# THE FIELD NATURALIST

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

October – December 2020 Issue No: 4/2020


## BACKYARD BIOBLITZ 2020

### Saturday 21st - Sunday 22nd November

## SEARCHING FOR SILVER LININGS IN A PANDEMIC

*by Amy Deacon*

This year the Bioblitz organizing committee were faced with a daunting task – planning an event in a pandemic with huge uncertainty about what would be safe or permitted. However, rather than postponing the event or risking cancellation, we decided to embrace the limitations and turn the 9th T&T Bioblitz into a "Backyard" Bioblitz, that people could take part in from the safety of their own homes and gardens.

*(continued on page 3)*

**Bronze Anole spotted on a backyard wall.** *Photo by Stephanie Warren-Gittens*

## Inside This Issue



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

**Editor's 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


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**October - December 2020**

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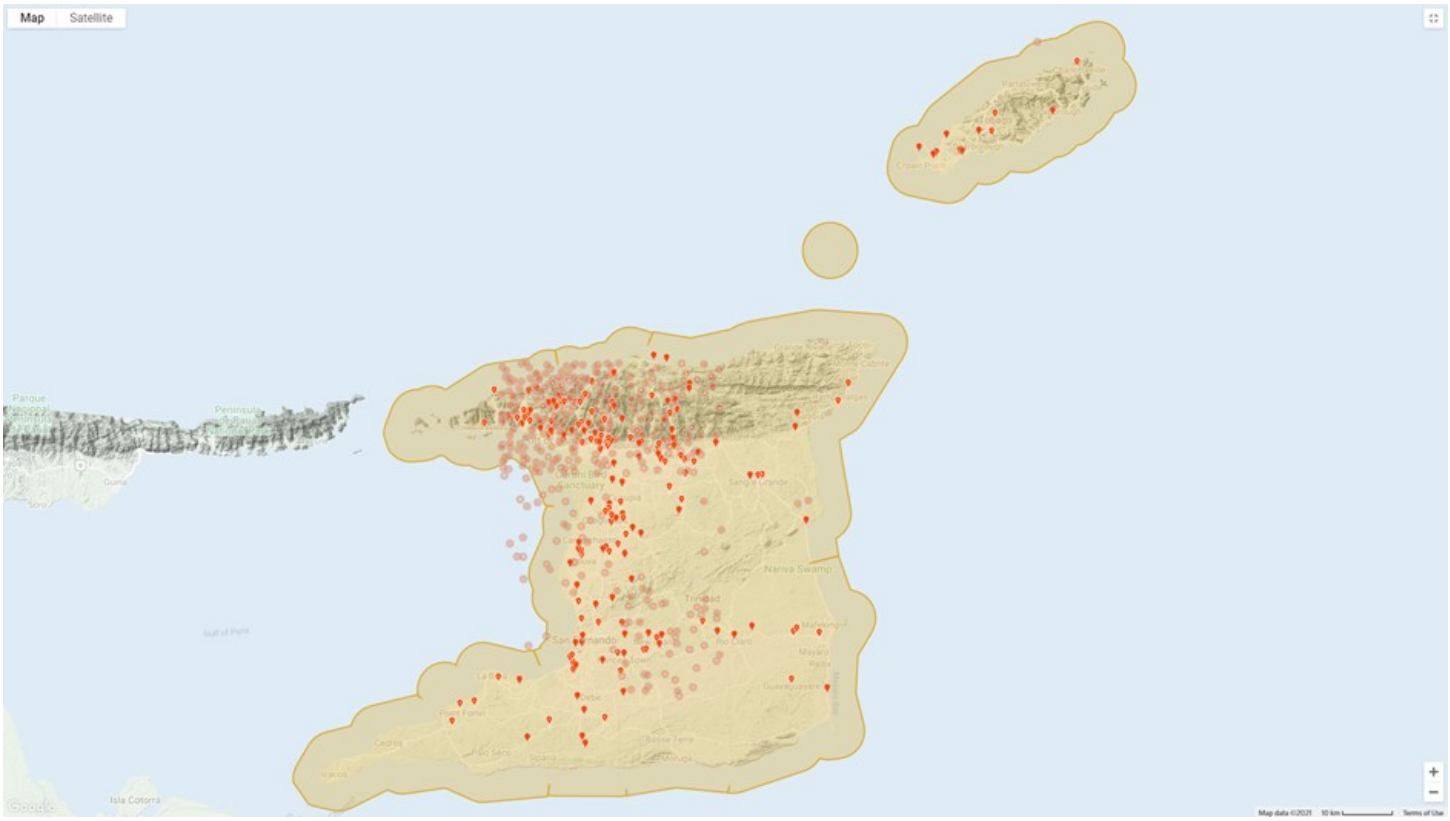



**Figure 1: Map of observations made during Bioblitz 2020.** *Source: iNaturalist*

*(continued from Page 1)*

On the very rainy weekend of the 21st - 22nd of November 2020, more than 200 people across T&T ventured into their backyards and started uploading photos.

Within a few hours there were hundreds of observations accumulating on the project, and by the end of the 24hrs we had 6,708, representing an estimated 1,383 species – the highest total ever recorded in the 9 years of Bioblitz and exceeding all of our expectations. The virtual nature of the event was made possible thanks to the brilliant free app – iNaturalist. iNaturalist is used by people all over the world to help identify species and collect data on their distribution.

By simply uploading a photo of a plant, bird, insect etc, the app's algorithm gives you a pretty good guess as to what type of organism you have found, then local and international experts chip in to help get it down to a species with more confidence. For the T&T Backyard Bioblitz, we created a project page within iNaturalist to gather all observations from the event in one place, so all participants had to do was install the app and take photos of all the living things in their backyard - from kiskadees to bachacs to chadon beni.

We embraced social media more than ever before for the Backyard edition, with regular posts and tutorial videos in the weeks leading up to the event, and a live-streamed welcome at the start and closing remarks at the end. Appearances on breakfast TV shows, print and online news and Caribbean Beat magazine also helped to spread the word.

It was fantastic to see the spread of observations across the country– including both islands (Figure 1).

The ten most commonly-sighted species are shown in Figure 2; the common crapaud (*Rhinella marina*) was the most common garden sighting across the country, closely followed by the introduced bronze anole (*Anolis aeneus*) and the ubiquitous ruddy ground dove (*Columbina talpacoti*).

More unusual sightings included several species of


**Figure 2. The ten most commonly observed and uploaded species during the 2020 Backyard Bioblitz.** *Compilation courtesy iNaturalist*

snake (including *Oxybelis rutherfordi*, the vine snake recently renamed after the T&T Bioblitz founder Mike Rutherford), a tufted capuchin monkey, and the endemic Trinidad stream frog.

