashore, from which measurements could be conveniently made. This location had the ideal aspect to determine the ability of this endemic species to regulate its core temperature throughout the day. Ten agave plants were selected and tagged; these were used to take thermal imagery of the core of the leaf whorls at 3 hour intervals over the course of the 24 hour period. We began taking readings at approximately 9:00am.

Upon completion of the first set of thermal images the botany group proceeded on a hike to the island's ridge. The trail on the south facing slope has a steep gradient, and as such the climb was one that would be unforgettable. The botany group (Aidan, Joshua and myself), accompanied by Amy

**Aidan Farrell and Joshua Spiers take measurements of the agave plants.** *Photo: Ariel Mohan*

Deacon, Dan Jaggernauth and Mike Rutherford, ventured up the slope. The trail passed through a rocky path that appeared to have been formed by flowing water, although it was completely dry during our visit. The journey revealed much beautiful flora and fauna that make their home on this island, however, we were specifically interested in locating *Anthurium jenmanii*, which seems to thrive on the Bocas islands. We soon observed anthurium plants in great abundance on the ground under the open canopy, including many flowering individuals. The anthuriums were beginning to disappear as we approached 365m which gave us the impression that these plants did not grow any higher. However, as we reached closer to the top of the ridge, an even greater density of anthuriums was found. Here, Aidan, Joshua and I remained to take measurements, while the remainder of the group continued to the highest point of the island.

Above: **Mike Rutherford puts *Anthurium jenmanii* into perspective.**
Below: **close-up of an *A. jenmanii* flower.**
*Photos: Amy Deacon*

We first took measurements to determine the density of plants in a 5 metre radius in three locations at our sample site, and also to determine which plants were flowering. Then, a leaf impression method was used to take samples of the stomatal density of ten representative leaves. These were obtained from ten, healthy, flowering anthuriums at ground level, by pasting silicon on the surface which once set was removed and stored in a labelled envelope for further analysis. Leaf dimensions were also recorded. A Leaf Porometer was to be used to give more information on the amount of transpiration, however, the humidity of the environment seemed to act against the proper functioning of the device. The measurements that were successful will be compared with those obtained from the closely related *Anthurium hookeri* growing in the Northern Range of Trinidad. We hope these physiological measurements will allow us to find out what special traits allow *Anthurium jenmanii* to proliferate in the dry forests of Huevos, while the closely related *Anthurium hookeri* remains restricted to the wettest areas of Trinidad's high mountains.

Upon completion of the survey, the team group reunited and we journeyed back downwards, using the trees as support as we were pushed down the slope by gravity. We carefully made our way over the rough surfaces and rocky terrain to the seashore where the rest of the team was waiting. We quickly resumed the thermal imaging of the agave plants, in order not to miss the three hour interval. The remainder of the 24 hours continued in this manner with imaging of the agave becoming progressively more challenging as the night darkened.

*To find out more about how the findings of this trip have helped us learn more about T&T's flora, come along to Aidan Farrell's lecture at the June Meeting.*

Survey Group Report Part II, October 3-4. 2015

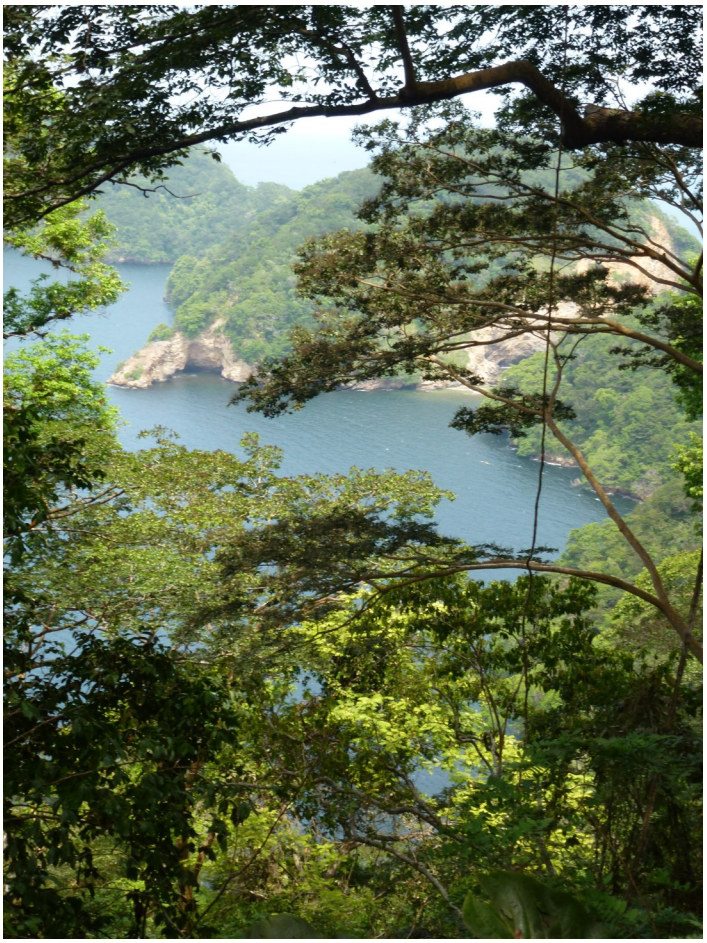
# ADDITIONAL NOTES FROM HUEVOS

*by Amy Deacon*

Other activities undertaken during the weekend included a transect survey of stick insects by Mike Rutherford on Saturday night, while Kris Sookdeo set up a light and white sheet in the ravine to add to the list of moths known from Huevos. During the day, Amy and Mike found some interesting little camouflaged insects, which they later discovered were the larvae of the more elegant lacewings that graced Kris's light traps at nightfall. Meanwhile, Jeffrey Wong Sang made a first attempt at documenting some of the island's fungi. Mike also set up a camera trap on the ridge, which captured several botanists and an unidentified rat (see below).


**An unidentified rat captured by the camera trap Mike Rutherford had set up on the ridge overnight.**

All participants were treated to an unforgettable spectacle on Saturday afternoon, whereby a nest of hawksbill turtles hatched in front of our eyes, in the midday sun, on the beach at Tortue Bay. We collected them (168) into two buckets kindly supplied by Mervyn, the island's caretaker and kept them in the shade until nightfall, when we released them at the location of the nest and watched them return to the sea. Amy and Mike jumped into the water with snorkelling gear and underwater torches and felt privileged to watch the hatchlings take their first swim – remarkably quickly and efficiently! As the last turtle disappeared into the blackness, we turned back to the island to witness a magical display of fireflies, illuminating the entire forest with their flickering fairy lights. The magic didn't stop there, as late in the night a few of us woke up to watch at least two different hawksbills laying their eggs on the beach – a first for many of us who had only previously encountered nesting leatherbacks.



**View from the ridge** *Photo: A. Deacon*

Other reptilian sightings for the weekend included an elegant machete snake and two very large iguanas on the slope near the ridge, and a clever *Plica caribeana* taking advantage of the light trap for his supper. The water visibility wasn't excellent, but several members enjoyed snorkelling around the jetty and on the west end of the beach as well, where a couple of barracuda were spotted. Before we departed on Sunday, a full clean-up was undertaken along Tortue Bay, producing around 10 garbage bags full of trash (5 of which were recycled). A highly enjoyable and productive trip, further expanding our knowledge and appreciation of the wonderful Bocas islands.

