



THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

January – March 2018

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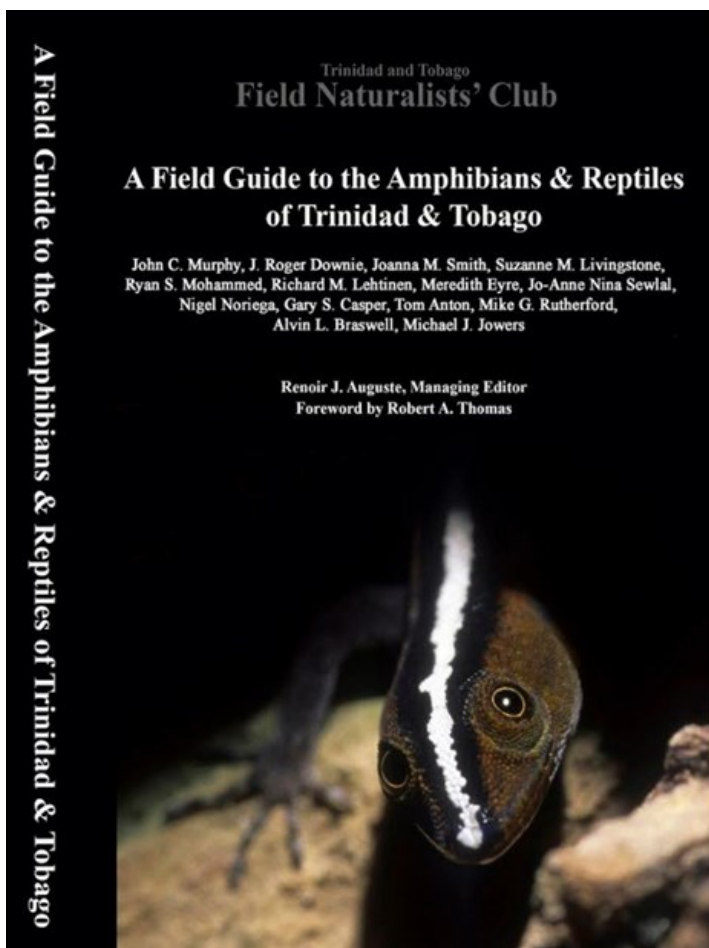


Not Just A Book Launch, April 20 2018 “A FIELD GUIDE TO THE AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO”



by Danielle Morong

“The important thing in science is not so much to obtain new facts as to discover new ways of thinking about them.”— Sir William Bragg.



Cover: A male Streak Lizard, *Gonatodes vittatus*.

Photo by Bryan E. Reynolds

The act of discovery and the sharing of this knowledge are, in many ways, the heartbeat of a scientist. However, every now and again, a text comes along which can revolutionize a field, create opportunities for further research and exploration and even help stimulate a cultural shift. ‘A *Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Trinidad & Tobago*’, the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists’ Club (TTFNC) newest publication is one such example.

On a cool April evening, an eclectic mix of naturalists and the constantly curious gathered in Lecture Theatre B of the Frank Stockdale Building, UWI, St. Augustine, to celebrate the launch of the first ever comprehensive field guide to Trinidad and Tobago’s diverse ‘herpetofauna’. While the term might seem strange to some, it refers to all the reptiles (snakes, lizards, caimans, turtles and tortoises) and amphibians (frogs and toads) in a given area or region, in this case – our twin island Republic. With our warm tropical climate and unique mix of continental and island ecology, it can be of no surprise that documenting our herpetofauna was a monumental task that had been over 5 years in the making.

Some 16 authors spread across the U.S., U.K. Europe and T&T, contributed towards the creation of this book. Photographs were provided from numerous sources, a fact which lead author and U.S. based herpetologist John C. Murphy mentioned in his live video feature address.

Such a collaborative effort, and the detailed output which it produced, has the possibility of

(Continued on page 3)

Inside This Issue

THE FIELD NATURALIST

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Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

January - March 2018

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- I** Not just a Book Launch
A FIELD GUIDE TO THE AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
- Danielle Morong
- 4** A Collaboration between TTFNC & FOBG
MAPPING OF TREES IN THE ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS
- Roma Wong Sang
- 7** Bird Trip Report
FIELD TRIP TO TOBAGO
- Matt Kelly
- 12** Marine Trip
MATURA BEACH CLEAN-UP 2018
- Marianna Rampaul
- 13** **STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE**
- Compiled by Amy Deacon
- 14** **YOUR IDEAS AND OBSERVATIONS**
- 16** Club Trip Report
MERMAID POOL
- the Edwards Family
- 18** **2016/2017 UWI AWARDS CEREMONY**
Compiled by Stephanie Warren-Gittens
- 20** Mammal Group Trip Report
TAMANA CAVE
- Laura Baboolal
- 23** **NATURE IN THE NEWS**
- Compiled by Kris Sookdeo
- 23** **Management Notices**
- 24** **Notes to Contributors**

Editors' note :

Many thanks to all who contributed and assisted with articles and photographs.

Disclaimer :

The views expressed in this bulletin are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion and views of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

(Continued from page 1)

'stimulating more research into herpetology of the islands'. It affords naturalists and researchers alike the opportunity to put knowledge into action by learning more about species that can now be much more easily identified. It is not limited, however, to use only by the herps at heart. A deeper understanding of the life histories and habitats of different species can allow for more informed decision-making, especially when it comes to land use planning. The simple act of trimming the vegetation along a stream's edge can completely decimate the preferred habitat for a vulnerable species such as the Tobago glass frog (*Hyalinobatrachium orientale tobagoense*), which lays its eggs on the underside of streamside vegetation.

While impossible to showcase all our herpetofauna in one evening, TTFNC president and managing editor of the publication, Renoir Auguste was able to highlight several species in a vivid slideshow display. For some, the collection of bottled specimens of frogs and snakes and the skeletal remains of sea turtles was their closest encounter with herpetofauna. This can be of little surprise as, for many people, a cultural dislike and phobia towards frogs and snakes in particular has been ingrained through custom and religion. This was captured by local contributor Ryan S Mohammed's recollection of his own experiences.



