



THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

July – September 2021

Issue No: 3/2021



Art Group Report, 28 July 2021 'BACKYARD BIODIVERSITY' - A VIRTUAL ART EXHIBITION

By Amy Deacon



Acrylic painting of a macaw *Painting by Helina Chin Lee*

Given ongoing lockdowns preventing any Art Group trips, we decided to launch an “Art and Nature” online art sharing initiative in the run-up to our Member’s Evening in July. Using the theme of ‘Backyard Biodiversity’ members of the club and the wider public were encouraged to create some art using any media they wished, and then share it with us via email or on social media.

The response was extremely positive and allowed us to showcase a full Virtual Exhibition at Member’s Evening, which was later posted as a Facebook album. The hope is that this will have encouraged people to pick up a paintbrush/pencil/camera and spend some time appreciating the biodiversity on their doorstep using art.

Submissions included photography, pastel, oils,

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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

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

July – September 2021

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!



The club warmly welcomes the following new members:

Rashid Ali
Jerome Ali
Shamirah Hosein

Michael Oatham
Jesse Nanan
Frances White

Ruqayya Ghany
Debbie Ghany



Paper sculpture of a jacamar with clearwing butterfly on *Bois Canot*. By Raimundo Reyes

acrylics, pencil, watercolours, and even sculptures using paper and polymer clay. Birds were a common theme, given that everyone has an abundance of these in their garden – but as well as orioles, kiskadees and bananaquits, some captured more unusual garden visitors such as channel-billed toucans, jacamars and macaws.


Invertebrates were also represented – jumping spiders, leafhoppers, butterflies and crane flies.

Plants included a variety of house and garden ornamentals.

It was inspiring to hear from those who had found art an indispensable outlet during the pandemic, as a distraction or a relaxing activity and

had enjoyed finding the time to learn a new skill. Others commented on how lockdown had forced them to see the nature in their garden in a different way, noticing details and appreciating the beauty more.

Thanks to everyone who shared their artwork – we look forward to hosting more of these initiatives, even after lockdown, as it was a really nice way to encourage professional and amateur artists to share their work and inspire others.

**NB: Artist submissions continue on the following pages* 



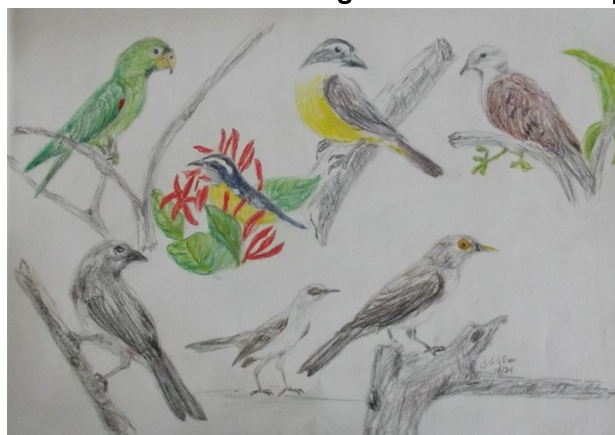
Hibiscus (coloured pencils, crayons & markers). *By Taramatee Kenneth*



My backyard (acrylic & pencil). *By Trina Halfhide*



Left-right: Toucan & bananaquits (acrylic) paintings. *By Maria Reyes*



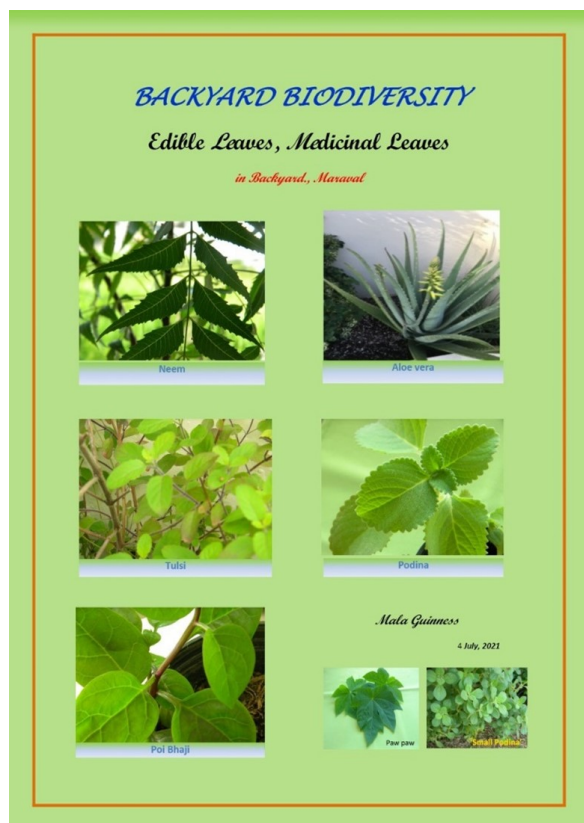
Sketches of backyard birds (graphite pencil). *By Dennis de la Rosa*