*See overleaf for more photos...*






**More photos from the trip to Huevos.** Clockwise from Top Left: ***Plica caribeana;*** **Ground bromeliads** ***Bromelia humilis;*** **Lacewing at the light trap** *(A. Deacon);* **Tropical racer** *Mastigodryas boddaerti;* **Hawksbill hatchlings; Members liming with Mervyn on the jetty as he fishes** *(M. Rutherford)*;

Art Group Report, October 10, 2015

# BARCANT'S BEAUTIFUL BUTTERFLIES

*by Amy Deacon*

At 10am on Saturday 10th October more than 20 people gathered at the Angostura Museum in Laventille for the TTFNC art trip – some were raring to get the chance to make observational sketches of some of the rare and beautiful specimens, while others were keen simply to have the opportunity to explore the display cases for the first time and learn more about the collection.

Angostura's Public Relations Officer Ronda Betancourt, who had facilitated the visit, was kind enough to give us an informative introduction to the collection, including some background about Malcolm Barcant and some facts about a few of the noteworthy specimens. She explained that Mr Barcant had been a keen collector of butterflies since he was a small child in Port of Spain in the 1920s, a passion which continued for the rest of his life.

His collection contains an amazing 8,000 specimens. Most of these are from T&T, but many are also from far flung parts of the globe- such as swallowtails from the Pacific islands, and Morphos from throughout the Americas - which he received as the result of trading with other collectors. Highlights of the T&T specimens include a pair of rare northern white page butterflies (*Eurytides protesilaus*) captured by the young Barcant in 1927. As well as capturing wild specimens, he frequently bred adults from caterpillars at his home – including a number of emperor individuals (*Morpho peleides*), one of

**Ayodhya Ouditt sketches butterflies from the collection** *Photo: Jeffrey Wong Sang*

Clockwise from top left: **Artists admiring the collection; a case of emperors; Amy's watercolour-in-progress**

Photos by Kamal Mahabir (left), Mimi Chu Leung (right) and Jeffrey Wong Sang (below).

which displays an unusual melanistic mutation. In addition, the collection boasts several extremely rare species, which you would be incredibly lucky to spot in the wild – and exist in no other collection.

We were then allowed full access to explore the room and the many glass cases displayed. Most of us took our time weaving around the cabinets to familiarise ourselves with the collection before choosing our favourites to draw, paint or photograph.

As usual, Ayo wandered around filling his sketch book pages with quick, flowing, overlapping sketches of multiple specimens, while Kahani and Amy opted to make detailed studies of one or two. It was very pleasing that some of the attendees who are not art-group regulars happily put pen to paper and embraced the art group's ethos of 'everyone having a go'. It was perhaps predictable that Bird Group coordinator Kay selected a birdwing butterfly as her subject, and that Lester was attracted to a butterfly whose wing colour perfectly matched his t-shirt!

The photographers were also out in force – Jeffrey taking some lovely shots of butterflies and artists alike, and newcomer Mimi captured the jewel-like quality of some of the species with her close ups and unusual angles.

Before we left, Ronda opened the gift shop especially, so that we could purchase items from their range of butterfly memorabilia, which include pencils, keyrings and postcards (as well as rum…).

We are extremely grateful to Ronda for generously giving up her time to host us on a Saturday morning, and for enriching our visit by giving us such an informative introduction to the collection. Whether motivated by the rare opportunity to make observational drawings or close-up photos of the specimens, or out of pure curiosity, everyone learnt a lot, and thoroughly enjoyed getting to know the collection.

*The museum is open to the public on weekdays (623 1841 ext.257, at least 3 days in advance). Those interested in T&T's butterflies, see the laminated guide, funded by Angostura in collaboration with TTFNC, Asa Wright and the UWI Zoology Museum; copies available through the club or at bookstores.*

Field Trip Report, January 31, 2016

# CUMACA CAVES

*by Imran Khan*

This trip report was prepared from memory and not the bounty of notes that was taken on the day by the author. The notebook has been stuffed into some corner of my belongings, for want of a clean and orderly house, and so there is at least one happy wife.

It was a long drive – that much I am sure of. To access the Cumaca Cave, one has to drive up the Cumaca Road, past the Cumaca Quarry, then the small village beyond the quarry, and to the end of the drivable road (for most regular vehicles) at the former Cumaca R.C. school. A fairly large group of 28 persons assembled at the school. Some had purposefully arrived earlier than planned to get in some early morning birding, and that they did. Species such as the silver beaked tanager and white lined tanager were all observed around the school.

The hike soon commenced with Dan leading the way after he had just provided some words of what to expect on the hike. Comic relief was soon to be had for those of us with no hair on our heads, as we walked past "Bald Head Springs". It seemed to be a small ecotourism venture hosting persons wishing to utilise the area for relaxation, cooking, bath-

**Members outside the cave entrance** *Photo: Kris Sookdeo*

ing, and overnighting. The usual forest edge/ disturbance species such as bois canot and bois flot, as well as Brazilian rubber, could be observed along the early part of the hike. The zone of forest edge/ disturbance flora exists along either side of our muddy path. Most members were taking their time to avoid getting their footwear wet and muddied, and so caused some distance between Dan's first stop and the end of the group. When most of us had gathered at the stop, Dan gave a brief but ever informative talk on the mora (*Mora excelsa*) under which we were all standing. Of note, he spoke of the quality of the wood, the large kidney-bean shape of the seed, and the young leaves which appear pink/ red. Onwards from this point, the vegetation changed to include more of the mora, olivere, and a personal favourite of mine, penny piece (*Pouteria multiflora*). The latter has only come to the fore of my experience once before in the hills of the Guayaguayare/Moruga forest, and so it was pleasing to reacquaint myself with the species. Some of us were able to find the fruit and tried the bland taste with varying opinions.

We pressed onwards behind Dan, and soon passed an area where structures once stood as typical countryside homes. Their owners have long neglected them and so they lay in a weathered crumpled heap on the ground. In stark contrast, as the boundaries around each were made from crotons, these plants offered up a variety of "croton colours" in the forms of pinks, purples, greens, and yellows, and so offered a bright sight to the befallen houses. Of note amongst the crotons is the plant called ryo or boundary bush (*Cordyline* sp.). In the days of old, this was used by owners of land to demarcate the corners of their property. Pausing for a break on the hill just after these houses, Kris was keen to spot the refuge of some tent-making bats (*Uroderma bilobatum*) which had made roost under a philodendron leaf . Dan explained that these bats would chew at the midrib of the leaf, weakening it and causing it to drop downwards from the midrib, thereby creating shelter for these clever bats. There were also some swifts that were seen through the opening of the canopy, but it was extremely difficult to get a conclusive identification on these fast fliers.