Mating Tobago Glass Frogs Photo by Renoir Auguste

Ryan's early childhood fear of amphibians and reptiles is perhaps one which many in T&T can identify with.

For the layperson, the *Field Guide to the*



An avid reader leafs through his copy of the book while attendees congregate around the UWI

Zoology Museum display Photo by Aidan Farrell

Amphibians and Reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago remains an easy to use instrument to satisfy a gurgling curiosity about an aspect of our local wildlife. For others, it can be used as an educational tool to stifle old fears. This guide coupled with online platforms such as iNaturalist can also be used to enhance community identification and verification of species as well as stimulate further research, as expounded upon by UWIZM Curator Mike G. Rutherford.

Indeed, it is the collective hope of all involved in its publication, including local contributor Dr Jo-Anne Sewlal, that this Field Guide will not be viewed "as just another book", but instead Jo-Anne articulated on behalf of her co-authors that as citizens and as custodians of nature, they want this Field Guide to "grace the bookshelves of persons in the country and those outside of it." If there is any book that can spark a change in thinking and a call to action, it is a ***Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago***.



Copies available via the club and at local bookstores. Those abroad can order via www.ttfnc.org



(Left) From left to right: Local Authors Jo-Anne Sewlal, Renoir Auguste, Mike Rutherford and Ryan S. Mohammed



(Above) Attendees grabbing a copy of the book.

Photos by Aidan Farrell

A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago can be purchased in most leading bookstores, or directly via the TTFNC (email admin@ttfnc.org for more information).



A Collaboration between the TTFNC Botany Group with Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens

MAPPING AND IDENTIFYING THE TREES IN THE ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



by Roma Wong Sang

On Sunday 22nd October 2017, the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club Botany Group (TTFNCBOTG) provided assistance to the Friends of the Botanical Gardens (FOBG) in the mapping and identification of trees on Lookout Hill in the Gardens. FOBG has been involved in mapping the trees of the gardens to build an up-to-date, interactive inventory for eventual public access for the 200th anniversary of the Gardens in 2018.

Most of the lower sections of the Gardens have already been mapped by the FOBG. These include

the Brazilnut, Cemetery, Mabola, Ebony, Ironwood, Prunus, Upas, Anthurium Lawns, names given to sections of the Botanical Gardens.

A small group of botanists and plant enthusiasts led by Lester W. Doodnath, Coordinator of TTFNCBOTG, showed up early that Sunday morning and were briefed by Pat McGaw, Secretary, FOBG. We learnt of the mapping project and the process involved in the mapping exercise. We were provided with suitable Global Positioning System (GPS) equipment and guidance on its use. Also



By midday, the joint team were able to complete the mapping of trees of the eastern section of Look-out Hill, along the trail from the Folly to the top,



And off we go...from the bottom of the Look-out Hill
Photo by Roma Wong Sang

near the Lady Chancellor Road. Among the trees identified were the yellow poui, *Gliricidia*, *Genipa Americana*, hog plum, royal palm and mahogany. It was agreed that Lester W. Doodnath, Dan Jaggernaut and Shane Ballah would return to complete the mapping of the remainder of Lookout Hill. A visit was made in January 2018 and more are scheduled for after Carnival. It may not be possible for all the trees to be mapped and identified so it may be an exercise in what is feasible.

In 1981, the TTFNC planted nine native trees in the Botanical Gardens on the occasion of its 90th anniversary – crappo, guatecare, mora, serette, bois mulatre, cocorite, debasse, royal palm, and *Podocarpus*. The gesture was done as a gift to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to address the imbalance of native trees in the gardens. The 200th anniversary of the Botanical Gardens in 2018 may provide an opportunity to expand the number of native trees. It has long been the vision of Victor Quesnel to plant more native trees on Look-out Hill to raise greater awareness and appreciation of our own native trees.

(Top Right) Lester Doodnath presents token to the indefatigable Pat McGaw, Secretary, Friends of the Botanic Gardens of Trinidad and Tobago; (Right) Roma Wong Sang consults Shane Ballah of the National Herbarium—Photos by Roma Wong Sang



Mapping team at remains of Folly or Look Out Photo by Roma Wong Sang



Bird Trip Report, February 23-25 2018
FIELD TRIP TO TOBAGO
 by Matt Kelly



Friday, February 23:

On the morning of Friday, February 23, I took some of the TTFNC birders out to the Lowlands area in Tobago. We birded the Bon Accord ponds and canals, as well as the Bon Accord Swamp, Milford Bay, and Kilgwyn Swamp. We logged in 63 species.

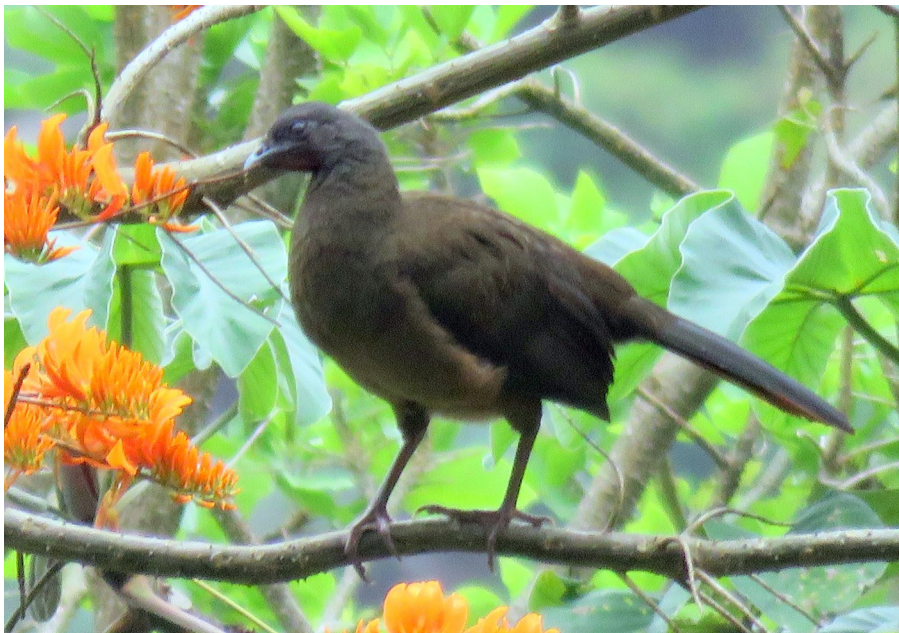
The main group flew over on Friday evening, as the ferry system has been very unreliable lately. Selwyn Gomes rented 5 vehicles, and Kate Hinkson used her own vehicle, to transport the group of 22 club members to Turpin's Man 'O War Cottages in Charlotteville. This would be the base camp for the group.