The species list also highlighted the abundance of invasive and exotic species in our backyards, such as the African giant snail and the lesser Antillean whistling frog – both of which appeared in the top 50 species seen.

There is still some work to be done identifying less well-known species and coming up with final totals – so the most interesting findings may be yet to come.

Even several weeks after the event, there are still around 50% of observations that need identifying to species level (Figure 3). On that note, we would like to extend a special thank you to the 405 iNaturalist users who helped identify the species – in particular Mike Rutherford and Matthew Cock, who both made substantial contributions from across the Atlantic. Mike alone helped identify more than 700 observations!

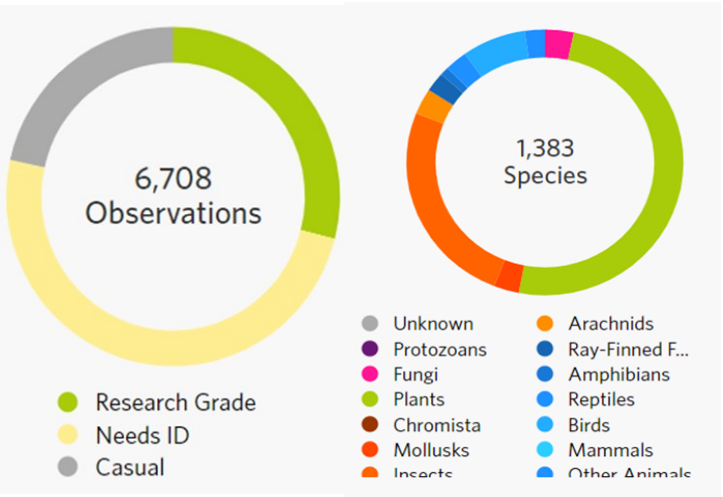



**Figure 3: Breakdown of observations by identification status, and breakdown of species identified by taxa** *Source: iNaturalist.*

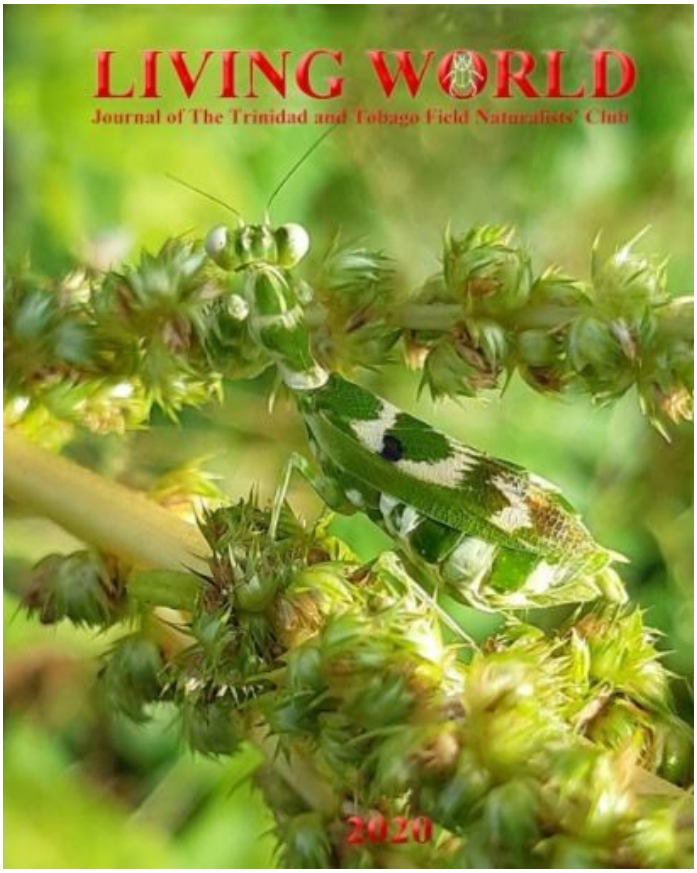
In addition to the usual naturalists and interested members of the public taking part, we were delighted to see many schools incorporate the Bioblitz into their virtual lessons this year. Many current and former UWI students also joined in.

All participants received complimentary stickers on request, thanks to a generous donation by Mr. Mitchel De Silva, and those meeting targets in

certain categories received laminated field guides as prizes, courtesy of TTFNC (see page 22).

While we hope to resume 'on location' Bioblitzes as soon as it is safe to do so, the success of this event means this is unlikely to be the last Backyard Bioblitz we hold in T&T, even once restrictions ease. Discovering the level of enthusiasm and participation among members of the public (not just club members) was a real silver lining of the pandemic; it suggests that lockdown has encouraged people to notice, appreciate and learn more about the biodiversity right on their doorsteps, and that is definitely a good thing!

**This photo of a tufted coquette taken during the Backyard Bioblitz was chosen as the iNaturalist observation of the day**
*Photo by: ralytt*




**This photo of a praying mantis was chosen via Facebook vote, as the cover of TTFNC's 2020 Living World Journal**
*Photo by: rossi_nicholi_dookie*