The group moved onwards again, and we were soon entering into a property purchased by the Aboud family. There was a dilapidated fence of sorts at this point to stop persons from trying to gain access to poach and conduct other illegal activities that may intrigue them. Dan spoke of this portion of the trail at one time being drivable, and of the logging activities that were undertaken by the previous owners. To my uninitiated eyes, it did not look as if that much damage was done by the logging as no immediate evidence could be found – the area was still green with many large trees around. However, whilst not a betting man, I would guess with much certainty that the more valuable hardwood species would have been selectively removed, leaving behind the "softer" species. Before nearing the house on the property, there was a strong foul stench that wafted around. Kris and I set off to find the source thinking it was some sort of recently dead animal. After a brief search, it was pleasing to say that no dead animal was found. What was found was a structure resembling an outdoor toilet, and the discoloured, wet earth around it seemed fitting for the source of the stench. It was strange indeed that that bacteria could still be breaking down waste matter and creating that stench, well after persons are no longer in that house. The trail forked in front of the house and I was soon reminded by Kris that when material is placed across a trail, it is meant for a hiker not to pass there. Dan had placed some balisier (*Heliconia bihai*) leaves across the path leading to the house.

The rest of the trail was easy enough and we made short work of it. On approaching the outskirts of the cave I saw solid rock rising from jungle soil and felt a rush of excitement. This was soon to be it. I would finally be visiting a place I have long heard about for its tragedy involving brave adventurous divers. Two of them had lost their lives in an effort to explore the caves to map out its underwater pathways, and find the source of the waters that flow through it. As a fellow diver who likes getting into tight spaces underwater, I had the chills walking forward. After watching the group relax at the mouth of the cave and seeing Dan clean the commemorative plaque with a makeshift scrubber from

Above: **Dan Jaggernauth cleans the memorial plaque outside the cave;**

Left: **A fallen oilbird egg**

*Photos: Kris Sookdeo (above) Imran Khan (left)*

vines and a young tree, the mood changed. Well done Dan.

From outside the cave, one can easily hear the clicks, calls and flapping of the oilbirds (*Steatornis caripensis*) inside. A few of us ventured into the initial chamber of the cave, and these noises soon escalated into an overbearing cacophony. What an experience though. Darkness all around, water at your feet, an unknown river bed to try to find your footing in, wafts of cave air bearing down on you from the movement of distressed oilbirds overhead, their droppings landing on you, and a deafening noise from their calls so loud that you had to be two feet next to someone for them to hear you. I did not have a flashlight and so whenever someone flashed their light, I negotiated my next few steps. Someone pointed out eggshells in the river bed and after retrieval, sure enough they looked like the shells from doves or pigeons when the hatchling emerges. I happened to glance upon a few of those shells that looked to be complete, and sure enough they were. They presumably had fallen from their "nest" site and remained preserved in the cold water of the river. Interestingly, they had a cracked appearance, and I collected three for the UWI Zoology museum. Only one survived the journey home, and will soon be sent over to the museum as there is no such item in its collection.

A larger group led by Dan ventured deeper into the cave to access the site from which those divers would use to explore the underwater portions of the cave. I tried to keep up but without a flashlight it was useless. I watched that group disappear and slowly made my way out aided by the flash from my friend's camera, for he and his wife also had no flashlight. Flash by flash on the river bed we made our way outwards, feeling a sense of accomplishment as the glimmer of light from the mouth of the cave guided us out. We waited around for Dan's group to return, and observed Glenn taking some of his surveying marks. He was on a quest to do some mapping around the cave as well, using another method to try to pinpoint the source of water that flows through the cave. When Dan's group returned, the word was that they saw several catfish, numerous oilbirds and palm seeds, but could not access the staging point used by the divers due to a dangerous build up of quicksand – like silt just before this spot. In all it was a wonderful experience. We soon readied ourselves and left. On the way out, we came across deer and possibly lappe tracks not that far from the cave. At the end of the return leg of the hike, many persons took the opportunity to wash off the mud in the nearby river.

A good day was had by all, and this trip should definitely be kept on the roster of TTFNC activities. Hopefully, the next time around we can have some guidelines by which to conduct our visit so as to cause minimal disturbance to the inhabitants of the cave.

# Your Ideas and Observations

## A Quarterly Update

### Diurnal or Nocturnal?

I was walking home in Arima one night in January 2016. It was roughly 7:30 pm and the sun had set about an hour before. I noticed a small lizard perched vertically on a wall under a bright light. My first thought was *Hemidactylus mabouia* or house gecko; one of the common nocturnal lizards found here in Trinidad. However, upon closer inspection, I was able to clearly see that it was *Anolis aeneus* which is a diurnal lizard. The position of the lizard on the wall is similar to how they perch themselves when awaiting prey. I consulted other *Anolis* lizard specialists about my observation on an online blog "Anole Annals". Based on the responses I got, it appears other species of diurnal anoles in other Caribbean islands have exhibited similar behaviour. Further, not only are some diurnal anoles being observed active at night, but other diurnal reptiles as well. What could be causing this shift in behaviour? Perhaps increase in temperature is the main causative factor contributing to conditions that are now disadvantageous to their survival. Will this have any effect on nocturnal lizards with increased competition? Further studies are recommended.
*(Renoir Auguste)*

***Anolis aeneus* is assumed to be a diurnal lizard**
*Photo: Renoir Auguste*

### Jep Tatu nest

Earlier this year Glenn Wilkes spotted a strange-looking jep tatu nest near Icacos, and brought it to the attention of Prof. Chris Starr.

**A jep tatu nest undergoing an extension**
*Photo: Gabrielle Wilkes*

Chris explained that these wasps (*Synoeca surinama*) were in the process of adding a new lobe to their nest. The new lobe's envelope is put in place, after which the partition and old entrance tube are dismantled inside, so that the next interior isn't exposed at any point. The comb of cells is extended up the trunk to occupy the new lobe as well. It's a simple way of extending the nest upwards without really changing its structure. The largest jep tatu nest Chris has seen was of the very similar species *S. septentrionalis* in Costa Rica. It had nine lobes, but in Trinidad they don't very often have more than one, presumably because the colonies don't stay in place long enough to grow to the point where they need a larger nest. *(Glenn Wilkes and Chris Starr)*

*If you have any interesting ideas or observations to share, but are unable to attend the monthly meetings, we'd still be interested to hear from you at admin@ttfnc.org.*

Bug Group Report, January 16, 2016

# BUGS IN BUSH BUSH

*by Rakesh Bhukal*

On January 16th a dedicated team of avid bug group explorers made our way to the Bush Bush wildlife reserve in Nariva. Mike Rutherford, Chris Starr, Kareena Anderson and myself arrived late afternoon and made our way along the main trail leading into the reserve, later joined by Virendra Bissram and Virmal Arjoonsingh. Along the way Chris bought a big watermelon from a farmer, so we had plenty of refreshment at the end of the trip. On approaching the entrance of Bush Bush, a red-bellied macaw, *Orthopsittaca manilatus,* caught our attention as it flew overhead; it eventually made its way to some nearby palm trees which they often frequent for roosting and nesting. Upon entering the reserve, the calls of several parrots could be heard echoing throughout the forest as they made their way over the canopy.