*Charlotteville, Charlotteville
 If you want to have a fill
 Of kingfish, jacks or mackerel
 Just take a bus come down the hill
 To beautiful Charlotteville
 –(Lio Mitchell 1940)*

Saturday, February 24:

I commuted from my home to Charlotteville, to meet the group early in the morning. Today we are scheduled to start the day with a boat trip with 10 birders from Charlotteville to tour around St. Giles Island; the masked booby was our target bird. The weather was very rough. We watched in dismay, as it rained buckets from a jet-black sky. As the old Tobago saying goes; “Yuh nuh know when win’ a-come from fuh blow fowl tail” (You don’t know where the wind will come from to blow the chicken’s tail. Expect the unexpected. You never know what’s going to happen.)

We had to cancel the boat trip for the 10 birders to St. Giles Island. The boatman was very understanding. Dan Jaggernaut had planned to take everyone else on an exploration trip to the Hermitage area, which is about midway between Charlotteville and L ‘Anse Fourmi. Our plan for



(Left) Cocrico; (Right) Common Pootoo

Photos by Matt Kelly

the day also included a 1:00 pm trip for everyone to boat from Speyside to Little Tobago. So, in the meantime, I took the birder's group, and we headed for the Tobago Forest Reserve on the Main Ridge. The rain kept up in torrents. After reviewing the day's weather forecast, we decided to cancel the trip to Little Tobago for the day, and move it to 8:00 am the next day. After hunkering down and watching the heavy rains outside the closed-up and locked Bloody Bay Main Ridge Welcome Centre for a long while, we decided to take the short drive to the Sunshine Restaurant in Bloody Bay. I was hoping that heading to the "Sunshine" could bring us some luck. And it did! As soon as we were seated on the nice veranda, overlooking the rainforest, and had ordered our lunch, the sun came out! But, just as soon as we finished, and hurried back out to bird, the rains picked up again. I was starting to think that "someone here got peed on by the corbeau!" (Another old T&T saying, meaning, someone was bringing us bad luck). While we consumed our lunch, we were highly entertained by at least a half dozen red squirrels acrobatically chasing one another through the trees. We also tallied many birds in the rainforest right off the deck.

We did get a chance to bird the Main Ridge, mostly from the road, and acquire a decent list of 54 bird species for the day. We searched and searched for a sighting of the blue-backed manakin (*Chiroxiphia pareola atlantica*); it was finally found by Elizabeth.

Sunday, February 25:

Selwyn woke to find a huge limb had fallen during a big storm in the night, and landed on his rental car. The size of the limb and its impact had smashed the car's windshield and dented the roof. Selwyn also had to deal with the malfunctioning transmission of another rental car, and a scrape on yet another!

Weather looks like its holding. We assembled at the Speyside Jetty. The beach at Speyside is starting to have another big influx of sargassum seaweed (*Sargassum* sp.) washing in and thickly covering the beach. In 2015, the huge, red-coloured, foul-smelling sargassum that

washed up at Speyside was labelled a "natural disaster", and the THA spent over \$3 million to clean up the beaches.

We had 23 persons board "Frank's Tour's Glass-Bottom Boat" on time for an 8:00 am departure to Little Tobago Island. On the 20 minute trip across, I watched for the corbeau (*Coragyps atratus*) that has been hanging around here for the past few years, with no luck today. By the way, did you know that "corbeau" is the French word for "carrion crow"?

On our way, we boated past Goat Island, which is now owned by the THA. At one time, it was a private island, with its private residence still standing. The author Ian Flemming is said to have stayed there while writing his novels which featured his signature character, James Bond. Flemming took the name James Bond from a prominent Caribbean ornithologist, whose works on Caribbean birds are still sold today.

Little Tobago comprises about 100 hectares (about 250 acres), and sits 2.4 km. from Speyside. It rises from the sea up to 137 metres (450 feet). Not too long ago, the world's largest brain coral lived just off the jetty on Little Tobago in the area called "Manta Reef". Tobago's Department of Tourism used photos of this coral for many years. That coral has since died and deteriorated, along with 70% of all the corals surrounding Tobago, in the past 25 years.



Matt Kelly examines the spadex of the Giant Anthurium (*Anthurium hookeri*), Photo by Matt Kelly

Global warming issues seem to be the main culprit.

It was in September of 1909, that James Ingram, wealthy London publisher and owner of the then, "Ingram Island" released 48 greater birds of paradise (*Paradisaea apoda apoda*) in the hope of establishing a sanctuary for them, and to save them from the millinery trade. The birds were obtained from the Aru Islands, south of New Guinea. Three more birds were added in 1912. The island officially became a sanctuary in 1928, and has also been called, "Bird of Paradise Island" ever since. By 1955, Ingram could only count 11 birds. In 1958, National Geographic Magazine ran a large feature story, complete with colour photos of the males on display. The birds were thought to have been blown away by Hurricane Flora in 1963, but Dinsmore [1970] reports at least 7 birds on the island in 1965. By 1979, only one pair remained. In the early 1980's there was a serious attempt to re-introduce the birds, and vestiges of the holding pen from that failed project can still be seen. Today, the greater birds of paradise in T&T survive only on the country's five cent coins and \$100 currency notes.