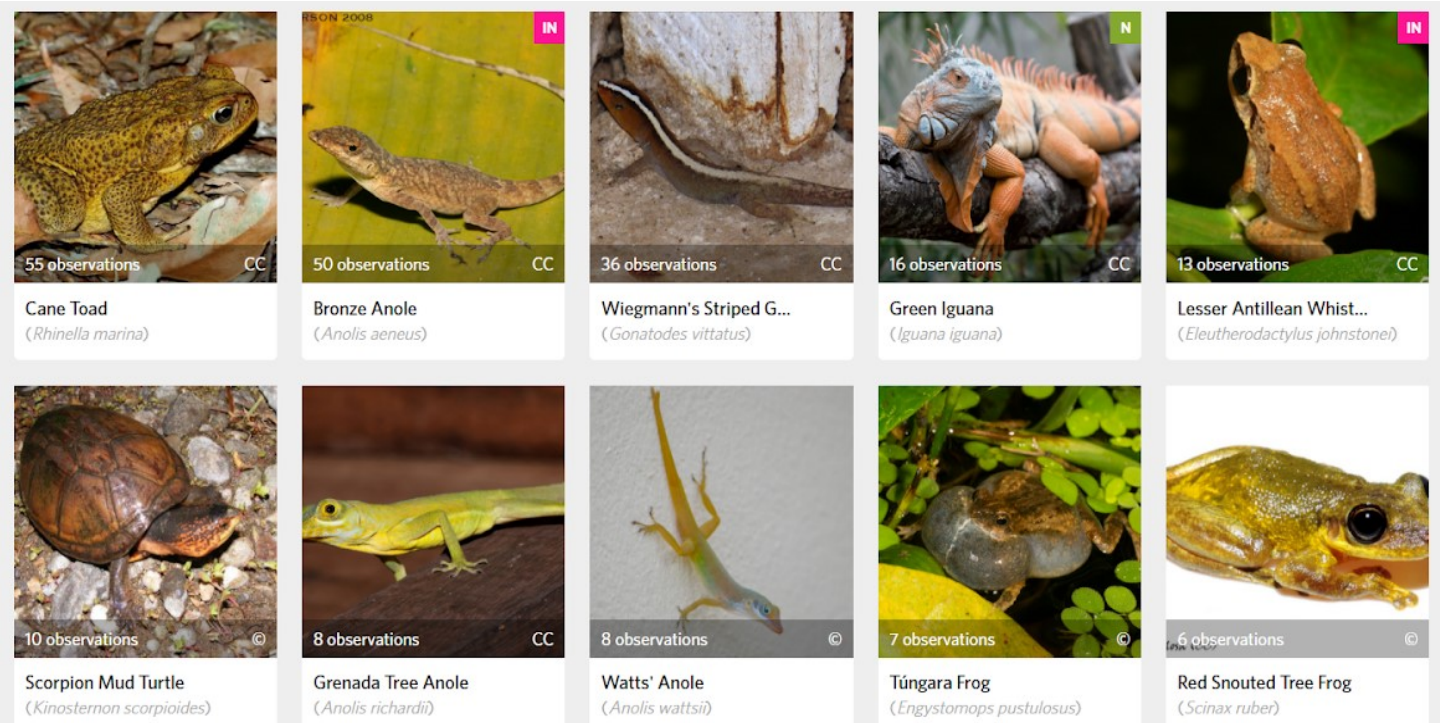
**(Left) : Jeffrey Wong, Bioblitzing in his backyard with none other than a large fungus specimen**. *Photo by Jeffrey Wong Sang*

The 2020 Backyard Bioblitz was held by TTFNC with the support of the Department of Life Sciences at The University of the West Indies. TTFNC extends thanks to all of this year's Bioblitzers and to our organizing committee for ensuring the event was a success!

Backyard Bioblitz 2020 Committee:
Amy Deacon, Mark Hulme, Ryan Mohammed, Stephanie Warren-Gittens, Linton Arneaud, Renoir Auguste, Laura Baboolal and Karishma Rampersad

# AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE GROUP REPORT

*by Renoir Auguste*




**Backyard Bioblitz's Top 10 amphibians and reptiles.** *Compilation courtesy iNaturalist*

The 2020 Backyard Bioblitz produced a good turnout of amphibians and reptiles from across Trinidad and Tobago. Most of these species were observed in people's backyards, but also a few along the road or a nearby less urban area.

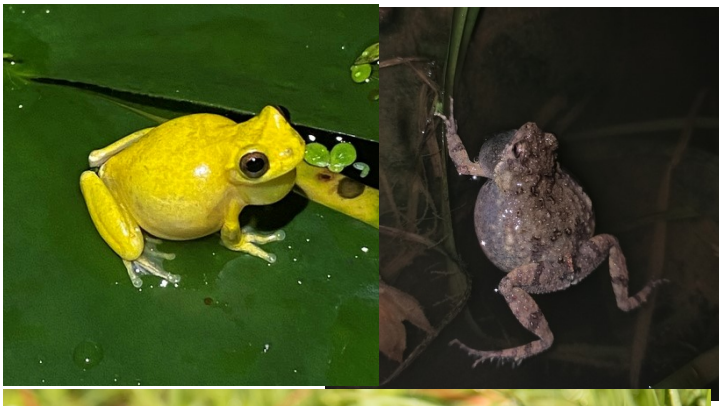
In total, 14 species from 6 families of amphibians were observed from 113 observations and 58 observers. It may come as no surprise that the most observed amphibian was none other than the ubiquitous cane toad (*Rhinella marina*). This is the largest amphibian in the country, and although scorned by many, it does play an important role in keeping insect pest populations down.

Another notable amphibian observation was the invasive Johnstone's litter frog (*Eleutherodactylus johnstonei*). This species is not native to Trinidad and can often be found in residential areas, so their observations were also expected. There were also observations of tree frog species, which is always fantastic, as these frogs are typically brightly coloured, and perhaps the negative perception by locals on frogs would change if they saw more of these. Thanks to iNaturalist user "simmin" for the most amphibian observations with 8 comprising 2 species, and to all the identifiers.

There were 35 species of reptiles which included lizards, snakes, turtles, and caiman from 244 observations and 105 observers. The most abundantly observed reptile was the bronze anole lizard (*Anolis aeneus*). This lizard is native to Grenada, but is widespread across urban areas in Trinidad, and to a lesser extent in Tobago. It was fantastic to have observation of freshwater turtles as they are often elusive, usually hiding underwater most times of the day.

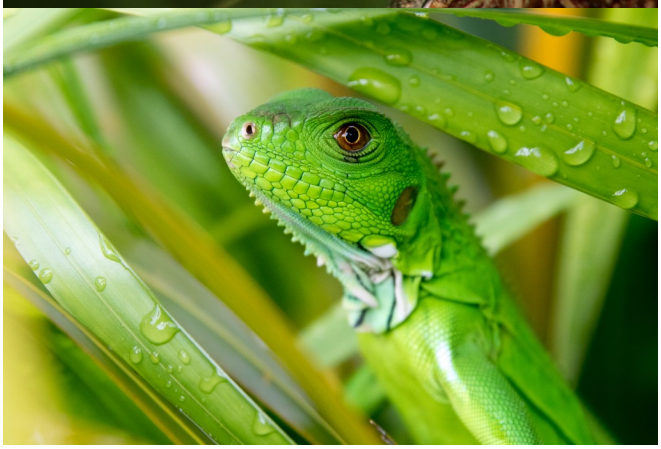
Overall, no rare reptiles were observed during this Bioblitz, but perhaps that will change next time around! Thanks to Saifudeen Mohammed for the most reptile observations with eleven comprising nine species, and to all the identifiers.