While our main focus was on scorpions, and trying to get a better understanding of how exactly they are able to co-exist within a forest environment despite being so similar in makeup and ecological requirements, other club members had special


**Virendra Bissram, Virmal Arjoonsingh, Rakesh Bhukal, Kareena Anderson and Professor Chris Starr hunting for scorpions at Bush Bush** *Photo: Mike Rutherford*

interests of their own.

Mike Rutherford was searching for specimens of *Leptodactylus longirostris*. This frog had last been encountered in Bush Bush during the 2014 Bioblitz but as no specimens were taken it has been impossible to confirm the identity of this potentially new record for Trinidad. Unfortunately, the relatively dry conditions in this trip meant there were far fewer frogs around than during the Bioblitz. However, we did find quite a few *Scinax ruber* and *Leptodactylus validus* on the forest paths, and there was a frog chorus from an unidentified species some distance into the swamp from the northern end of the trail. A single *Dendropsophus* sp. was found calling from low vegetation along the track just outside of Bush Bush on the return journey around 10pm.

Chris studied the size distribution (numbers of cells) of old potter wasp nests *Zeta abdominale*. He has been trying to infer the process of starting and stopping nest building from the pattern of nest sizes. While still daylight, we saw plenty of nests of the arboreal termites *Nasutitermes corniger* and *N. ephratae*. No-one knows what ecological separation allows these two very similar species to co-exist in almost every forest habitat in the country. Another puzzle is why *N. ephratae*, whose nests can reach much greater size than those of *N. corniger*, often nests on small trees with very narrow trunks, so that these sometimes bow over due to the weight.

We reached the main hut at the far end of Bush Bush around dusk and waited for it to get properly dark, beginning the hunt for scorpions at 19:00. The use of ultraviolet flashlights (wavelength 395 nm) was the main artillery in the hunt for these night crawlers, as they possess the ability to fluoresce when irradiated with this light. The ecological significance of this phenomenon however, still remains uncertain and is the subject of much debate. The hunt proved to be quite a success as several species of scorpions were found, distributed throughout various microhabitats. The notorious *Tityus trinitatis*, the country's most venomous and abundant scorpion, predominated with many found foraging on various arthropods in the leaf litter. An adult female was even observed feeding on a conspecific, at no surprise of course, as these creatures are known to be highly opportunistic predators with a cannibalistic nature. The arboreal species, *T. tenuicauda*, was found as high as 6 metres on trees along the trail but with a much lower abundance than *T. trinitatis*. Several *Microtityus rickyi*, the smallest of our scorpions, were also observed on trees where they were partially hidden under loose bark; no doubt this microhabitat provided safe haven from predators while allowing for foraging, as their small size would make them especially vulnerable. Other scorpions encountered included *Broteochactas nitidus*, *Ananteris cussini* and *T. clathratus*.

**Scorpion with young.** *Photo: Mike Rutherford*

Other notable sightings included an *Erythrolamprus cobellus* which slithered out of a puddle right next to where we parked the truck, this aquatic fish-eating snake is common in Nariva. In Bush Bush we saw a tree boa, *Corallus ruschenburgeri*, in a small tree about 3 metres above our heads, detected thanks to the reflective eye-shine which is a signature of this species amongst Trinidad snakes. At the same time, Mike noticed a tropical screech owl, *Megascops choliba*, sitting in the same tree about 1 metre away from the snake. Another screech owl was seen in a tree back out on the trail through the farmland. A number of fruit-eating butterflies were also observed feeding on fallen mangos along the pathway. Of the many mammals present in Bush Bush we saw two red howler monkeys, both alone, and one common opossum, agilely climbing up a thin tree trunk. There were also numerous unidentifiable bats flitting around enjoying the bounteous mosquitos.

# Bats of Trinidad and Tobago

## *By Geoffrey Gomes and Fiona Reid*

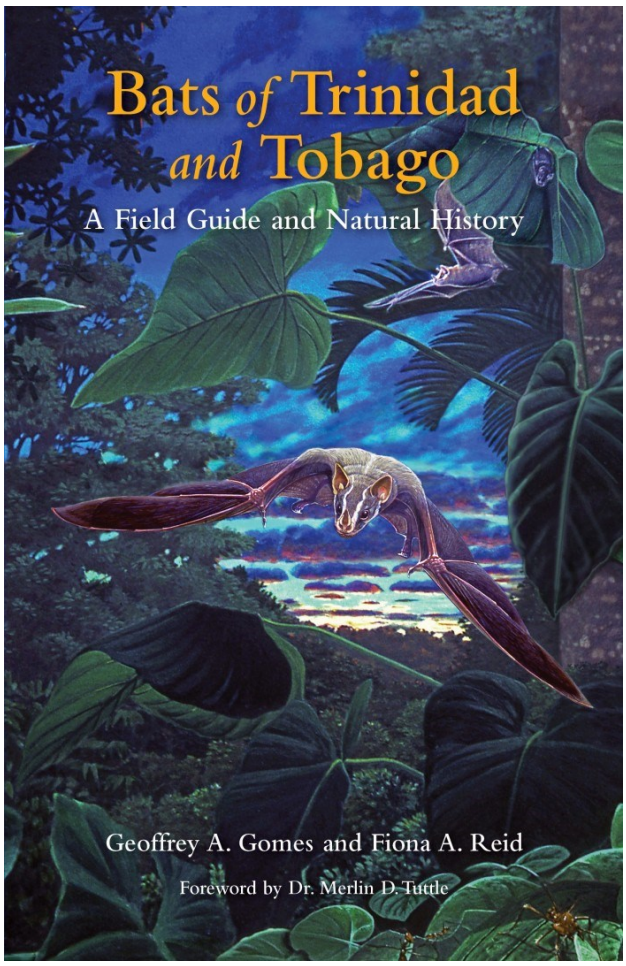
This new book is a fantastic body of work which not only contains detailed accounts of our bat species, but also looks at everything from their natural history to their role in our local environment and their place in our culture.

*Local distribution is being coordinated by the Club. You can purchase a copy at one of our general meetings, or contact admin@ttfnc.org.*

*It is also available at the following bookstores throughout T&T:*

*RIK*
*Nigel Khan*
*Ishmael Khan*
*Paper Based*

**Pick up your copy today!**




*Our heartfelt condolences go out to the family and friends of*

# Dr Doon Ramsaroop

**Dr Ramsaroop was a member of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club. He was committed to conservation of the marine environment and to expanding our knowledge of Trinidad and Tobago's biodiversity.**

# NATURE IN THE NEWS

A quarterly summary of local environmental news *by Kris Sookdeo*

## Young conservationists on mission to rescue wildlife

The newly-formed group, Wildlife and Environmental Protection of T&T (WEPTT), are on a mission to regain lost harmony between humans and the animal kingdom in T&T (*Trinidad Guardian - February 1, 2016)*

## Better protection needed for Caroni

Students from the Department of Life Sciences at the University of the West Indies have completed a series of important research projects in the Caroni Swamp. The research projects aim to address some of these major knowledge gaps about Caroni Swamp life and the ecological services the swamp provides. *Trinidad Guardian - February 2, 2016*