The landing on the Little Tobago jetty went smoothly and our group gathered in the shelter near the beach for a little background talk about Little Tobago. We then commenced the climb up about 100 steps to the former Warden's building. As we ascended, we passed several nesting holes in the embankment of the audubon's shearwater (*Puffinus ilherminieri ilherminieri*). Many were active holes, as apparent with fresh whitewash below the entrance holes. Upon reaching the first lookout, we were rewarded with a stunning view of the bay below, and off into the Atlantic. This is the very spot which captivated David Attenborough, and was filmed for his 1990 documentary, "The Trials of Life." It would be easy to sit in the man-made shelter here, watching the birds. with a cool ocean breeze and breathtaking views, and idle away the entire day. The red-billed tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus mesonauta*) is the main star of the constant aerial show here. They nest on the sides of the cliffs. In the mornings, they arise and head out to sea to find fish for their young, who wait patiently back at the nest.



TTFNC Group in Tobago Photo by Matt Kelly

On the trip back home, the parent birds must run the gauntlet past the magnificent frigatebirds, or “Man-O-War” Birds (*Fregata magnificens*), who make their living by thievery. The frigates will attack the tropicbirds and even seize them in the air until they give up their booty and drop a fish, which the frigate bird will adeptly snatch out of the air.

Renoir discovered an ocellated gecko (*Gonatodes ocellatus*) hiding in a tree stump [photo]. Renoir said, “This lizard is endemic to Tobago, which means it is found nowhere else on earth. They can generally be found in tree bark, holes in trees, and near streams. The male is generally found on bark, facing down. The males are very territorial.” Later on, several members of the group saw a snake. It was long, thin and light brown with yellow underbelly. It must have been the Tobago racer (*Mastigodryas dunni* formerly *Drymobius boddaerti*), as Dinsmore [1969] reported this as the only snake to be found on the island.

About half the group made the walk to the second lookout. We walked through a forest of thin palms which Dan identified as *Coccothrinax* spp. I kept a sharp eye out for the scaly-naped pigeon (*Patagioenas squamosa*), which seems to have a small population here now. This large pigeon is native to Caribbean islands throughout the Antilles, but very rare here.

There is a shelter looking over the big view of Alexander Bay. We noticed several red-billed tropicbirds were nesting right below our feet, under the floorboards of the shelter!



Little Tobago’s native botany would be intact, if not for two major disturbances. The first was the clearing of a large section of the island for the planting and growing of sea island cotton, starting in the 18th century until the early 20th century. The second major disturbance to both the fauna and flora was Hurricane Flora in 1963. Dan Jaggernauth was able to identify many plants we encountered. We found chenette, plum, guava, and banana, which were previous planted to encourage bird life. Also, Dan identified; *Randia aculeate* (a small tree), sea island cotton (*Gossypium barbadense*), giant anthurium (*Anthurium hookeri*), virgin orchid (*Caularthron bicornutum*), royal palm, naked Indian tree (*Bursera simaruba*), balisier (*Heliconia bihai*), bamboo (*Bamboosa vulgaris*), *Smilax* spp. (“wait a while” vine).

In past trips to Little Tobago, I observed hermit crabs, wearing the shells of large West Indian top snails (*Cittarium pica*). This is really quite amazing. I wonder how old some of these shells are, and how many different owners one shell could have gone through?

Little Tobago’s shores are mostly steep, with a lot of cliffs. There are only a very few and very small sandy beach areas to even find any shells. I wondered how in the world did these hermit crabs: a). even find a West Indian top snail shell? and b). carry it up as high as 450 feet (140 metres) to the top of these hills? This must be: a) like finding a needle in a haystack; and b) a herculean task. As a “Tobago Beachcomber” of over 25 years, I can attest to the fact that seashells, just like the coral reefs, have become more and more scarce every year. So with a mixed feeling of amazement and sympathy for the hermits, I brought 10 large empty large West Indian top snail shells, and left them on the ridge top, near one of the highest points on the island. I will be interested to see what becomes of these shells on my next visit (provided there is no human interference).

As the group boarded our boat for the return, I was rewarded with a great view of the rare scaly-naped pigeon flying low as it passed by! 🐦

(Left) Red-billed tropicbird on Little Tobago

Photo by Matt Kelly

BIRD LIST FROM TOBAGO TRIP

1. White-cheeked Pintail
 2. Rufous-vented Chachalaca
 3. Least Grebe
 4. Anhinga
 5. Brown Pelican
 6. Great Blue Heron
 7. Great Egret
 8. Little Blue Heron
 9. Tricolored Heron
 10. Cattle Egret
 11. Green Heron
 12. Black-crowned Night-Heron
 13. Purple Gallinule
 14. Common Gallinule
 15. Southern Lapwing
 16. Wattled Jacana
 17. Whimbrel
 18. Ruddy Turnstone
 19. Sanderling
 20. Spotted Sandpiper
 21. Greater Yellowlegs
 22. Lesser Yellowlegs
 23. Laughing Gull
 24. Pale-vented Pigeon
 25. Ruddy Ground-Dove
 26. White-tipped Dove
 27. Eared Dove
 28. Smooth-billed Ani
 29. Mangrove Cuckoo
 30. Short-tailed Swift
 31. Ruby-topaz Hummingbird
 32. Black-throated Mango
 33. Copper-rumped Hummingbird
 34. Rufous-tailed Jacamar
 35. Red-crowned Woodpecker
 36. Yellow-headed Caracara
 37. Green-rumped Parrotlet
 38. Barred Antshrike
 39. White-fringed Antwren
 40. Cocoa Woodcreeper
 41. Yellow-bellied Elaenia
 42. Yellow-breasted Flycatcher
 43. Fuscous Flycatcher
 44. Brown-crested Flycatcher
 45. Tropical Kingbird
 46. Gray Kingbird
 47. Scrub Greenlet
 48. Red-eyed Vireo
 49. Caribbean Martin
 50. White-winged Swallow
 51. House Wren
 52. Spectacled Thrush
 53. Tropical Mockingbird
 54. Northern Waterthrush
 55. Prothonotary Warbler
 56. Yellow Warbler
 57. White-lined Tanager
 58. Blue-gray Tanager
 59. Blue-black Grassquit
 60. Bananaquit
 61. Black-faced Grassquit
 62. Shiny Cowbird
 63. Carib Grackle
 64. Great Black Hawk
 65. Common Potoo
 66. Gray-rumped Swift
 67. White-necked Jacobin
 68. Rufous-breasted Hermit
 69. White-tailed Sabrewing
 70. Collared Trogon
 71. Trinidad Motmot
 72. Golden-olive Woodpecker
 73. Orange-winged Parrot
 74. Olivaceous Woodcreeper
 75. Stripe-breasted Spinetail
 76. Venezuelan Flycatcher
 77. Blue-backed Manakin
 78. House Wren
 79. Yellow-legged Thrush
 80. Spectacled Thrush
 81. White-necked Thrush
 82. Northern Waterthrush
 83. White-lined Tanager
 84. Palm Tanager
 85. Red-legged Honeycreeper
 86. Crested Oropendola
 87. Giant Cowbird
 88. Violaceous Euphonia
 89. Red-billed Tropicbird
 90. Magnificent Frigatebird
 91. Brown Booby
 92. Red-footed Booby
 93. Scaly-naped Pigeon
 94. Short-tailed Swift
 95. Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
 96. Osprey
-