**Map tree frog (*Boana geographica*).** *Photo by zakwildlife*



**Some backyard amphibians found:**
**(Top): Beebe's toad (*Rhinella beebei*) & middle left: Trinidad yellow tree frog (*Dendropsophus goughi).*** *Photos by Kyma*
**Middle right: Túngara frog (*Engystomops pustulosus).*** *Photo by kyleedghill*
**Bottom: Cane toad or crapaud (*Rhinella marina*).** *Photo by ryanmannette*

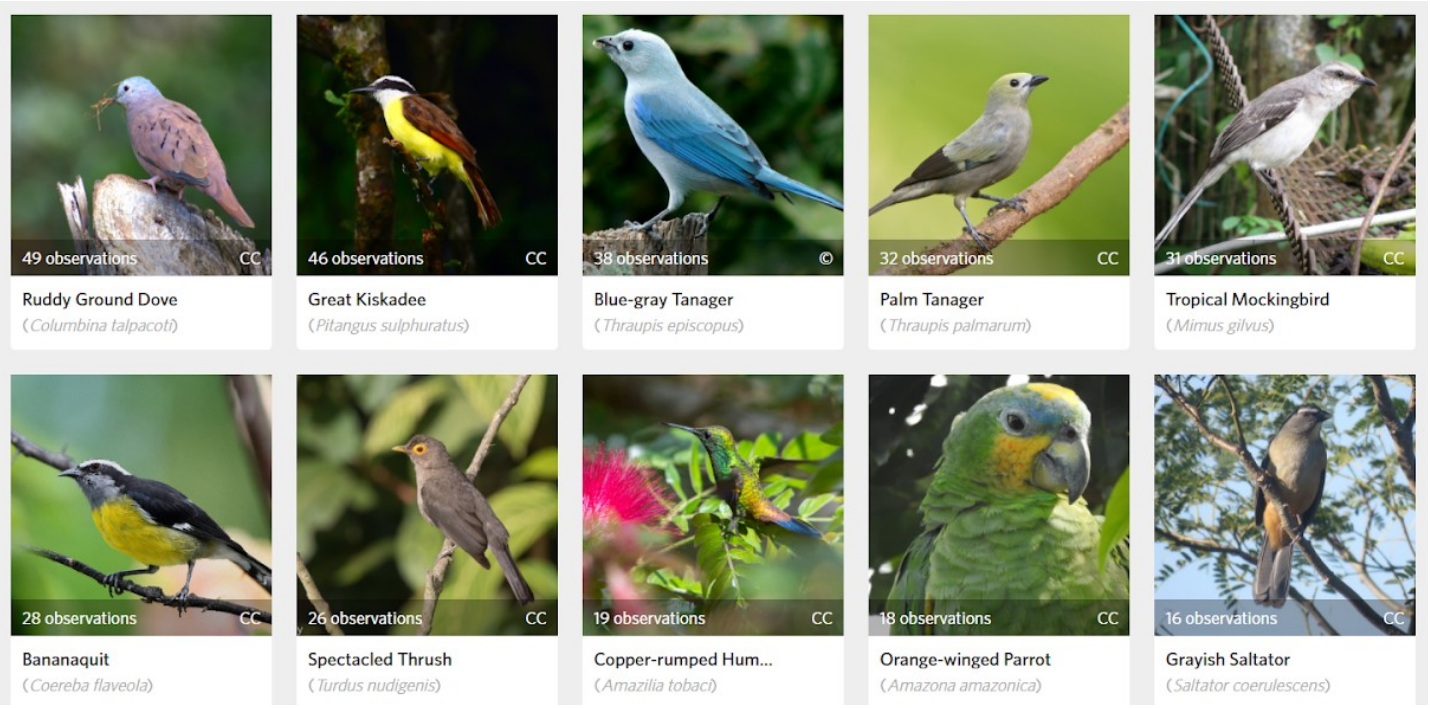
(Top): Boa constrictor. *Photo by kesterdass*
(Middle): Forest flame snake & (Bottom) three-lined ground snake (***Atractus trilineatus)***
*Photos by saifudeen_muhammad*



(Top): Bronze anole. *Photo by wesley117*
(Middle): Green iguana. *Photo by ryanmannette*
***(Bottom):*** Spectacled caiman*. Photo by iancorbinlocaltobago*

# BIRD GROUP REPORT

*by Mark Hulme*




**Top 10 birds found during the Backyard Bioblitz.** *Compilation courtesy iNaturalist*

Wherever they live everyone can spot some birds from their backyard so, unsurprisingly, birds made up five of the top ten most observed species: ruddy ground dove, great kiskadee, blue-grey tanager, palm tanager and tropical mockingbird, with bananaquit and spectacled thrush just a few places behind. All very familiar garden birds (though the great kiskadee is absent from Tobago).

In total, 88 species (including chickens and a caged canary!) with photos or sounds were observed from 507 observations and 96 observers, with an additional 14 species observed without media. iNaturalist user ralytt won the prize for most verifiable species uploaded with 17. West, east and central Trinidad saw the most observations though there were a good number also from south Trinidad and from southwest to northeast Tobago, with backyards in urban, arable, forested and coastal habitats represented.