## Kublalsingh:TT needs national production plan

Wayne Kublalsingh has called for the creation of a "national production plan" to safeguard T&T s natural ecology such as the Oropouche wetlands. Kublasingh said that the theme of World Wetlands Day, '*Wetlands for our Future: Sustainable Livelihoods*' was "selected to demonstrate the vital role of wetlands for the future of humanity and specifically their relevance towards achieving the new sustainable Development Goals." adding that "T&T is in dire need of a national production plan. The unscientific or haphazard use of the Oropouche wetland by state or corporate entities, or citizens, jeopardizes any plan for national production planning and growth," *Trinidad Newsday - February 4, 2016*

## Hunter's guide shot dead in forest

A hunter's guide, identified only as 'Sheldon' of Tamana was shot dead by a hunter who he was assisting in an expedition at Guayaguayare forest. Investigations are continuing by officers of the Mayaro police station. Police sources said that foul play is not suspected in the incident. (*Trinidad Newsday - February 5, 2016)*

## 300 bush fires already in harsh dry season

The Chief Fire Officer indicated that last year there were over 4,000 bush fires and that, thus far, for 2016 they have had over 300. He indicated that they want to prevent fires rather than respond to a bush fire. He added that many citizens were not aware that if they lit a fire in their backyard they were breaking the law. *(Trinidad Guardian - February 19, 2016)*

## FFOS takes Govt to Privy Council

Environmental lobby group Fishermen and Friends of the Sea (FFOS) has been granted leave to challenge an appeal court judgment on the standardized water pollution fee for small and large polluters. Jn a statement, FFOS said polluters should bear the cost of cleaning up their pollution and ii was unreasonable for small entities to pay the same fee as larger companies.The group has been granted leave to take their challenge to the London Privy Council where they will be asking the Judicial Committee to clarify the meaning and application of the polluter pay principle. *(Trinidad Newsday - February 19, 2016)*

## Oil Spill confirmed

Confirmation that an oil spill occurred in the vicinity of Riser Platform #1, Main Field on 11 February. It is alleged that 1050 gallons of oil was spilt. Cleanup and containment activities were conducted and the MEEI, EMA and other regulatory bodies and stakeholders were informed. *(Trinidad Express - February 25, 2016)*

## Las Cuevas project sparks fisherfolk worry. EMA take action

Hundreds of acres of land are being bulldozed and burnt in the Las Cuevas area causing serious concerns for the livelihood of villagers in the Las Cuevas fishing community who depend on the bay to survive. These were the concerns of secretary of Fishermen and Friends of the Sea (FFOS), Gary Aboud, who spoke on behalf of the fishing community. Subsequently the EMA served businessman George Aboud a notice of violation. However, the developer remains confident this will not hinder the over $1 billion project. *(Trinidad Guardian—April 2 & 5, 2016)*

# HAWKSBILL TURTLES

Commentary *by Hans Boos*

Reading a recent article in the Newsday daily paper for Thursday 21st May, 2015, wherein it was claimed that the release of hatchling Green and Hawksbill turtles from Grand Riviere was the first time this had been done, prompted me to go into my files and comment as follows.

These hatchlings had been what is termed "head started", that is, the eggs had been removed from the natural nesting site, hatched in a protected crèche and the young kept in a holding pen, fed until they were considered to be of a more suitable size to survive the rigours of hatching and surviving the predators both on the beaches and the surf and off shore, and then released out in deeper water. This may not be the proper forum to debate the pros and cons of "head starting" which has its supporters and critics, but maybe a few observations are in order here.

It was in the article, that the reasons for the head starting were that the nests with the eggs of the smaller species of marine turtles, the greens and the hawksbills, were being dug up by the larger and heavier leatherbacks. All three species are recorded as laying on the same beach in Grand Riviere.

This I find questionable, as the nesting seasons of these three species show little overlap in the months they come ashore to lay. According to Prichard and Trebbau in their comprehensive 1984 book "The Turtles of Venezuela" (which includes all records for Trinidad and Tobago), hawksbills lay from July to September, greens from July to October and leatherbacks from May to July.

Thus, except for a few early laying of Hawksbills and Greens and late laying Leatherbacks, there should be little if any overlapping, and therefore little destruction of earlier nests of smaller species, by late laying giants.

I can attest to the laying dates of the hawksbills. On a Field Naturalists overnight camp on Chacachacare Island on the 8th and 9th August, 1981, the late Dr Victor Quesnel and I witnessed a large hawksbill come up on the northern end of La Tinta beach, where it is extremely rocky and unsuitable for nesting. Nevertheless she attempted to find a suitable location between the large rounded rocks and made several attempts to start digging. I photographed her there. Giving up, she returned to the waters of the Grand Boca and coming ashore further to the south where it was a sandy expanse, successfully nested.

Several years later in 1999, a visitor to Trinidad, who went swimming at Macqueripe beach, found a nest of eggs that had been washed away by a very high tide or wave action. He gathered the eggs in a bucket and after contacting me gave them to me and explained the circumstances of his discovery.

I went to this same beach within the hour and finding the probable location of the destroyed nest I filled a bucket with the sand from this area and reburied the eggs at what I guessed would have been the original depth that they had been deposited. I placed this false nest on the western facing side of my house where I reckoned they would receive about the same photo- and thermal- period had they been incubating on their natal beach and with only an occasional dampening of the sand, left them entirely to their own devices.

**Hawksbill hatchlings**
*Photo: Mike Rutherford*

The date stamp on the transparency of the little turtles emerging from the sand is Jan. 2000, and it was only then I was able to identify them as hawksbills. This hatching points to a laying date around October 1999,

That night, with some friends, I went back to the beach where the eggs had originally been laid and simulating a nest with the sand from the bucket, let them crawl free and down the beach to the water's edge and we watched them swim out of sight. So this was, as far as I know, a much earlier release than the "first" one claimed by the folks from Grande Riviere.

Driving north on the Cocal, Nariva, on Nov 11th 2002. I noticed a small lump on the seaward side of the asphalt. Stopping, I collected a crushed hatchling Hawksbill. Over the next few miles I collected seven more, all dead, crushed by passing cars and amazingly all the little corpses were oriented with their heads pointed west, away from the beach. The width of the beach at this point between the road and the sea may be about seventy five yards, and nesting hawksbills had obviously placed their nests between the coconut trees rather than closer to the water's edge, about three months before, that is September. Hatchlings would have been attracted to the open sky during the day and the passing headlights at night over the inland road, and headed that way to their deaths. How many hatchlings fall prey to this phenomenon each year is not known but it must be a considerable amount, considering the number I collected on a comparatively short stretch of roadway.

# AN ERROR BROUGHT ON BY WISHFUL THINKING

Commentary *by Christopher K. Starr*

*Ectatomma ruidum* is a relatively large, reddish ant, commonly seen on vegetation in both Trinidad and Tobago. It is quite pugnacious, so that at your approach it will typically face you with a menacing demeanour.