Marine Group Report March 4 2018
MATURA BEACH CLEANUP 2018
by Marianna Rampaul



TTFNC Team Photo by Marianna Rampaul

It was an early wakeup call for all on Sunday 4th March, as we headed for the remote treasure that is Matura Beach, to join in Nature Seekers' 2018 Beach Clean-up. This annual exercise is vital to ensuring an obstacle-free nesting experience for the vulnerable leatherback turtle species (*Dermochelys coriacea*) which frequents this nesting mecca during the March-September nesting season. Clearing the beach of debris also assists emerging hatchlings with their journey from the nest to the shore.

As we emerged from the scenic trail through the forest we were met with an almost empty carpark, being the second group to arrive, only just missing out on the early bird prize. Armed with gloves, crocus and garbage bags and lots of sunscreen, we made a quick stop at the registration tent, then it was off to work!



Team Turtle Photo by Marianna Rampaul


The important task of data collection, i.e. meticulously logging every piece of trash collected, fell to Stephanie who was more than up to the challenge. After a morning of hard work, our team had removed 330 pieces of trash including numerous plastic items and pieces of fishing lines and nets which are particularly hazardous to turtles due to their respective risks of accidental ingestion and entanglement. Sargassum seaweed also accounted for a lot of the material removed, luckily, it was not so vast in quantity that a little elbow grease could not remove it.

Following the clean-up we were treated to a display of wildlife from the El Socorro Centre for Wildlife Conservation. Some of us thoroughly enjoyed interacting with these wildlife ambassadors, many of which are permanent residents of the centre due to their previous injuries which would not allow them to survive in the wild. The highlight of the day was, however, the



Sifting through the sargassum Photo by Stephanie Warren-Gittens

much anticipated sand turtle competition. The team represented well, making our best attempt at a life size leatherback turtle, complete with a nest full of eggs (sea coconut palm seeds). Although we did not grab the top prize this time, a good time was had by all.

Great team effort Jo-Marie, Laura, Stephanie, Sherrana, Ronnie, Keshan, Terrance, Rhea and Jasmine! 



January-March 2018 STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE by Amy Deacon



Short Term Goals

Outreach

Club-branded cotton bags have been produced for sale. These aim to raise the profile of the club, raise some funds and help people to be more environmentally-friendly in their shopping habits.

In February, Danielle Morong presented to Central Pathfinders Environmental Foundation on how to be a 'Biodiversity Champion'. She donated a Trail Guide to the group on behalf of the club.

Publications

All Living World archives are now available online via www.ttfnc.org

A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago was published by the club in March.

Medium and Long Term Goals

Land Acquisition

Management is actively pursuing the potential purchase of plots of land. Members are encouraged to let management know if they become aware of any promising possibilities, or if they wish to form part of a committee to help pursue any leads.

Membership

The club welcomed 9 new members during this quarter (January-March).

A copy of the full strategic plan can be requested by email to admin@ttfnc.org. Constructive comments and suggestions from members of ways to work towards these goals are always welcome.



AN OCELOT ENCOUNTER

by Chris Kelshall



Date: March 11th 2018.

Time: 3 pm

Place: Upper Platanal Area, Cumaca

Ocelot, *Leopardus pardalis*

While bushwhacking and trail finding along a ridgeline, I spotted movement up ahead along the ridge. I froze in amazement. A big cat that I know to be the local ocelot crossed over the ridgeline ahead.

The most striking aspect was the colour of the cat. It was quite pale compared to the darker hues that I have seen at wildlife centres and at the zoo. The spots along the body were also lighter in colour. This cat seemed bigger and longer than the ones I had seen in captivity.

The torso was also very low and had a pronounced sagging back, but that might have been due to the fact it was hunting and staying very low to the ground.

The animal's focus was entirely on something in a dead tree on the ground while we looked on (a group of 9). We heard a bird begin to squawk, then

I saw the brown feathers and the head of the cat moving behind the fallen log. You could see the head moving left and right and up and down in a tearing action.

Only a few minutes before, I had seen a small chick, wren-like bird flapping along the ground. It moved through the undergrowth crossing the path in front of me. The bird that was caught by the ocelot was considerably larger and made a more intense sound.

We were downwind of the animal, but as soon as I started to move forward to get a better look, the cat spotted us and picked up its game and moved away, further into the valley in an east south-east direction where the forest was thicker.

The ocelot was roughly 2 metres long from head to tail and we saw it roughly 38 metres (123 feet) away (the later based on GPS readings of where we stopped for some time to the site where the sighting took place). A truly amazing site.