Monstera deliciosa (acrylic painting). by
Christenthia Lake



Backyard flowers. Photos by Nadine Ali-Hosein



Edible leaves and medicinal leaves (photography).
Photos by Mala Guinness



Crane fly (photo). Photo by Nandani Bridglal



Rampanalgas Falls (acrylic & pencil). *By Ian McGarry*



Jumping spider (coloured pencil).
By Alex Sansom



Acrylic painting of lilies. *Painting by Helina Chin Lee*



Garden leafhoppers (watercolour). *By Amy Deacon*



(Left) Birds seen in my backyard (acrylic)
yellow oriole and caterpillar (acrylic).
By Dennis de la Rosa



Left & middle: Macaws & Toucan (crayons); Photo by Angeli Parasramsingh ; (right) Macaw (coloured pencil). By Vanessa Rosie Moodoo



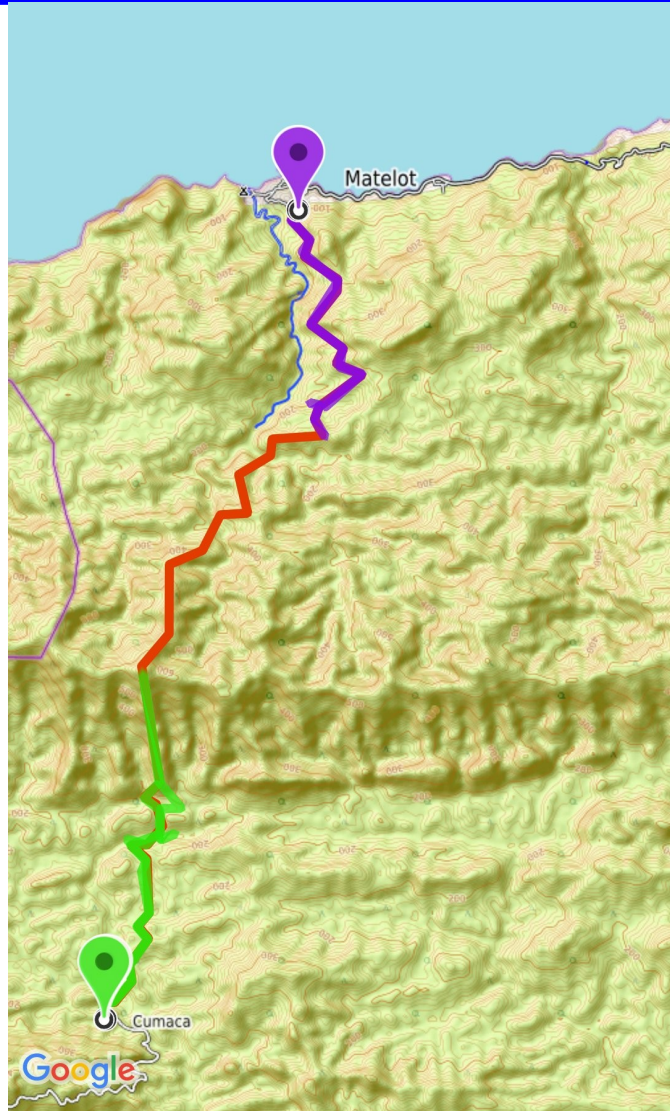
(Top row): Barn owl (acrylic & acrylic with polymer clay); Pied water tyrant (photo/polymer clay with acrylic) bottom right) (Bottom left:) Photography. By Shalini Dass





CUMACA TO MATELOT EXPEDITION

by Mario Russel



The trail taken from Cumaca to Matelot

We started our journey to Cumaca around 12.30 pm on Friday 27th August 2021. The group of six persons included Lawrence James of TTFNC, Chris Kelshal close friend of Glen Wilkes, Alvin (a hunter), two other hikers and myself Mario Russell. Along the way we were fortunate to give a ride to T&T's most highly ranked and respected bushman Hammer. It was a pleasure to meet him since he was the only one that knew the route to Matelot. He did not share much info but agreed with what we were about. Chris and I already had our destination planned out. In preparation, we

previously scouted the 1st leg to the top of Cumaca Ridge called by villagers Mt Blair and the last leg of the route from Matelot. The red path on the attached map, legs 3, 4 & 5 was not scouted. There were four mountains to climb and three rivers to cross, the details of the trail are as follows:

- Total hiking time 14 hrs.
- Day #1: 1 1/2hrs
- Day #2: 12 1/2hrs
- Total elevation 1280 metres
- Total distance 21 kilometres

Glenn Wilkes at the age of 78 was always raising the bar in remote places to explore. We plan to complete some of Glenn Wilkes's hiking expeditions that he had hoped to accomplish. To date, we have done several: Pico Escondido, the 2nd tallest peak; Cumaca to Hollis Waterfall; El Cerro Del Aripo from Aripo; Aripo Valley, its caves and the exploration of Dry River– its gorges and waterfalls in the Aripo region; Manantial Village in Monte Video and Pico from Lalaja. It took 1 1/2 hrs on the bumpy Cumaca Road to the starting point of the expedition at Ballhead Spring.