During the recent BioBlitz at Charlotteville, Tobago, I often saw it in second growth on the inflorescences of *Costus scaber*, always acting as if it was looking for trouble. Walking a trail one day, I saw one particular individual that looked a bit odd. She had adopted the usual aggressive posture, but her mandibles seemed much too widely splayed. "Hot damn!" I thought in a flash of inspiration. "You don't fool me, my lovely. Those aren't mandibles but pedipalps, and you are an ant-mimicking spider, although I admit that you are doing a very good job of pretending." I even had her identified to family, Clubionidae, quite possibly a new species, as I knocked her into my net and then into a vial.

With the devious creature vialed, I could examine her closely. In truth and in fact, what I had collected was… *Ectatomma ruidum.*

Being long attuned to the abundance of mimics in tropical nature, this was not the first time I had mistakenly seen as a finely-crafted mimic something that was, in fact, just what it "claimed" to be. This is known in statistics as a type-I error, the product of excessive credulity. It is, of course, the mainstay of religion.

**An honest example of *Ectatomma ruidum***
*Photo by Chris Starr*

Book Review

# THE INVENTION OF NATURE—ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT'S NEW WORLD by ANDREA WULF

*by Matt Kelly*

Today, Alexander von Humboldt is largely unknown. He certainly was more known 100 years ago. Yet his name lives on in four U.S. counties, at least 13 cities and towns, a mountain range, and numerous plants and animals, such as the "Humboldt penguin". The major ocean current sweeping the West Coast of South America also bears his name. He invented the isobar and isotherm method of weather forecasting which is still in use today. He was the first to link human behaviour with global weather consequences. He discovered "life zones", which organize plant distribution based on altitude and latitude. He was probably the first to propose the earth's continents fit together at one time. He was the first European to extensively explore the New World from a Naturalist's point of view, with examinations of plants, animals, birds, insects, geology, weather, sociology, anthropology, and political patterns of the day. He is credited with inventing what we call "ecology" today.

I have always been a Humboldt fan. I have always been distressed that more credit and attention has not been given to Humboldt in our times. That is why I am so happy to see the publication of "*The Invention of Nature – Alexander von Humboldt's New World*" by Andrea Wulf. In this work, Wulf has really done justice to Humboldt. And she certainly did her homework. Sifting through the libraries of Europe and South America, retracing the footsteps of Humboldt from the rainforests of Venezuela to the Andes of Ecuador, and gleaning the tens of thousands of pages of Humboldt's writing, she has created a tribute to Humboldt that has been missing for a long time.

It all started on a trip to the outback of Venezuela in 1799, when Humboldt, on a self-funded expedition, took one partner, and carried 42 of the best technical scientific instruments of the day, on an expedition to measure and record everything around him. He was the first European to see, scientifically describe, and name, the oilbird (*Steatornis caripensis*), among thousands of other descriptions.

***Alexander von Humboldt***

His trip lasted until 1804, and covered very dangerous explorations through the Orinoco Basin to climbing to 19,413 on Mt. Chimborazo in Ecuador, without climbing or mountaineering gear. At the time, Chimborazo was thought to be the world's highest mountain. Humboldt also explored his way through Cuba and Mexico. It was in 1800 that Humboldt deduced that human activity induced global climate change.

Details of this trip were written up in the multivolumes of, *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America, During the Years 1799–1804.* Simón Bolívar, "The Liberator", relied heavily on the writings of Humboldt for his campaigns. Charles Darwin said he would have never boarded the HMS Beagle in 1831, without Humboldt, and therefore would have never written the "*On the*

*Origin of Species*" in 1859. American Naturalists; (President) Thomas Jefferson, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir were greatly influenced by Humboldt. Humboldt sparked the careers of innumerable illustrious men of science and nature.

Humboldt took one more epic trip in his life, which was across Russia, and partly into China. Humboldt came firmly to believe in nature as a "web of life", that all things are connected. His many books were all major influences on contemporary scientists and natural history minds, especially, *Views of Nature* and *The Geography of Plants*. His ideas were later memorialized in his monumental multi-volume Cosmos. Most all of these works are available today as a free PDF download.

The Invention of Nature – Alexander von Humboldt's New World is a book which belongs on every Naturalist's shelf. It is an important work to remind us of a man largely forgotten outside of today's academia. It is not a technical book, and is a fascinating and illuminating read for any natural history enthusiast. I really hope this monumental work will be the spark of a resurgence of long-overdue interest in Alexander von Humboldt. Three cheers for Andrea Wulf!

**Photos from the Bird Group trip to the southwest peninsula.** Clockwise from top left: **Black hawk-eagle** by Lawrence James; **Turquoise tanager** by David Huggins; **Black-tailed tityra** by Rishi Goordial; **Spotted tody-flycatcher** by Jerome Foster

*See report on facing page*

Bird Group Trip Report, March 17, 2016

# BIRDING IN THE SOUTHWEST PENINSULA

*by Feroze Omardeen*

Another trip expertly led by Sanjiv Parasram, ably assisted by David Huggins and Rishi Goordial, two experienced birders from the southland. The very early start was a bit hard on older members, but it was worth it! On the road into the Southwest Peninsula, piratic flycatchers and striped cuckoos noisily called, Pale-vented pigeons flew overhead and the mango trees were laden with green fruit overhanging the road. However the peninsula was bone dry and there was extensive recent fire damage, including in the cocoa and teak areas where the trees were damaged.

We first visited Belle Vue Road, a very good birding road, entering it by turning north at the Chatham Health Centre. We were greeted by pairs of Black-tailed Tityras and Grey-Headed Kites, and Sanjiv pointed out that the breeding season was just beginning so many species were in pairs and quite busy. Also very evident overhead were the Plumbeous Kites, although the noisily calling Black Hawk-eagles were elusive, and Lawrence James just managed to get a shot of one in flight. The birds did not seem very interested in the profuse fruiting of the Bois Lay-lay, a Cordia species, which everyone else in the group seemed to know well from childhood. So I made up for lack of boy-days and had a bellyful of about a hundred lay-lay fruits. Rohan Cheenibass skillfully showed us how to pick Roseau palm fruits without a cutlass, and not get stuck by the spines! The road yielded a good variety of flycatchers and tanagers, few trogons and hummers, and a squirrel cuckoo. There were also interesting trees, including the very, very spiny *Astrocaryum* palm, found only on the southwest peninsula.

Next we tried Bowen Road, deeper west, at the periphery of the Los Blanquizales lagoon area, but found it badly affected by fire and drought. Many cocoa pods were still on the trees with the lower halves of the pods burnt black. Memorable there was a Rufous-tailed jacamar who posed briefly for pictures. But we were saddened by the loss of habitat in a usually birdy area.

Going west on Bowen we reached a Morichal area, the high point of the trip. Sanjiv generally finds birds by following the voices of the forest, and he soon heard the Sulphury flycatchers, It took a while, but three of these appeared, and we got to study these birds a bit in their habitat. They are specialised to live in the Moriche palm forests, as is the Red-bellied macaw, which Sanjiv has also found in this area.