A discussion with Ricardo Meade of the El Socorro Centre for Wildlife Conservation suggested it most likely was pregnant and eating to feed the young. The time of the year coincides with the cats producing kittens and the daylight hunting is indicative of their need to feed more.



Trail camera photo of
an ocelot

Photo by Kris Sookdeo

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Your
Ideas and Observations
A Quarterly Update

March 2018

FISH OUT OF WATER

Renoir Auguste and Michelle Cazabon-Manette



Remora on the nesting leatherback turtle Photo by Renoir Auguste

While I was observing a nesting leatherback turtle at Grande Riviere, I saw a fish attached to the turtle; the fish appeared to be still—which was fascinating. This fish, later identified by Michelle as a remora (*Echeneis naucrates*), is commonly associated with leatherbacks and other sea turtles, as well as sharks and rays etc...

It has been reported, that similar sightings were observed in Barbados and Grenada on nesting leatherbacks and hawksbill.

Sometimes the remora is dislodged during the nesting process and can be seen on the beach the next morning! It is not known, how often they come ashore with nesting turtles or whether or not they could survive out of water for that period.

(Pulled from the TTFNC Members' Forum) 

Please send us your ideas and observations to admin@ttfnc.org for inclusion in the next Bulletin!



Club Trip Report, March 25 2018

MERMAID POOLS

by the Edwards family (Sheldon, Sharon & Gabrielle)



Upper Mermaid Pool Photo by the Edwards family

Members, visitors and persons who have been associated with the TTFNC for many years such as myself and family, gathered in Thomas Trace in Matura to enjoy the March Field Naturalist trip to Mermaid Pools. Mermaid Pool was visited by the club in May 24, 2009 and from the John Lum Young write up: 'Mermaid Pools consists of three pools - Lower, Middle and Upper. Upper Pool was on a bend of the river hemmed in by a downstream point, upstream rapids and a shear wall on the inside of the bend. It was estimated to be 5m deep in the darkest corner, about 12m at its greatest width and roughly 30m long between rapids and point'. On this trip we went to the upper pool.

The trip was led by Mr. Edmond Charles, a knowledgeable member of the Club and a Forestry official. We started off walking along the dirt road enjoying the forest scenery and he identified the wild nutmeg tree, or cajuca, (*Virola surinamensis*) whose fruit is similar to the nutmeg with which we are more familiar, but smaller. As we continued our trek, we came upon two different types of palms close to each other, the royal palm (*Roystonea oleracea*), with its broad leaves and the manac palm (*Euterpe precatoria*), whose leaves were very close together as if in prayer.

There is another species *E. Broadwayi* in which the leaflets are further apart. Mr. Charles informed

(Continued on page 17)

us that the palmiste palm, cabbage palm and the royal palm are the same palm and that its heart is edible.

Along the trail, many pine trees (*Pinus caribea*) were observed and members enquired as to why the Forestry Division planted these trees. Mr. Charles stated that many years ago, the Forestry Division cut down the native mora (*Mora excelsa*) trees and planted these trees instead. At that time, the saw millers said that the wood of the mora trees and the balata trees (*Manilkara bidentate*) were difficult to work with. He went on to say that pine trees grew very fast, required minimum maintenance, were cheap to obtain, fire resistant and the wood had some economic value. However, it was found that the pine cones made the soil acidic and did not provide food for the animals in the forest.

Over the years as the pine trees matured, the Forestry Division started to cut down some and planted local trees within the pine fields, which have now become mixed plots. It was found that the pines did create a sufficient micro climate so that other local trees can now establish themselves.

As we continued walking, Mr Charles pointed out the mahoe trees (*Sterculia caribaea*) and advised that these trees had two different shapes of leaves. It was found that the young leaves had a shape similar to three fingers while the older leaves had only one. The seeds of the mahoe trees are eaten by birds, especially parrots and the wood can be used. In addition, the actual bark of the tree can be used as a rope. Hunters peel off the bark and use it to tie the scaffolding of their camps. He stated that in World War II when rope was scarce, the bark of these trees was used as substitute.


Another tree found along the trail was the geriton or matchwood (*Schefflera morototoni*) tree. We were told that this tree has a natural way of splitting and was used to manufacture matches. At one time, these trees were exported as far as Australia. It was observed that the tree had a long trunk with a whitish coloured bark and all the leaves and branches were at the top, making a total ring of foliage.

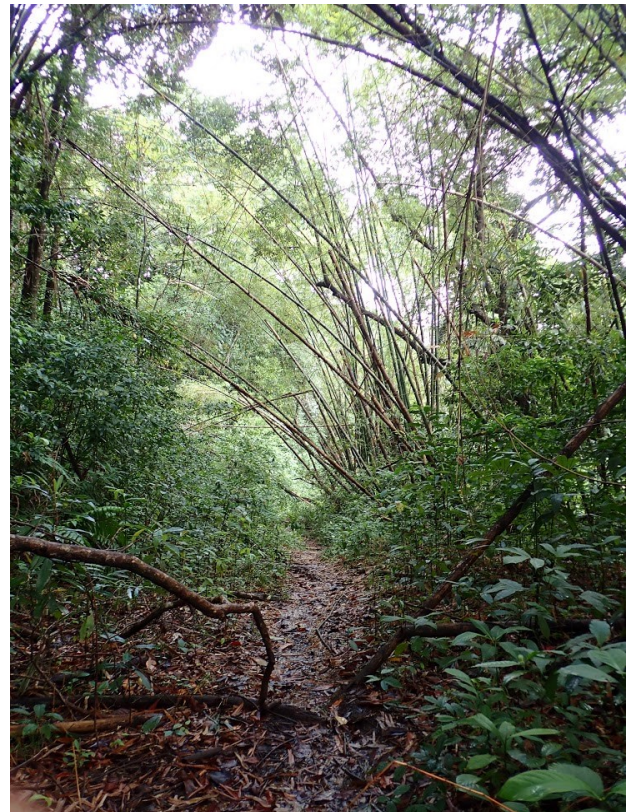
Further along the trail, we saw the crappo tree (*Carapa guianensis*), Mr Charles showed the group the seeds from the tree which are used to make oils to treat arthritis and make soaps. He went on to state that the name 'crappo' is derived from 'crapaud' the French word for frog. In the old trees the barks are

very rough like the back of a crapaud.