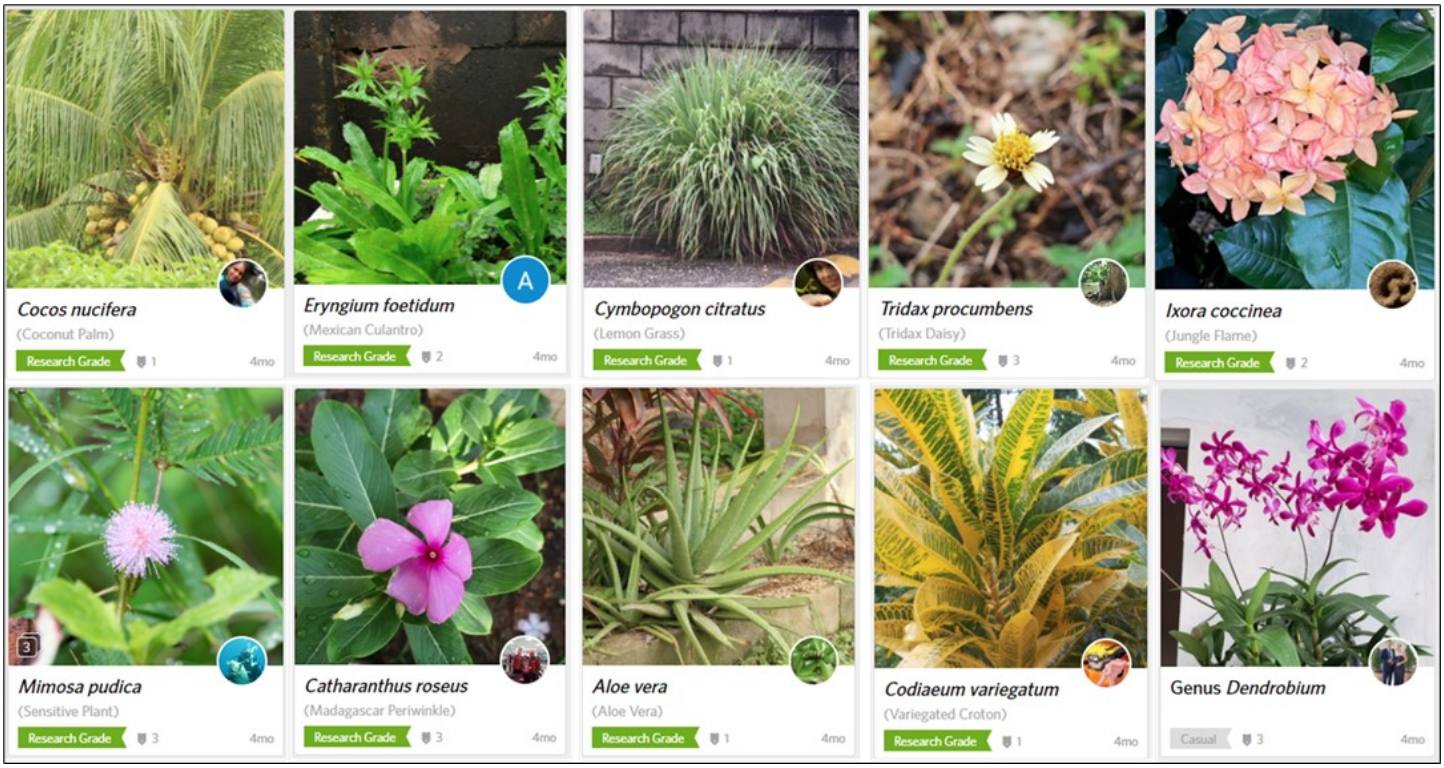
Some of the more interesting species (and perhaps those seen in some of the more remote back yards, such as those near Brasso Seco, submitted by user ierenation) included blue-headed parrot, olive-striped flycatcher (normally only seen at high altitudes), channel-billed toucan (how lucky to have this beautiful bird in your back-yard!), purple honeycreeper, black-tailed tityra, Trinidad euphonia, Trinidad motmot (the one Trinidad and Tobago avian endemic seen during the BioBlitz, all 4 observations from Tobago) and bay-headed tanager.

Backyards can be very fruitful places to watch birds. You can develop great knowledge of the common birds you see and even of the resident pairs that frequent your neighbourhood, and not much beats adding a new species to your backyard list! Why not continue keeping an eye out and add your observations to iNaturalist and eBird to help scientists monitor what happens to our backyard birds in the future.

(Clockwise from top left): Crested oropendola, silver-beaked tanager, ferruginous pygmy-owl *Photos by rgoordial.*
Ruby-topaz hummingbird (Chrysolampis mosquitus). *Photo by ralytt*
an eared dove (Zenaida auriculata). *Photo by magintob*

# PLANT GROUP REPORT

*by Linton Arneaud*




**Top 10 plants identified over the Backyard Bioblitz weekend**. *Compilation courtesy iNaturalist*

## Addressing 'plant blindness' in Trinidad and Tobago

With the recent increase in fossil fuel extraction within the Caribbean and the establishment of new industries, concerns of global warming and carbon mitigating strategies have been brought to the forefront. However, one easier way to introduce such concepts to the general public is by addressing the elephant in the room — Plant Blindness. Plant blindness is "*the under-appreciation of flora around us…despite the fact that our very survival is dependent on plants…*".

With the inception of the virtual Backyard Bioblitz 2020 event, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago (and to a lesser extent — foreigners) were given the opportunity to not only interact with plants closest to them, but also to appreciate the many different ways people see plants throughout the islands.

## Coverage of Different Ecosystems

This year's Bioblitz edition provided the opportunity for participants to study a vast variety of zones and micro-environments throughout the islands. However, from looking at the results, participants did not take advantage of the opportunity, as most of the species identified were from the interior of the islands; with less than 2% occupying coastal regions. It seems that participants with large estate/ farmlands/ backyards limited their observations to the periphery of their homes. Therefore, it should be noted that ecosystem diversity was poor. Unsurprisingly, no endemic species were identified, as Bioblitz's methodological design is not specialised for finding such species, however, there were a few plants tentatively identified as threatened species.

## Top 10 plants identified

During the 24 hours, a total of 3,619 botanical observations out of 6,707 (total observations) were made, of which 676 species were tentatively identified by professionals throughout the world. The number one plant/tree identified (with 31 observations) was the coconut tree (*Cocos nucifera*—Arecoideae), and was the only tree species that made the top ten. Of all the plants identified, most were exotic species; except for the chadon beni (*Eryngium foetidum*) and the sensitive plant (*Mimosa pudica*).

On average, just over 3,600 vascular species have been recorded in Trinidad and Tobago, consisting of just over 2,400 indigenous species. From the results, there were low counts of indigenous plants recorded, possibly due to the low number of participants from the countryside or the lack of specialised ecosystems surveyed. Much work is needed to speed up the general population of Trinidad and Tobago on familiarising themselves with native or indigenous plant species.

Species diversity in relation to the biodiversity of Trinidad and Tobago backyards (i.e., 676 floral species compared to 707 faunal species) can be considered similar (one-to-one) and should be compared to future virtual Backyard Bioblitz events if possible. Other plant species most Trinbagonians can easily identify include: red ginger (*Alpinia purpurata*), mango (*Mangifera indica*), heart of Jesus (*Caladium bicolor*), paw-paw (*Carica papaya*), parrots beak (*Heliconia psittacorum*), and avocado (*Persea americana*).

## Lessons learnt

It should be noted that not everyone is computer savvy, therefore, much preparation is required (especially for traditional folks) to ensure efficiency when uploading observations on iNaturalist. Furthermore, some naturalists generally avoid the use of technology and steered away from using mobile devices altogether. In these cases, younger persons can learn how to mass input numerous observations or take screen-shots of video recording for upload to the iNaturalist desktop app. We must build on lessons learnt during this Bioblitz experience. The country should acknowledge that "Native Plant Blindness" exists, as a small number of indigenous plant species were identified. I recommend the implementation of more human-plant interactions activities—especially with native plant species. The government of Trinidad and Tobago (via the ministries dealing with agriculture, social and community development, and planning and development) have already engaged in several agricultural and public awareness initiatives. Priorities should focus more heavily on native plant species over exotic plant species.

At present, there are very few qualified local botanists on the islands with the skill to identify endemic plants. Primarily, this handful of local botanists need to be properly trained and, in turn, can teach the wider public not only how to identify endemic plants, but also how to interact with the native plant species on a daily basis. Unfortunately, from the results, it seems that on average, most persons can more comfortably identify exotic plant species as opposed to native plant species.