Leg 1 Platanal Road to camp in river 4.5 km; time 1



1/2 hrs

Description: from Baldhead Springs we walked 5km north on Platanal Road to an old hunters campsite situated next to the Petite Platanal

River. We would camp there for the night to awaken at 2 am. The Platanal Forest Rd is always muddy and slippery making it difficult to walk. On several occasions, we had to cross and walk in the river. Along the way, the only wildlife we saw was a small mapepire, which we ignored. At the end of the road in Plantanal, there was a temple situated at the top of the hill. Just before the temple, the river divided into two tributaries, we took the one on the left heading north-west to the hunters camp. The plan was to awaken early to start climbing the dreaded Hammer Ridge as we called it.

Leg 2 – From Camp to summit of Mt Blair Peak (650m); Distance 2.7km; estimated time: 3hrs

We left the hunters camp at 3 am and entered the river to the base of Mt Blair a.k.a. Hammer's Peak, heading at first north-east then due north for 2.7 km to the summit and the highest point on the trail. As we ascended in the darkness, climbing the steep slippery slopes with our camping backpacks was exhausting; so at times we had to stop. Our concerns were if there were trap guns. One of the guys, Alvin, a hunter, got his leg disfigured by one. I was surprised he could walk and was able to climb steep ridges. We reached the summit just around 6 am, getting the first glimpse of sunlight. In our minds, we thought we could finish this in a few hours and it would not take the 12hrs as planned. From this point, it was a descent to Matelot. At least we thought so.

Leg 3 – Mt Blair to Ananas river

We descended from Mt Blair/Hammers Peak to the Ananas river. On the Matelot side, there was no clear ridge going down to the river but countless mountains and valleys each branching off into another ridge. So if for a second you kept your eyes off your navigation equipment you could easily be on the wrong ridge. On the descent we were lucky to see the rare golden capuchin monkeys, they seemed to be curious to see us. Finally, we reached the Ananas River. It took almost 4hours from the summit of Mt Blair. As we crossed the river we could hear the water cascading over a steep escarpment and what appeared to be a large single drop waterfall. The terrain was very crag-like

so we could not venture there even to have a look.

Leg 4 – Ananas river to Petit Matelot River. Distance: 2.77km; Estimated Time: 3hrs

We ascended 128 metres from Ananas river to a knoll on the main eastern ridgeline for 430 metres, heading north-east to the east. At this knoll, we headed north along the ridgeline then north-east into the Petit Matelot river. From Ananas river, we climbed up steep ridges and down to the Petit Matelot river; it took at least 3 hours to accomplish this leg. The descent to Petite Matelot river was perilous because of its steep rock. There was a cozy little cascade coming from another tributary into the Petit Matelot river. Our route was carefully planned to cross over ridges and avoid the main Matelot river which could flood during the rainy season.



On the trail. Photos Courtesy Mario Russell



(Left): Chris Kelshal; (middle): Hammer & Mario; (right): Lawrence James. *Photos courtesy Mario Russel*

Leg 5 – Petit Matelot River to another tributary of Matelot River. Estimated time 2.5hrs

We ascended from Petit Matelot, crossing the river heading in a north-west direction up a minor spur to the main east-west ridgeline. Heading easterly along the ridgeline, we dropped into a small hanging valley then rose following a series of small ridgelines to join the head of the eastern valley. This leg would take 2hrs 30 mins. As we crossed the Petit Matelot river, we had to get on the next side. We all stared at the rugged terrain and wondered how we would get up on that ridge. Lawrence James made the first attempt and he was successful so we all followed. It began to rain heavily with thunder and lightning. We were thankful we were not in the river. The rain fell heavily and it hindered us from taking out our navigating equipment and phones. If we were not careful, the ridges would constantly divide causing us at times to go off course. Anxiety began to build up, as we looked for the connecting point where we had previously scouted. Eventually, we were on the right track at the top of the mountain and then down to the river.

Leg 6 Tributary to Santa Cruz road to exit in Matelot.

We finally got to the last tributary that we had to cross. The heavy rainfall caused the water to be brown. From this point, the trail went up a ridgeline and contoured the west and north joining the Santa Cruz Trail Road to Matelot. There was no time to waste since we had previously done a scout and it would take at least 2.5hrs to Matelot. We were hiking since 3 am and completed at 3.30 pm. Everyone in the group, although tired, was safe and in good condition. Some said it was their most difficult hike. I am grateful to the team for making a dream come true.



Bug Group Trip — 23 October, 2021



PRINCES TOWN AND THE MORUGA GRASSHOPPER

by Chris K. Starr



Shane Ballah and Chris Starr hit the road early for the drive south to observe the ongoing outbreak of the Moruga grasshopper, *Coscineuta virens*. This medium-sized grasshopper is found in the south-eastern quarter of Trinidad. Its native habitat is forest, but it has episodic outbreaks in which large numbers move out into farmland and this year even into residential areas. It counts as an agricultural pest, because its food plants – of which more than 70 are recorded, almost all of them dicots – include several crop plants.

On the advice of Joanne Sahadeo of the Ministry of Agriculture (whom we thank very much), we headed south-east from Princes Town to Ramdhanie Trace, off Moruga Road. The area round about is predominantly agricultural with residential buildings. The vegetation is secondary and heavily disturbed with large tracts of grass along the roadway and in nearby fields. Invasives and weedy species are abundant along the roadway and around residential holdings, along with pockets of secondary forest.