Eventually in the heat of the day we headed to the Fullarton-Icacos lagoon areas, in the middle of the coconut estates. These were almost water-less, revealing the bottom to be black peat-like soft decaying vegetation that we could actually walk on. The unfortunately water-less egrets, ibis and a rare Wood stork were mucking about in the drying mud, along with a few Yellowlegs sandpipers who were trying to garner some nourishment before their upcoming long northward migration. We were surprised by the sudden appearance of two baby birds very close to us. These proved to be downy nestling chicks of the Black-necked stilts. They had probably been "hiding" out in the open in the mud, motionless on the ground in front of us, while their parents were trying to distract us from the distance. The Spotted tody-flycatcher was beautifully photographed by Jerome, and David informed us that he saw it quite regularly in the area.

Sanjiv recorded almost one hundred species on this trip! I was personally fascinated to find no less than 10 species of native palms on the southwest peninsula. On this trip we visited areas of (secondary) forest, moriche palm forest, herbaceous wetland; we did not have time to reach the coast or the mangroves. This is a biologically rich, diverse and interesting area. And we met Zack, the 12 year old youngest member of the bird group, and other wonderful birders. A great trip.

*See photos on facing page*

*In memoriam*

# CLAYTON HULL: OUR LOSS AND HIS LEGACY

*by Selwyn Gomes*

Mr. Clayton Hull was an active member of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club since 1974.

In 1992, Clayton was one of the four authors of the Club's First Trail Guide, the others being Paul Comeau, Louis Guy, both now deceased, and Ewoud Heesterman. Specifically, Clayton wrote the trails of the Guanapo Gorge and the North Oropouche River.

In 1994 Clayton was elected as the Club's Vice President, a post he served with distinction.

On the 10th October, 1996, the Club launched its website and started an e-mail account. This project was spearheaded by Shachindra Tripathi who emigrated in 1997/1998. From then on, Clayton maintained and updated the Club's website and email until 2013 when he handed over to our present Club President, Kris Sookdeo. This was at a time before facebook and youtube, and we received many compliments about the website. It was to Clayton's credit that we were one of the earliest launchers of a website in Trinidad.

One of the most important pieces of work that Clayton did for the Club was setting up the membership database between the years 1997/1998 from an index card system to an electronic spreadsheet. Kudos to Clayton for bringing into being a database that is still being used today, facilitating easy designation of financial members from non-financial members, and from which we can print out the labels of all members which otherwise would be a pain staking process. Thank you, Clayton!

Between the years 2005 to 2014 Clayton and Kay Hinkson led the Club's Birding Group on outings. On 31st July, 2009 he set up a group called T&T Bird Alert whereby members could post pictures of birds seen in different locations. This information is passed on to the Rare Bird Committee provided that a rare bird was sighted. This is now being maintained by Dr Feroze Omardeen.

He actively participated in the Club's overseas trips – including to St. Lucia, Dominica, St. Vincent, Guyana, Venezuela and Guadeloupe. He was always a trouper on these trips.

Clayton will be remembered for his embracing quality of welcoming those who wanted to be part of the Club's activities and giving them the support that was needed as newcomers. In his quiet way, his real call to fame was that whatever needed to be done would get done. In all of Clayton's work you will find that whatever he started was meant to last for the future to the benefit of all. He dedicated himself to giving quality work with a vision for many tomorrows.

Farewell Clayton. Thank you for all the great work you did for us and you have now yourself taken flight – free as a bird. May you rest in peace.

*These words were spoken by Kay Hinkson at Clayton's funeral in September 2015 on behalf of the Club.*

**Clayton Hull (left) and Graham White, bird-watching in the Orinoco Delta, Venezuela in 2008.**
*Photo: Selwyn Gomes*

Memoirs of a two week paddle around Trinidad in a canoe in 1985

# IN THE WAKE OF THE CARIBS

*by Glenn Wilkes — Part 4 of 5*

**Sunday 18th - 22 miles**

As we prepared to leave Moruga, we realised how strong fishermen's traditions are. The "aloof" Moruga crowd had prepared breakfast for us, and bade us a heartfelt "God-speed", as we paddled off. The day was hot and still, and we stayed fairly close to shore. The last of the unknown dangers facing us was the fierce current of the Channel as it narrowed.

Fish jumped constantly in front of the boat, and I kept thinking of "summertime".

We rested at Morne Diablo, then Roja Point, and even though Quinam was just a little further, we were attracted by the crowds and pulled in. We wandered up the beach, and from a respectful distance, watched the ceremonial cutting of a young Hindu's hair. After Quinam we started looking for a suitable campsite, since it didn't look as though there would be too many choices. We checked out Chagonoray, but decided to go on. As we approached Palo Seco Beach Camp we saw a picturesque thatched hut perched on a grassy hill. It was so inviting that even though the coast was rocky, we stumbled ashore and hauled the kayak up the hill. The sun was going down, and we relaxed on the benches looking across the Channel to the Venezuelan "mangue". A security guard came down to the hut, and after learning that we planned to spend the night there, told us we would have to get permission. The thought of packing up to go in search of another camp site was so unappealing, that I knew we just had to convince whoever was in authority to let us stay.

"Who do we have to see?" I asked.

"Mr. Angus Khan" the guard replied.

I laughed in relief. After my mother died, we had gone to live with our grandparents at Prince Albert Street, in San Fernando. "Stretch" Khan had lived three houses up the street. We got to his house to find a big "lime" in progress with lots of familiar faces from P.O.S. I know we must have looked like bums, but we were greeted with typical southern hospitality.

"Ay, long time no see! What you drinkin'?"

I explained our immediate problem, and "Stretch" told the guard it was "no problem". Of course those within earshot had heard us explaining the need for a place to camp. You can imagine the reaction from the "limers".

"Ay, Ay, all you hear that, Glenn and he partner paddling 'round Trinidad".

Laughter and fatigue ensued.

"Wha' happen, you ain't have gas money?"

In the middle of it all, one teenager was freaking out.

"I saw you, I saw you in Mayaro!"

And we did remember someone on the beach, waving and shouting out questions.

"Stretch" rescued us from the fatigue and hustled us off to the dinner table. You have no idea what it's like to have your dinner menu changed from corned beef and crix to barbecue chicken, potato salad etc., plus ice cream for dessert. And as many cold drinks as you could consume! "Stretch" and the other "Camp" residents tried to convince us to spend the night in their homes, but we wanted to be close to our boat, so when the lime finally broke up, we showered and went back down to the hut. Everything in life is relative, and not too many people can visualise someone stretched out for the night on a bench as being utterly contented, but we were.

**Monday 19th - 22 miles** We left Beach Camp and continued along the unfamiliar coast, stopping to explore whenever something interesting

caught our eye. We still hadn't experienced any strong currents, and the calm waters permitted us to roam safely. From a distance, most of the beaches looked inviting, but often when we came ashore, we found them muddy. Puerto Grande was one of these. Still, there were coconuts, and we liberated a good many from the confines of their trees. On the water, there were large clumps of vegetation brought down by the Orinoco. I'd heard that sometimes one could see a whole piece of riverbank, kept afloat by the roots. I'd even heard that a tapir had hitched a ride to Trinidad on one of these. But perhaps that story belonged in the company of the "mossy log" that so many hunters had sat on, only to discover it was really a snake!