Most participants identified exotic plant species such as the 'boundary bush' during the 24 hr study period. *Photo downloaded from iNaturalist*)







(Clockwise from top left): Ivy Gourd (***Coccinia grandis***). *Photo by hameeda.*
Indian Mango & a fern (Class Polypodiopsida). . *Photos by nigelaustin.*
***Solanum stramoniifolium***. *Photo by sterlingjames*
Blue Porterweed ***(Stachytarpheta jamaicensis)***. *Photo by ryanmannette*
Frangipani Flowers (Genus Plumeria). *Photo by figtree.*
Mexican Sunflower (***Tithonia diversifolia***). *Photo by rayannaa*

# FUNGUS GROUP REPORT

*by Jeffrey Wong Sang*

**(Top L-R): American Shitake.** *Photo by nicholasmohammed* **and Speckled Greenshield.** *Photo by allandarwent*
**(Bottom L-R): Wood Ears (Order Auriculariales).** *Photo by Jeffrey Wong Sang*; **Bridal Veil Stinkhorn.** *Photo by Shamz.*
**Puffballs.** *Photo by rossi_nicholi_dookie*

Ah! Finally its Covid Bioblitz day 2020! But a Bioblitz with a difference this year. Basecamp, technically, is home—unless I'm moving around, as I plan to this year. But, as in previous years, where I am one of the few looking for fungi, everyone participating in Bioblitz 2020 will record whatever species they encounter, regardless of their usual group affiliation. Should make for interesting numbers in the end. All in all, I was one of the 219 observers for this year's Blitz. Advantage to those who have large backyards with good flora.

Living in an urban environment with a simple garden in Petit Valley was going to be challenging but I embraced it and hit the garden hard with camera in hand. Fortunately, I had to work whilst doing my Bioblitz so I was also able to photograph the garden at Deane Street, St Augustine. Kind of weird feeling bioblitzing by myself, but "we got to do what we got to do."

I was able to bioblitz in Manzanilla on Sunday morning, as I had committed to making that run with a friend for personal reasons. Overall, I did not get that many fungi myself, but was still able to contribute to the overall observations in other groups, which, for the first time this year, we were mandated to post to iNaturalist website as the Bioblitz data was being correlated there. According to data in the end, we had 46 fungi this year…not bad for a crazy virtual Bioblitz… I sure missed the basecamp scenario and engaging with my friends in the various groups, but we'll see what happens for Bioblitz 2021.

Be safe everyone…and keep on "shrooming"…

# MAMMAL GROUP REPORT

*by Laura Baboolal*

This year's Bioblitz was a unique one due to the pandemic. However, it created a widespread Bioblitz covering Trinidad and Tobago. Relying on finding mammals solely through observation can be challenging, especially finding elusive species. Despite the challenge, the 2020 Bioblitz participants sent in their mammal observations.

Several participants had some fun with uploading their pet dogs and cats as their observations. Other domestic species were uploaded as well, including a rabbit, horse, a few goats, sheep, and cattle. Even though the domestic animals are not within our target, it was entertaining seeing these animals included. There was a captive observation of a white-throated capuchin (*Cebus capucinus).* Even though this observation was not in the wild it is very useful information to know what captive species are being trafficked into Trinidad and Tobago.

**Red-tailed Squirrel.** *Photo by amargopaul*

**A Manicou or Southern Opossum**. *Photo by jojada18*

There were a total of nine species observed in the wild. There were five observations of red-tailed squirrel found in Champ Fleurs, Mayaro, Caparo, Chaguanas and St. Joseph. The common opossum (*Didelphis marsupialis*) was observed twice in Rio Claro and St. Ann's. There were even observations from Tobago of a red-rumped agouti (*Dasyprocta leporina*) and another in Petit Valley. In the St. Augustine area there was an observation of a black rat (*Rattus rattus*), which can be found in urban environments. The non-native tufted or brown capuchin was spotted in Mountain View, Trinidad.

There were observations of volant species. These included Pallas's long-tongued bat (*Glossophaga soricina)* at Wa Samaki Ecosystems, Seba's short-tailed bat (*Carollia perspicillata*) in Tunapuna and Tobago, and Jamaican fruit-eating bat (*Artibeus jamaicensis)* in the northern area of Trinidad and Black Rock, Tobago. There were some

species of bat that were not identified but belonged to the family Phyllostomidae.

A very interesting finding was a Robinson's mouse opossum (*Marmosa robinsoni)*. This opossum is nocturnal and can be found on the forest floor or in the trees to evade predators. We thank everyone for participating in the Backyard Bioblitz and for submitting their observations!

**(Top to bottom): A black rat.** *Photo by markhulme*; **red -rumped agouti.** *Photo by iancorbinlocaltobago* **& brown capuchin.** *Photo by yo_aid_dan.*


**(Top to bottom): Robinson's mouse opossum.** *Photo by kyma*; **Jamaican fruit-eating bat.** *Photo by avinhardeo* **& a new world leaf-nosed bat (*Family Phyllostomidae*).** *Photo by iancorbinlocaltobago*

# AQUATIC GROUP REPORT

*by Stephanie Warren-Gittens*

Teta (*Hypostomus robinii*).
*Photo by: zakwildlife*

With rivers off limits and the sea not quite a 'backyard' feature for most, how would the COVID restrictions affect the species tally for the fish grouping for the 2020 Backyard Bioblitz? Thankfully some persons were lucky enough to have the sea literally in their backyard and ponds or small streams flowing through their property to allow 32 fish observations to be made, inclusive of captive organisms in aquaria.

The majority of marine fish uploaded on iNaturalist was as a result of the efforts of erictobago in Charlotteville, Tobago. Environmental Research Institute Charlotteville—ERIC, as they are commonly called—were our gracious hosts for Bioblitz 2015. Some of the marine organisms observed were the Atlantic sargeant major, hairy blenny and cocoa damselfish. They were also responsible for marine crustaceans and molluscs observed under the invertebrate category.

Back on 'land', zakwildlife observed a total of 10 freshwater fish, the most of all observers, as he Bioblitzed at Wa Samaki Ecosystems— his backyard for the weekend. Some observations made there included the stout sardine, blue acara, two-spot Astyanax, teta and wolf fish.

The most commonly observed fish was the marbled swamp eel (*Synbranchus marmoratus*) with five sightings in Couva, and Arima. Some other interesting sightings were the wolf fish and jumping guabine.