The grasshoppers are not only individually but collectively mobile, so Joanne had reported to us the day before where they were then to be found. We were not disappointed. Rakesh Bhukal was to meet us there, but even with liberal use of cell phones we failed to make the connection, and he is presumably still lost somewhere in South Trinidad. He was a good friend and will be missed.

We reached the site just about 07:30, which is when these diurnal insects become active for the day. It wasn't long before we saw the first several of them. As the sun rose, so did they, until we could see many at any given moment, both resting on vegetation and flying past at a height between about two and six metres. They all seemed to be flying inland at directions between west and north-west, away from the area where they had presumably hatched and matured. We saw none of the (flightless) immatures, which was not surprising. October-November is the peak season for the adults, while any that were still immature at that time must have been left behind in forested areas to

the south-east of where we were.

We examined 16 species of plants for grasshopper presence or activity. We found chew marks on only five species, of which only, razor grass (*Paspalum virgatum*) and teak (*Tectona grandis*) showing significant loss of foliage. The odd thing is that both of these have tough leaves, really just roughage, while many plants with supposedly juicier leaves seemed untouched or at most moderately chewed. We noted a few instances of grasshoppers actively chewing on leaves, although not stripping them down to the mid-vein in the manner of leafcutter ants.

We netted 100 adults, the sex of which is easily determined by the bright yellow terminalia of the abdomen. This sample came to 48 females and 52 males, a balanced sex-ratio. The males are only a little smaller than the females on average, so that any marked male bias in the sex ratio would have been surprising.

The grasshoppers were fairly abundant at this



Comparison of the female (top) and male (bottom)
Moruga Grasshopper

first site, but when we moved back to the Moruga Road and drove a few kilometres toward Princes Town we came to quite a different scene. There they were present at quite a different order of magnitude. We had seen none when we passed that way earlier, but about two hours later they were in the air and on the ground in what can only be called



Evidence of the swarm of Moruga Grasshoppers in the Princes Town area.

Photos by Chris K. Starr

swarms. We pulled into the driveway of a house, where we found them festooning a water tank, and within minutes they were all over our car. And their crushed bodies left a distinct trail on the road, and when we pulled off to delectate the scene they were soon all over our car. We had earlier been skeptical that this insect could arrive and eat in such numbers as to do real damage to crops, but this scene made believers of us. Their presence in such masses not only changes from day to day but can evidently be very localized, as just a few hundred metres in either direction they were not nearly so massed. The householder where we parked said that he had never before seen them in such numbers.

The Moruga grasshopper has mostly broken-green colouration, especially on the forewings, which cover the body except the head from above. It can therefore be regarded as fairly well camouflaged at rest, but it also has yellow, blue and even some slight reddish marks. The functional significance of these is not obvious. If it had been conspicuously coloured (aposematic colouration) we would expect this to serve as a warning to predators that it is distasteful.

Well, is it distasteful? We each tasted one female and one male, chewing it up fairly well before spitting it out. The result from this very limited sample size – our dedication to scientific data-

gathering goes only so far -- is that both sexes are mildly distasteful, at least to humans. Regrettably, we did not see kiskadees or other insect-eating birds about. Our working hypothesis is that they were already full and couldn't eat another grasshopper.



Reference

Popov, G.B., L.D. McComie & M.H. Launois-Luong 1994. The Moruga grasshopper in Trinidad, *Coscineuta virens* (Thunberg 1815). *Journal of Orthoptera Research* (2):49-60.



Shane and Chris take a quick (masked) selfie



Bug Group Trip -December 2021

ARENA AND THE LEAFCUTTER ANTS

by Chris K. Starr



The Arena Forest Reserve in Central Trinidad is one of the Bug Group's favourite field sites, and we were back there on Saturday 11th December. Arriving at our starting point by the old Forestry Building, we took advantage of the conveniently placed shelter for the opening briefing. Chris first drew attention to an unusually large colony of *Metapolybia cingulata* among the several nesting in the shelter. This small species of swarm-founding wasp (maribon) is far from pugnacious, as he demonstrated by provoking the colony without eliciting any stings. (Provocation of this wasp is not always with impunity, although the sting is not very painful.)

He then outlined the field trip's main focus: plants harvested by the leafcutter ant (bachac) *Atta cephalotes* and those not harvested by this rather spectacular social insect. Instead of collecting prey, plant matter or honeydew (excreted by sap-feeding insects) to feed the colony, members of the genus *Atta* cut leaves and carry them back to the nest, where they serve as a substrate for the fungi that

form the ants' food. Records of plants utilized in this way by *Atta spp.* show that these span a wide range of species from many families, yet there has been surprisingly little attention to which plant species are not harvested. Individual naturalists were assigned different plant species and tasked with noting how many showed signs of leafcutter cutting from among a large sample. Leafcutter ants are of course not the only insects that chew pieces out of living leaves, but they leave distinctive traces. Their cutting is very neat, unlike the ragged traces of caterpillars and grasshoppers, for example. And, while leafcutter bees (Megachilidae) leave comparably neat edges, they usually take just one or two pieces from a given leaf for use in forming nest cells.