Erin had a familiar look, and perhaps I had been there as a child when we lived at Pt. Fortin. Both there and Islote had a nice "feel". Maybe during the dry season the sea wouldn't be too bad.

Further down the coast we came ashore at Green Hill, to check out the mud volcano, then continued to Quemada Point, where we pitched camp. I was taking no chances, and wanted to be well rested for our battle with the current at Icacos Point. We were only a few miles across the Channel from the "Main", and I was very nervous about illicit activities in the area. The last thing we wanted was to be accidental witnesses, or worse, to have our light mistaken for a signal. We hauled the kayak behind the tree line, and slept on the ground behind it. We didn't burn any flambeau that night.

**Tuesday 20th - 25 miles**

We bravely headed for the Serpent's Mouth, adrenaline pumping in readiness for the battle of our lives. The "serpent" turned out to be a rainbow boa, the gentlest of our local snakes. We sat on the beach at Columbus Bay and had a good laugh at ourselves. We had kept so close to shore that an onlooker might well have asked why didn't we just get out and walk! But we were in the Gulf now, and though it was still about 70 miles to Port of Spain, we had already started to celebrate the success of our trip.

Once we cleared Los Gallos Point, I figured we'd be able to see the unmistakable profile of El Tucuche. From this angle it would look like a plateau. Perhaps even the pink Alcoa Tembladora terminal would be visible. I was really disappointed when we saw neither. We made a pit stop at Bonasse, then headed across to Esperanza bay, which looked interesting. Both there and Irois bay, which I'd known from childhood days, are typical "southern" attractions, that lose their allure once you get a taste of the "north".

It was getting late when we pulled into Clifton hill beach, and though the boathouse seemed a good place to spend the night, I knew we would need "permission". One of my nephews lived on camp, and as I stood on the road debating whether to go in search of him, I saw a familiar face in an approaching car. Glenn Wilkes (1960 Maths. Group) hailed Ian Barnes (1960 Modern Studies). Time warped. Back then, I had cycled around Tobago and hiked the north coast, now I was paddling around Trinidad. Ian, whose command of the English language and sense of humour had been showcased in his lead performance as "Auntie Kay" in a variety show production, was still bull shitting.

"Glenn, but this is fantastic! Here I am mourning the passing of my youth, and with it all my dreams, and you are still living yours. We must celebrate this auspicious occasion". Or words to that effect.

He lived in the house on the hill overlooking where we stood, but his backyard extended right down to the road. He opened his back gate and we carried the kayak up to the house. Ian then proceeded to organise a dinner in our honour. It was an enjoyable evening during which I had the unexpected pleasure of meeting and talking to Peter Perchade, Ian's neighbour. He had once given the Field Naturalist's Club a lecture on shellfish. I now discovered that he was as much a man of the "deep blue sea" as he was of the shore, having done all sorts of interesting things such as salvaging in the Far East. His present job was as a marine pilot with Trinmar. I was naturally keen to get his opinion on our trip and how I'd planned it. I joked about my "orca" design, and the chances that an amorous whale might have approached us. He looked at me and said quite seriously, "You know there could be killer whales in our waters". I was dumbfounded. Although I knew other species frequented the Caribbean Sea, I had always associated killer whales with Arctic waters. (Percharde knew what he was talking about, and on

June 10th. 1987, a fisherman netted an *Orcinus orca* between Kronstadt and Gaspar Grande. It was one of a pod numbering about 15, and the incident is recorded in Living World 1987-88).

I don't know whether he was just being polite, but he complimented me on how I had planned the trip. I knew that there must have been things that I had overlooked, and asked him if there was anything that he could think of. "Get ashore as quickly as you can if you see a thunderstorm approaching". He went on to explain that, in the Gulf, the sea remains relatively flat even in a thunderstorm, so that someone sitting in a boat is the high object that would attract the lightning. He himself knew of two occasions when fishermen had been struck.

When the lime finally broke up, we bedded down on the couches in the porch.

"Intrepid adventurers wouldn't be caught dead sleeping inside a house", I told Hilma, with my best imitation of an Ian Barnes straight face.

**Wednesday 21st- 18 miles**

We had anticipated an easy run in calm waters to San Fernando, and when we pulled out from Clifton Hill beach and headed across to La Brea, everything was going as planned. And then the previous night's partying caught up.

Hot sun and "bad head", we discovered, are worse than any head wind.

We had to rest at Pt. Galba, Rousillac swamp and Otaheite, before limping into Flat rock, San Fernando. We hiked across to my brother's on Harris Street, carrying the boat.

I'd just as soon forget about that day.

*To be continued….*

**Dear Fellow Members,**

**In 2016, TTFNC will be celebrating our 125th birthday.**

We invite all to help create a special birthday experience with activities to commemorate this auspicious occasion.

**We need volunteers** to help run these activities.

Let's make our 125th birthday one that will be remembered for the next 125 years.

*E-mail* **admin@ttfnc.org** *to volunteer*

**TTFNC QUARTERLY BULLETINS & INDEX ONLINE LINK :**

http://ttfnc.org/publication/field-naturalist/

## Management Notices

### New Members

The Club warmly welcomes the following new members:

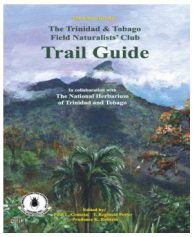
*Jarome Foster, Stanley Gomes, Luke Rostant, Maxine Hirst. Aidan Farrell, Nicolaas Kersting, Terri Ann Ragoonanan, Shawn Baldeosingh, Geoffrey Gomes, Danielle Morong, Keith Burkette, Rachael Shoy.*

**NOTICE FROM THE EDITORS:** ***Do you have any natural history articles, anecdotes or trip reports that could be published in The Field Naturalist? We welcome contributions from members. Please email your ideas or finished pieces to admin@ttfnc.org. We look forward to hearing from you!***

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

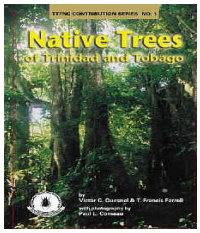
## PUBLICATIONS

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



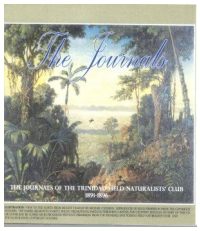

The TTFNC Trail Guide

Members : TT$160.00




The Native Trees of T&T 2nd Edition

Members : TT$80.00




Living World Journal 1892-1896 CD

Members : TT$95.00


Living World Journal back issues
Members price : free


Laminated wildflower and butterfly guides
Members : TT$50.00 each

## 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 the areas of flora and fauna) in Trinidad and Tobago. Full details are available on their website: http://www.greenhallstrust-wi.org/link.htm

### Your 2016 Annual Membership Fees are Due:

Please view bottom right of the mailing label to check if your subscription has been paid.

### Submission of articles and field trip reports:

1. **All articles must reach the editors by the eighth week of each quarter.**
2. **Electronic copies can be submitted to the editors at: admin@ttfnc.org or directly to the editors or any member of Management. Please include 'QB2016' in the email subject label.**