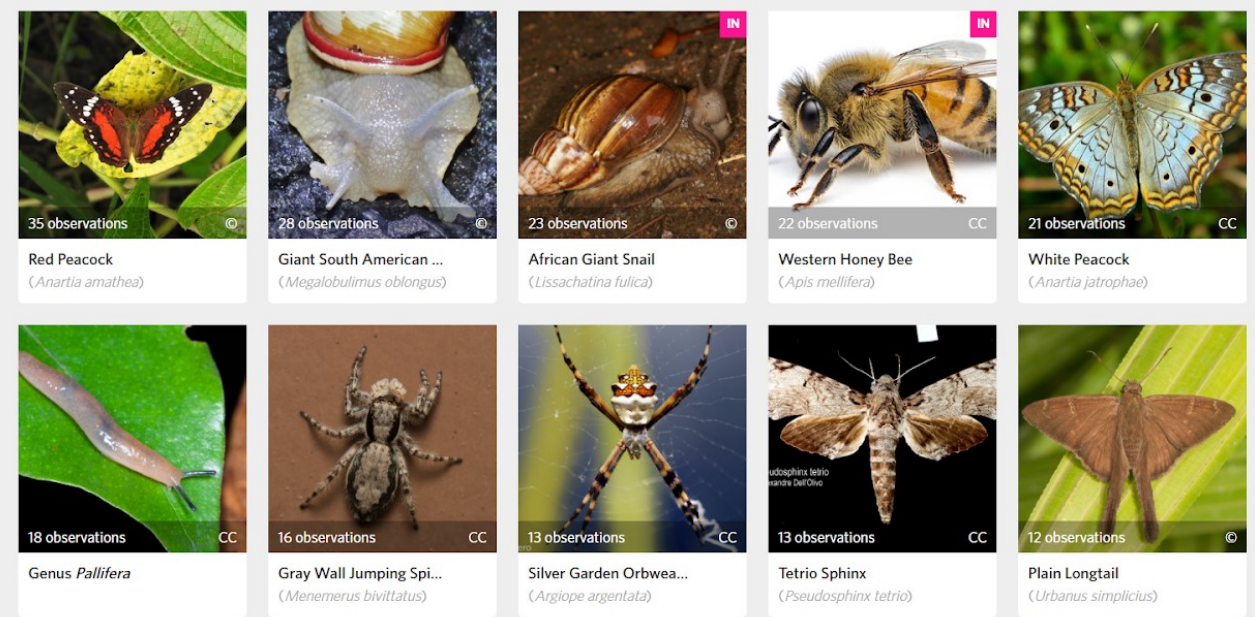




**(Top row L-R): Some marine organisms found: Atlantic sergeant major & hairy blenny.** *Photos by erictobago*
**(Middle row L-R): Wolf fish (*Hoplias malabaricus*).** *Photo by ryanmannette* **& marbled swamp eel (*Synbranchus marmoratus).*** *Photo by aamir_rassul*
**(Bottom row L-R): Blue acara & Guyana leaffish.** *Photos by zakwildlife*; **an aquarium guppy (*Poecilia reticulata*).**
*Photo by foresterkishan*

# TERRESTRIAL INVERTEBRATES

*by Stephanie Warren-Gittens*



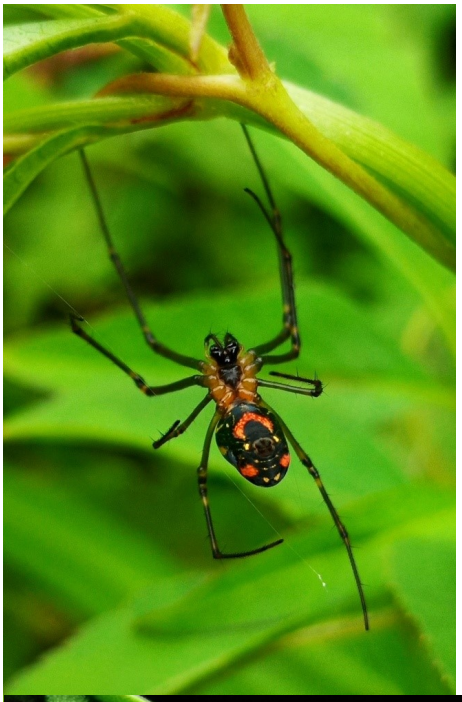

**Top 10 Backyard Bioblitz 2020 invertebrates.** *Compilation courtesy iNaturalist*

Some are easily seen in plain sight; others you need to get a bit closer and perhaps do a little digging to find, or even look under leaves and even in cracks and crevices—these are invertebrates. For the Backyard Bioblitz, participants did just that and from 1690 observations were able to find 459 species of invertebrates—the second highest grouping of the Bioblitz, after plants! There are observations which are still being identified to the species level, as best as possible. Some organisms, however, cannot be completely identified via photo observations, but may need further examination under microscope or even dissection, to differentiate the subtle differences that, unfortunately, could not have been done this time around.

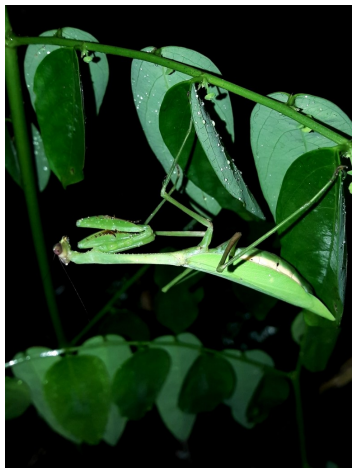
The red peacock butterfly was the most commonly observed invertebrate on that rainy weekend, with 35 observations, with three other Lepidopterans (white peacock, tetrio sphinx and plain longtail) included in the top ten invertebrates of the Backyard Bioblitz 2020 weekend. Considering the weather, it was no surprise that the molluscs made up one-third of the top ten observations: giant South American snail, slugs (genus Pallifera) and the African giant snail. The African giant snail, an invasive species, unfortunately was found along the East west corridor from Chaguaramas to as far east as Sangre Grande, in Cunupia and Chaguanas and a lone sighting in Tabaquite.

The majority of the invertebrates observed was insects, with 343 species. There were 44 species of arachnids, 40 species of molluscs, and 32 species of other invertebrates including annelids and crustaceans among others.

The top Bioblitz observer in this category was rainernd, with just under 60 observations, most of which were a beautiful collection of butterflies and moths observed at Wa Samaki Ecosystems—also his backyard for the weekend of Backyard Bioblitz 2020.