Experienced botanists Shane, Dan and Lester served as resource persons in identifying plants and showing the rest of us their diagnostic features. In all, we got data from at least 50 individuals of nine plant species, of which four showed signs of harvesting from some individuals. In the course of




Damage to leaves not caused by *Atta cephalotes*.
Photo by Rakesh Bhukal.



Leaves with evidence of harvesting by *Atta cephalotes*.
Note also an unidentified melastome behind, untouched by the ants.

Photo by Rakesh Bhukal.

our walk, we encountered a flourishing colony of *Anochetus emarginatus*. This colourful ant is closely related to the familiar trap-jaw ants (tactacs) of the genus *Odontomachus*. It is, however, slimmer and nests on above-ground vegetation, such as on tree trunks or the crown-bases of palms. In Arena, it appears always to form the nest from accumulated old leaflets of the dominant tree, *Pentaclethra macroloba*. 

References

Hölldobler, B. & E.O. Wilson 2010. The Leafcutter Ants. New York: W.W. Norton 190 pp.

Schultz, T.R. 2021. Fungus-farming ants (Attini in part). Pp. 404-411 in: C.K. Starr (ed.), Encyclopedia of Social Insects. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.



Chris, Dan and Lester in consultation.
Photo by Natalie Boodram



Dan & Rakesh point out a large colony *Metapolybia cingulate*. Photo courtesy Chris K. Starr



(Top): At the entrance to the Arena Forest Reserve. Front and center: Rakesh Bhukal. Behind, L-R: Lester Doodnath, Dan Jaggernauth, Christopher Starr, Stephen Smith, Navita Moonan, Shane Ballah. Also on the trip: Natalie Boodram.



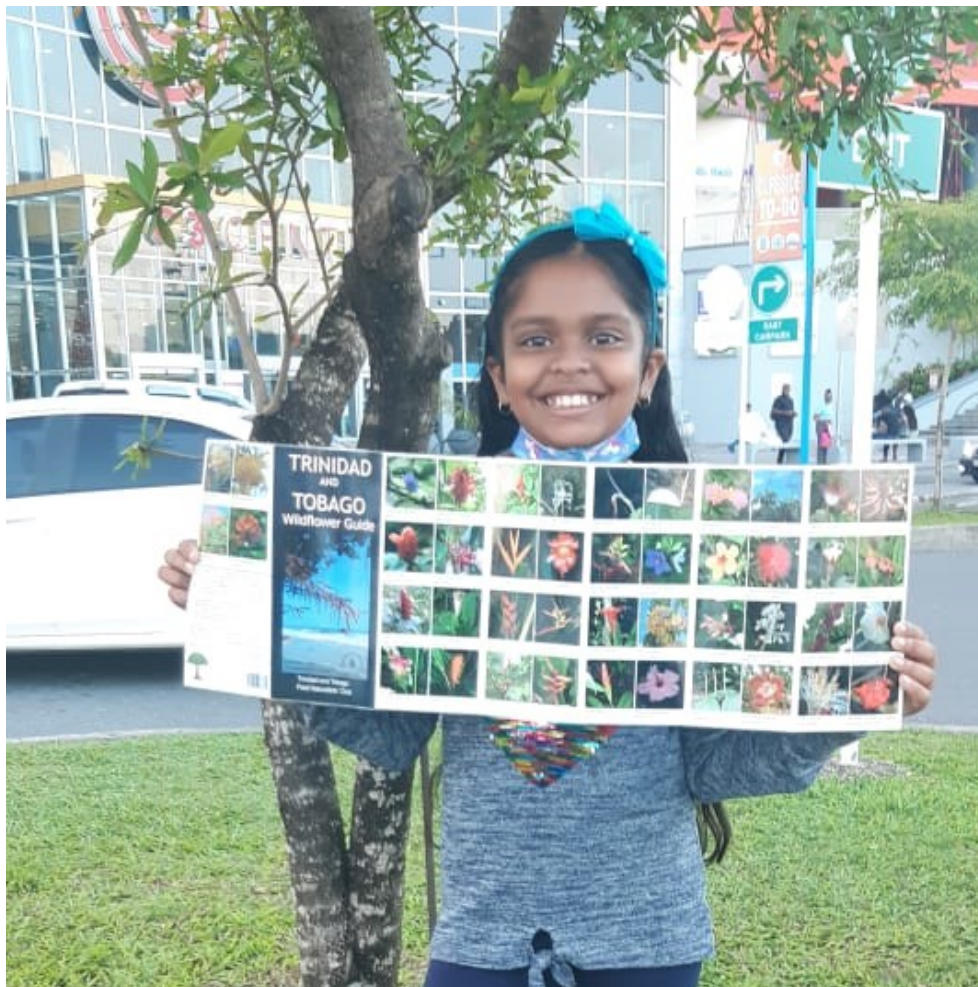
(Right): Typical nest closure of *Anochetus emarginatus* on a tree trunk. Photo by John Abbott.



August 2021

INAUGURAL STUDENT BIOBLITZ

by Stephanie Warren-Gittens



Sattvika Ragoonanan happily displays her prizes courtesy the Club, BirdsCaribbean and Environment for the Americas—she had the highest number of species uploaded for the Student Bioblitz 2021.