Shortly after, we arrived at the Forestry Division fire tower, where members got the opportunity to climb to the top to view the rest of the eastern Northern Range and we were able to see some portion of the Atlantic Ocean.

Afterwards, we continued on a trail leading to the river which was a bit steep and a little muddy. There were a few fallen trees along the way which we had to climb over, but there were young mora trees to hold onto to assist us in our descent to the river. Some fruiting balata trees were observed here. On arriving at the river, we had to climb down to some rocks and walk across the river to reach a sandy bank. The water was very cold but refreshing; many members of the group enjoyed swimming in the river.

As we were preparing to leave, a heavy downpour began and we quickly re-crossed the river and started to climb up the hill. Some other members hiked to the Lower Pool. The rain made the hill a bit more muddy and slippery, making the journey more difficult and slow, but all made it safely back to the gathering point—wet, but better off for this Mermaid Pool experience. 



Trail to Mermaid Pool Photo by the Edwards Family



October 24th, 2017
2016/2017 UWI AWARDS CEREMONY
compiled by Stephanie Warren-Gittens




The Dr. Victor Quesnel Prize is presented by his son, Gregory Quesnel, to Ms. Shanaaz Ali Persad
Photo by Vijay Ragoo

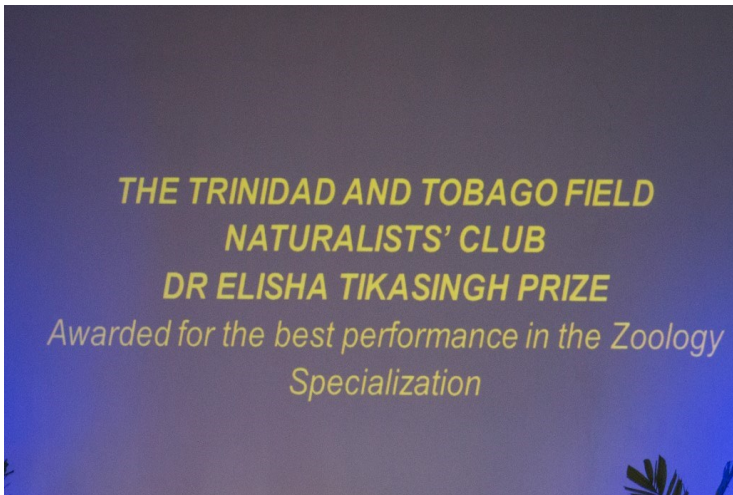
The Faculty of Science and Technology hosted its Annual Prizes & Awards Ceremony for the 2016/2017 academic year on Tuesday 24th October, 2017 at 2:00 pm at the Daaga Auditorium, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. Two of this year's awards were sponsored by the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club as follows:

- The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club, Dr. Victor Quesnel Prize, Awarded to Shanaaz Ali Persad, for Best Performance in the Plant Biology Specialization
- The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club, Dr. Elisha Tikasingh Prize, Awarded to Shenese

Harrysingh for Best Performance in the Zoology Specialization

Gregory Quesnel presented his father's prize, while Elisha presented his own prize. These awards are in recognition of the hard work and commitment to excellence by some of the Faculty's best students. These will also serve to inspire future outstanding performances and contribute to the success of the event, as well as forge stronger links between the Department of Life Sciences and the TTFNC.

The award package, which both students received, consisted of a monetary sum of \$1000, in addition to a set of Living World Journals. The Field Naturalists' Club has committed to awarding these prizes for a minimum of 3 years. 



(Left) One of the TTFNC features at the UWI Awards; (Right) Dr. Elisha Tikasingh and Professor Julian Duncan in the audience. Photos by Vijay Ragoo



Dr. Elisha Tikasingh presents an award to Shenese Harrysingh Photo by Vijay Ragoo



Mammal Group Report, September 23 2017
TAMANA CAVE
by Laura Baboolal



On September 23, 2017 seventeen members of TTFNC journeyed to Tamana Cave to experience the spectacular show of the bats emerging from the cave at dusk. Tamana Cave is located in Central Trinidad and houses the largest known population of bats recorded in Trinidad.

The weather was not in our favour during the day with heavy rainfall. Some members even called with concern, as to whether the trip was still on. However, we braved the weather and headed to Tamana which seemed to be the only dry area on the island that day!

The eager group huddled together for a short briefing and began our short hike to the caves. Along the way we stopped to enjoy the diversity of plants where Dan shared his invaluable knowledge.

We arrived at the infamous Tamana Cave at

5:30pm where the group anticipated the spectacular show. While waiting, half of the group ventured into the caves to explore and get an up close look at the bats, while the other half of the group patiently waited outside. Inside the cave was quite slippery so there were some tumbles, but all was well. While in the cave we used a hand net to gently capture some bats so we could get a closer look at these remarkable creatures. Little did we realise there was a hole in the net and the bats kept escaping, which lent some comic relief. Eventually we caught on to how the bats were escaping and were able to catch a few of them. It is absolutely amazing to see these creatures up close and to appreciate their unique characteristics. After the first half of the group returned from venturing into the cave, the other half took their chance venturing into the cave.

(Continued on page 21)



TTFNC Mammal Group Photo by Laura Baboolal

(Continued from page 20)

Darkness was quickly approaching and the bat activity was steadily increasing. Everyone stood or sat quietly around the cave opening anticipating the emergence of the bats. We could hear and feel the bats swiftly flying by us with great accuracy. At the peak of the event, one may describe it as a 'vortex of bats' flying out of the cave. It is truly a remarkable event and a natural wonder on this small island. The group enjoyed the sight for about an hour before packing up and hiking back to our vehicles.