Clockwise from top left: Orchard Spider and Allies (Genus Leucauge). *Photo by umarnobbee.* Trinidad Olive Tarantula. *Photo by figtree.* Orbweavers (Family Araneidae). *Photo by bushmansparkles.* Giant South American Snail (***Megalobulimus oblongus***). *Photo by milenchi.* Caribbean Reef Octopus ***(Octopus briareus)***. *Photo by erictobago.* African Giant Snail. *Photo by ryanmannette.* Blue Land Crab. *Photo by erictobago* and ***Plekocheilus glaber***, a member of Helicinan Snails and Slugs. *Photo by sabiraali*





(Top L-R): Mollusc-eating hammerhead worm. *Photo by bellbird20*. ***Oxyopsis rubicunda*,** member of unicorn matises. Photo *by rainerd* & Grasshoppers, Locusts, and Allies. *Photo by davisgunn*
(Middle L-R): Daring Owl-Butterfly. *Photo by rainernd*; Smooth-banded sister. *Photo by bushmansparkles* & ***Stolas discoides,*** member of tortoise and hispine beetles. *Photo by rashidali_7*
(Bottom L-R): Band-winged dragonlet (***Erythrodiplax umbrata***). *Photo by kerrie_naranjit*
***Automeris liberia.*** *Photo by zahrah_mohammed*

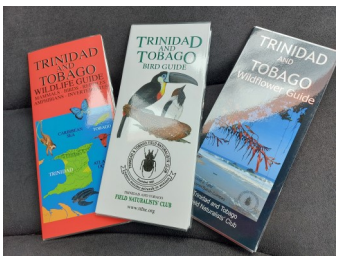
# BACKYARD BIOBLITZ 'PRIZE' WINNERS

*by Stephanie Warren-Gittens*

The 2020 Bioblitz was unlike any other — as it was completely virtual, using the iNaturalist platform from the comfort of your own 'backyard'! Over the past two years, Bioblitzers were encouraged to utilise iNaturalist to help observations at Toco and Tabaquite, however not all quite caught on then—this year Bioblitzers had no choice! As such, we were able to gather some useful information and stats about species distribution. One such set of information that was possible was the top species observers per organism group. Also, keeping with the 'different' theme this year, these observers were winners of a guide (Bird Guide, Wildlife or Wildflower Guide) courtesy the Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalists' Club for topping certain categories. A prize was also given to the person who most closely guessed the species count on social media channels (Facebook & Instagram), prior to the event. The winners are as follows — their iNaturalist names have been given:

| Category | Total | iNaturalist username |
|---|---|---|
| *Most species uploaded across all groups* | *187 sp.* | *bellbird20* |
| *Most observations uploaded (overall)* | *289 obs.* | *kellykingon* |
| *Most observations & species (Tobago)* | *127 obs. & 65 sp.* | *figtree* |
| *Plants* | *131 sp.* | *umarnobbee* |
| *Invertebrates* | *58 sp.* | *rainernd* |
| *Birds* | *17 sp.* | *ralytt* |
| *Herps* | *14 sp.* | *Saifudeen_muhammad* |
| *Fish* | *10 sp.* | *zakwildlife* |
| *Molluscs* | *10 sp.* | *sabiraali* |
| *Total species guess* | *1056 sp.* | *anaadipooran* |

A guide was also awarded to an energetic, young individual, Tristan, who promoted the event via the Chaguanas Public Library's Facebook page. The cover photo of TTFNC's 2020 Living World Journal was also selected by Bioblitzers on Facebook — the winning photo was that of a mantis, taken by Rossi Dookie.



***Some of the Backyard Bioblitz 2020 prize winners receiving their guides -f rom top: bellbird20, Tristan, rainernd & anaadipooran.*** *Photos courtesy: Stephanie Warren-Gittens, Amy Deacon & Anaadi Pooran*

# BIOBLITZ HISTORY

*by Matt Kelly*

According to Wikipedia, "The term "BioBlitz" was first coined by U.S. National Park Service naturalist, Susan Rudy, while assisting with the first BioBlitz. The first BioBlitz was held at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, Washington, D.C. in 1996. Approximately 1000 species were identified at this first event."

It was in 1998, that wildlife expert and biologist Peter Alden connected with Harvard professor, Edward O. ("EO") Wilson to develop the concept of "Biodiversity Days" around the vicinity of Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. The name "BioBlitz" was not initially attractive to Alden and Wilson because of the connotations of WWII. The goal of Biodiversity Days was to identify any form of life larger than 1 millimetre within a 5-mile radius of Walden Pond. Also, they wished to have another opportunity for birders to have a count, similar to the Christmas count, at another time of the year. Alden and Wilson launched their first Biodiversity Day on July 4th, 1999, to coincide with the anniversary of Henry David Thoreau's move to his cabin in the woods at Walden Pond in 1845. The result of Thoreau's 2-year stay here led to one of the highest regarded nature classics of all time with the book called, Walden. This first Biodiversity Day also coincided with E.O. Wilson's 70th birthday.

The first mission of Biodiversity Days was the concept of bringing together field biologists who had never met one another before. They "cross-fertilised the field biologists" and hoped for a greater fruition in the scientific community. At the same time, the mission was to involve the general public in this citizen-science event. In this first event, 1906 species were identified. This concept started to take off, and many similar events, in many different locations copied the format.

E.O. Wilson, also called "the father of biodiversity" is a prolific author and Pulitzer Prize Winner for his 1998 book, The Ants. In 2002, he published his book, The Future of Life, which was a blockbuster in the field of bioethics and natural history. This drove an even more intense interest in the next 2009 Biodiversity Day planned for Wilson's 80th birthday. By then the Wilson & Alden format had taken a solid hold, as well as the National Parks name, "BioBlitz". Again, the feeling was that the scientific information was not as important as getting interested citizens, scientists, and technical people meeting one another, which they felt was almost more important than the true science. During the second (now called) "Great Walden BioBlitz" over 150 participants found 2242 species of life. By this time, the concept developed by Alden & Wilson had gone global, and continues today.

July 6th, 2019, brought the most recent "Great Walden BioBlitz", of which I had the privilege of participating in. This was also the celebration of the 90th birthday of E.O. Wilson. This event brought 243 people to the field, and with 4175 observations produced a list of over 3690 species! By now, the Wilson & Alden format is accepted globally, and has created an invaluable global database of life. At this time, BioBlitzes are taking place all over the globe. The BioBlitz in T&T has created the same intense interest in observing, studying, cataloguing, and understanding nature, as well as meeting and connecting with like-minded people. I give great acclamation to those who work to put this event together. Let's hope this preeminent and priceless event continues in T&T for a long time to come.

[Professor E.O. Wilson (left) confers with Peter Alden (c. 1998)] *Photo by Judy Schwenk*

Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club
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T&T Bioblitz 2020
Backyard Edition

For more information about the Backyard Bioblitz and previous Trinidad & Tobago Bioblitzes see the webpage:

https://sta.uwi.edu/fst/lifesciences/bioblitz-events-trinidad-tobago

For more photos and posts about the event see the Facebook page:

https://www.facebook.com/TandTBioblitz

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