Photo courtesy Nicholas Mohammed

The Club held the very first Student Bioblitz during the last two weeks of August, as a perfect wrap up to the July-August vacation. Similar to the Backyard Bioblitz held in 2020, primary and secondary students were encouraged to take photos within their own backyards, outdoor walk or neighbourhood and upload their observations to iNaturalist. At the end of the two week period, 3,534 observations, 1,052 species were observed by 21 students. Prizes, courtesy the Club, BirdsCaribbean and Environment for the Americas, were awarded to the top three participants based on the number of species identified, as well as a prize for the most observations recorded. The

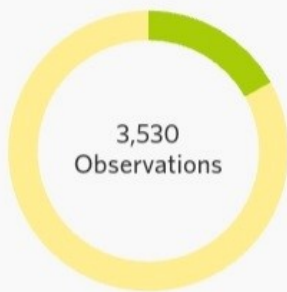
winners were as follows:

- First place went to Sattvika Ragoonanan, a 10year old student of Penal Government Primary School with 398 species identified
- Tying for 2nd place were Michael Roberts (13years old) of Hillview College and Dejean Mendoza (13years old) of Asa Boys College Charlieville both with 191 species.
- Jayda Ramjattan, an 11year old student of Grant Memorial Presbyterian School, was also awarded a prize based on enthusiasm and most number of observations recorded,

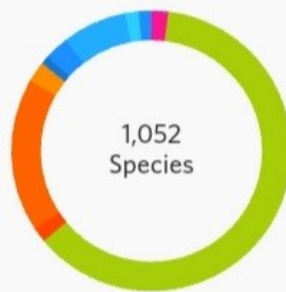
Congratulations to everyone who took part, and we hope to bring this project back in 2022.



Stats



● Research Grade
● Needs ID
● Casual



● Unknown
● Protozoans
● Fungi
● Plants
● Chromista
● Mollusks
● Insects
● Arachnids
● Ray-Finned F...
● Amphibians
● Reptiles
● Birds
● Mammals
● Other Animals



● Improving
● Supporting
● Leading
● Maverick

Student Bioblitz 2021 Stats Dashboard. *Courtesy iNaturalist*



Other Student Bioblitz 2021 prize winners, Dejean Mnedoza (left) and Jayda (right) collect their prize from TTFNC Management Committee member, Nicholas Mohammed. *Photos courtesy Nicholas Mohammed*



Naturalist-in Series
BRINGING THEM BACK LIVE
by Chris K. Starr



Review of:

Gerald Durrell 1954. *The Bafut Beagles*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis 231 pp.

Gerald Durrell 1954. *Three Singles to Adventure*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis 219 pp.

Gerald Durrell 1961. *The Whispering Land*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis 235 pp.

[52nd in a series on "naturalist-in" books; see <https://ckstarr.net/book-reviews/>]

Frank Buck (1884-1950) was an American zoo collector and showman who wrote about his expeditions and played himself in movies about them. His best known is titled '*Bring 'Em Back Alive*'. These were heavy on adventure, with the emphasis on big, spectacular animals. He had little interest in anything small enough for a person to lift unaided.

Gerald Durrell (1925-1995) wrote zoo-collecting accounts of quite a different kind. His books have plenty of adventure, but none of the swagger about encounters with big, dangerous beasts that make Frank Buck and Steve Irwin so ridiculous. His early life on Corfu is recounted in the immensely engaging '*My Family and Other Animals*'.

After several collecting expeditions, Durrell (rhymes with squirrel) established his own zoo on Jersey in the Channel Islands in 1959 www.durrell.org/Wildlife-park. He believed that zoos should serve as reserves and regenerators of endangered species through captive breeding, and the Jersey Zoo is credited with saving several species from extinction.

Attention here is to his accounts of three expeditions, the first two as an independent collector for British zoos and the third for his own Jersey Zoo.

In many places he found, he could get much of the common local fauna from people who had them as pets. This seems especially the case among the Amerindians of Central and South America where, in the midst of the daily struggle for existence, the



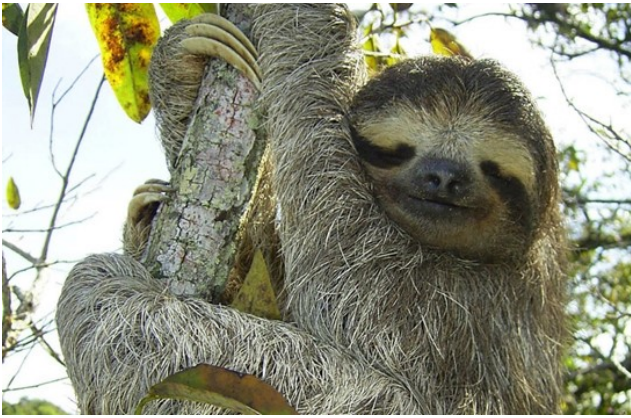
Gerald Durrell. Source: *Country Life*

people love to keep pets. This is consistent with Edward Wilson's biophilia hypothesis of a deep-rooted human love of other living things.

He would start by letting it be known that he was buying. The word quickly got around that the foreigners would pay real money for animals considered quite ordinary, so all Durrell had to do was build cages and wait for the people to bring the loot. That of course only went so far, and his accounts are largely taken up with the rigours or finding and safely capturing the rarer species that do not appear as pets.