Thank you to Dan, Darshan, Richard, Alexis, Jessica, Kendra, Edward, Gabe, Dominic, Arifa, Jo-Marie, Vikash, Ramchandra, Anupana, Tibaon and Jason for coming out to the trip and making it a success. 🦇



Right: The journey begins Photos by Laura Baboolal



Entering the cave Photo by Laura Baboolal



(Top) Exploring the cave; (Bottom) Dominic Barrow standing at the exit point with the bats swooping; *Photos by Edward Barrow*



NATURE IN THE NEWS

A quarterly summary of local environmental news
by Kris Sookdeo



JANUARY

Scarlet Ibis ESS Draft

The Environment Management Authority is pursuing the designation of the Scarlet Ibis as an Environmentally Sensitive Species (ESS). The draft Legal Notice has been prepared by the EMA and was circulated for review.

Disturbance at Las Cuevas

Following allegations that a Las Cuevas developer was illegally excavating sand from Las Cuevas Beach and modifying the course of the Las Cuevas River, Fishermen and Friends of the Sea (FFOS) is calling on the Government and the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) to take legal action against the company responsible. FFOS filed a complaint against the developer with the EMA in January 2018.

SWMCOL expands recycling network

SWMCOL has indicated that they aim to set up collection bins in all public primary and secondary schools as well as local communities. The expansion plan will include Tobago. Since the project's launch in June 2015, over 370,000 jumbo bags of recyclables have been collected.

Styrofoam restrictions delayed

Government has rolled back a plan to ban the use of styrofoam products to allow business owners to clear incoming imported goods. Initially the committee formed to look at the styrofoam ban had been given a one-year deadline to submit a report, but it has been moved up to mid-year.

FEBRUARY

Devil's Woodyard eruption

The Devil's Woodyard mud volcano erupted twice on February 13, spewing mud and gas some six metres into the air, while the disc of mud expanded to cover an area of approximately 100 metres in diameter from the centre of the eruption. The last documented eruption at the volcano was on February 22, 1997. Geologists have indicated that the volcano erupts on an average every 29 years. The Piparo volcano is believed to have a 20 year cycle.

MARCH

Churchill-Roosevelt Highway extension to Manzanilla

Work on the 5 kilometre highway from the Cumuto Main Road to Guaico Trace in Sangre Grande started on January 8. Following a challenge by the FFOS over the EMA's granting of a Certificate of Environmental Clearance (CEC) to the Ministry of Works. An injunction was granted on January 17 which saw the halting of major works. The injunction was lifted on February 6. Following another challenge from FFOS, a 24-hour injunction was granted. This was followed by a full injunction on February 9. On March 22, the Court of Appeals reserved their ruling on FFOS appeal in requesting a judicial review of the EMA's granting of the CEC. In the interim, the temporary injunction remains in place.



TTFNC QUARTERLY BULLETINS & INDEX ONLINE LINK :

www.ttfnc.org/publication/field-naturalist/



Management Notices

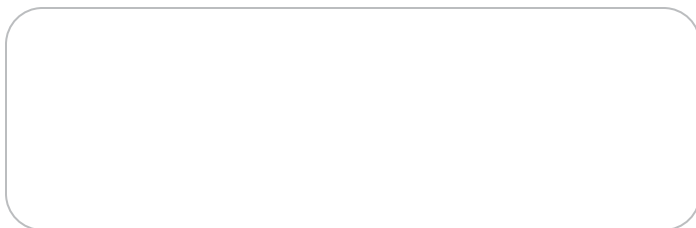
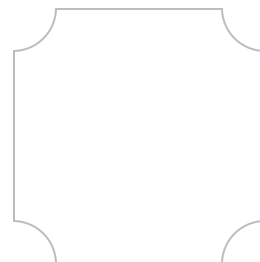
New Members

The Club warmly welcomes the following new members:

Shahada Paltoo, Aaron Peter, Rainer Deo, Sachin Maraj, Nicholas Mohammed, Kerry Lucio (family), Halim Ghany, Sarah-Lee Manmohan. Jessica Oura

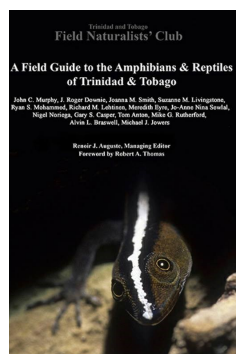
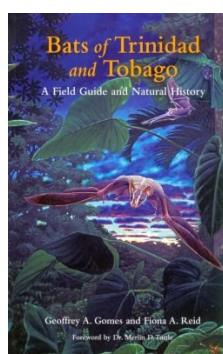
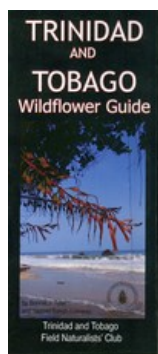
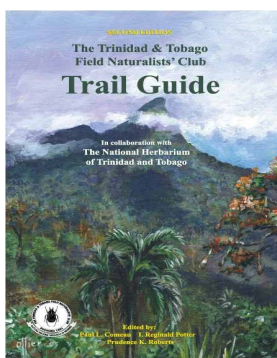
NOTICE FROM THE EDITORS: Do you have any natural history articles, anecdotes or trip reports that could be published in *The Field Naturalist*? We welcome contributions from members. Please email your ideas or finished pieces to admin@ttfnc.org. We look forward to hearing from you!

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 (*prices shown are those paid when purchasing directly from the Club*):



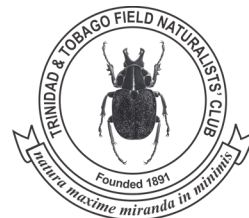
TTFNC Trail Guide (\$150); T&T Wildflower Guide (\$50); Bats of T&T (\$200); Field Guide to Amphibians & Reptiles (\$180); 2018 Calendar (\$25)

MISCELLANEOUS

Your 2018 Annual Membership Fees are Due:

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

Did you know? It is now possible to renew your membership online?
See www.ttfnc.org/funding for details. You can join the club this way, too!



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 'QB2018' in the email subject label.**