Acquiring the animals was just the start of the undertaking. There were plenty of escapes, so that animals often had to be recaptured. It is seldom practical to give wild animals their natural diet, and getting them adapted to an artificial diet often presents a special challenge. Some animals refuse to eat and must be released, while the giant anteater, for example, went right for the mixture of milk, raw eggs and raw mince beef with a garnish of live termites. There were also the immense difficulties of keeping a collection of diverse animals in good health. Durrell had to be something of a veterinarian, as when a baby peccary (quenk) came down with pneumonia.

Over and over in his accounts, we come to loving descriptions of particular animals. Although he was not a researcher, Durrell was an instinctive naturalist and eco-tourist, always eager to meet in their habitats wild animals that he had known only



Three-toed sloth. Source: Wikipedia

from books. As an example, in Guyana he compared the diet, locomotion and other habits of the two-toed and three-toed sloths.

Gerald Durrell – like his older brother Lawrence -- was a natural story teller, and each chapter is almost self-contained. He treated with uncondescending humour the people he met, with the exception of mean-spirited types, who received his scorn. Next to wild animals, there was nothing Durrell loved so much as a character. In his liberal use of humour, Durrell is more like a travel writer than a nature writer, although without the vapidness that makes most travel writing so atrocious. (One wonders how they get away with treating their readers with such contempt.)

He was fond of similes, and when you see one coming it almost always means he is about to say something droll. There were elephant seals "all lying about displaying the animation of a group of opium smokers", "an ancient woman dressed in black, which made her look like a somewhat dilapidated cockroach", while the orange-rumped agouti is "a large rodent with dark eyes, slender legs and the disposition of a racehorse suffering from an acute nervous breakdown." Another animal has "the expression of an elderly virgin who, after years of looking under the bed, has at last found a man under there", and a pygmy owl is described "with round yellow eyes that glared at me with all the silent indignation of a vicar who, in the middle of the service, has discovered that the organist is drunk." A pair of toads "waddled out onto the floor with all the indignation and dignity of a couple of Lord Mayors who had been accidentally locked in a public lavatory." And there is the "superbly scaly lizard, huffing and puffing with the astonishment

grading into rage of a Frenchman learning that the English consider their own cheese not only adequate but actually superior." Okay, I made up that one last, but Durrell could just as well have written it.

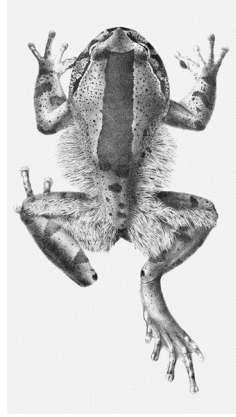
Durrell returned to Cameroon in 1949 for the expedition recounted in *'The Bafut Beagles'*, probably his most popular zoo-collecting book. His crew began work at the village of Mamfe, the site of his earlier expedition where the Cross River comes down from the mountain, and Durrell opens with a lyrical description of the locality. They also collected in the savanna highlands inland in habitats very different from the humid lowland forests.

However, the core of the book is about Bafut in the highlands at 6°05'N 10°08'E. At that time the traditional political structure still prevailed, headed by the Fon of Bafut. Achirimbi II, the 10th Fon, was in office from 1932 to his death in 1968. He was described by a district officer in Mamfe as "the most delightful old rogue" and a great drinker. The Fon was the only authority of importance, so that his good will was critically important. When Durrell's party reached Bafut, the Fon approached with his entourage (including his many wives) in a thoroughly royal manner. It was a good omen. The Fon proved to be a wonderful host. One evening while they were drinking together, he sent for a music band comprising about 20 of his wives to play for them. They arrived with an amazing set of instruments, giving rise to a great variety of sounds and much dancing.

There was a major ceremony 10 days after Durrell's arrival, and the Fon took the opportunity to enlist his people's aid. He also assigned four hunters to assist Durrell, who was able to get to work right away. These hunters and their pack of pot hounds came to be known as the Bafut Beagles, a title of which they were very proud. Their basic method was to choose a patch of savanna, spread their nets on one side, and then walk through with their dogs, driving animals toward the nets.

Especially engaging is Chapter 5, an account of a successful night hunt for the extraordinary hairy frog, *Trichobatrachus robustus*, whose very existence had been in doubt until then. *'Three Singles to Adventure'* is about an expedition to Guyana in 1950. Arriving in Georgetown, they had to select a base area. They looked over a map full

of alluring names and then, following a recommendation, they settled on the small village of Adventure at 7°05'N 58°25'W near the mouth of the Essiquibo River. There was no way Durrell was going to resist a place with that name. He went to the shipping office the next day, "Three singles to



(left) Poison-arrow frog. Source: US Fish & Wildlife Service; (right): Hairy frog. Source Wikipedia

Adventure, please."

As usual, the first order of business on arrival was to consult with hunters and other local people about what animals they wanted. High on their list were the giant otter, poison-arrow frogs, Suriname toad, capybara, Brazilian porcupine and curassow. He was also eager to get some common opossums (manicous), which flabbergasted the local people. The very idea that the English would pay good money for such despised vermin. Durrell gives a loving description of the creature's ugliness, notes its gross eating habits and concluded that there was nothing admirable about it. Or, as he expressed it, it was "an evil-looking, moaning creature with depraved tastes and not even the compensation of an attractive personal appearance."

There was a large lake nearby with an Amerindian village on the shore. Durrell went to the local school to tell the pupils which animals they sought. That yielded plenty of agoutis, lappes and monkeys. On the way back they had a magnificent view of a group of red howler monkeys in the glow of the setting sun.

From Adventure, they went to the Rupununi savanna in southern Guyana in search of animals not found in the forest areas to the north. Among his main goals was the giant anteater. He ranged widely on horseback with a guide, with many attempts to secure one with lassoes.

A zoo in England very much wanted a large caiman, and Durrell's crew was able to secure one at great effort and much danger. This was at a time when zoos were more like circuses than they are today. In modern times, if he had received such a ridiculous request, Durrell would have pointed out that a) at a fraction of the cost they could get a young animal, which would b) live much longer than the great big beast.

The final destination in Guyana was near Charity on the bank of the Pomeroon River. This is not very far from Adventure, but it is well inland in an area of streams, so that travel was mostly by canoe. Durrell estimated that they spent at least half of their working time afloat. This included a great deal of night paddling in these silent vessels in search of aquatic and amphibious creatures that were hidden or unapproachable in daytime. They met a great many caimans.

At the end there was a long ship journey across the Atlantic to Liverpool with about 500 animals in 150 cages, all requiring daily care.

The expedition described in *'The Whispering Land'* occupied about eight months of 1958 in Chubut and Santa Cruz provinces of Patagonia. Charles Darwin spent about two years of his round-the-world voyage in Argentina, and each chapter opens with a quotation from Darwin's *'The Voyage of the Beagle'*.

The expedition started with the maddening business of dealing with Customs bureaucracy, which took three weeks to get the equipment released. Then there was the long drive south from Buenos Aires to Patagonia. I have made that trip by bus and share Durrell's fascination with the marked changes in biome as one passes from the pampa into Patagonia. "By the simple action of crossing a river we entered a different world." Instead of the pampa, they were in "an arid waste stretching away as far as the eye could see ... a uniform pelt of grey-green scrub." What was especially notable was the silence, the absence of sound of birds or insects, just "the whispering of the wind through the thorn scrub". The expedition's core area was the 3600-km² Valdés Peninsula, which reaches out into the Atlantic right at the northern edge of Patagonia.

Among the notable creatures on the coast is the magellanic penguin, the northernmost penguin on the Atlantic side of South America. It has large breeding colonies toward the northern end of



Magellanic penguins at their nesting burrows.

Patagonia, where it nests in burrows scattered over the breeding area. Durrell's group lived among a penguin colony for three weeks, observing their daily pattern of movement between burrows on land and their foraging area in the sea. There is a vivid description of adults returning to the burrows full of fish to regurgitate to their chicks. Each adult had to run the gauntlet of hundreds of other chicks who attempted by main force to get them to give up their cargo. And on reaching its own burrow, an adult would be assaulted in similar fashion by its own chicks. I once watched a pair of chicks – almost adult size, but still with their baby plumage – vigorously harassing their father for food in this fashion.

One of the four species of New World camels, the guanaco, lives in small herds in Patagonia. Watched by a guanaco as he was still lying in camp one early morning, Durrell remarked that "He wore the supercilious expression of his race, the faint aristocratic sneer, as if he knew that I had slept in my clothes for the past three nights."

Coming over a rise one day, they suddenly saw a huge breeding colony of fur seals on the coast below. "As we reached this vantage point the noise of the animals smote us, roar, bleat, gurgle and



Guanaco. Source: *Wikimedia Commons*


cough, a constant undulation of sound, like the boiling of an enormous cauldron of porridge."

Given the wealth of wildlife on the peninsula, Durrell wished it could all be made a wildlife sanctuary, noting that with roads and other infrastructure it could become a valuable tourist attraction. He got his wish, although not quite in his lifetime. In 1999 it was declared a nature reserve and is today a UNESCO World Heritage Centre. At least in that part of Patagonia, in my experience, virtually all tourism is ecotourism, and the well managed Valdés Peninsula is an important source of revenue for the province.

During a trip into the mountains Durrell was eager to meet and collect vampire bats, at that time not found in any European zoo. He sat and watched the horses at night, waiting for the bats to arrive. But then he fell asleep and awoke to find bites on the horses' necks. The next night he used himself as bait, leaving one of his feet exposed --he was curious to know if the bite was painless as reputed - - and made an effort to stay awake and keep an eye on the horses. In the morning he was surprised to find that some of the horses had been bitten, but he had not.



Vampire bat. Source: *Wikimedia Commons*.

The book has a moving passage about examining a friend's collection of stone artefacts from the area's long-extinguished Amerindians. He felt their ghostly presence in an area where their arrowheads and other relics were still encountered. 

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Your
Ideas and Observations
A Quarterly Update

HELPING OUT A SUCRIER

by Peter Reis

This story begins with my observations of bits and pieces of dry material on the floor area below the circular fluorescent lamp in my porch. One day, soon after this watching, I saw a sucrier flitting in the porch. There and then I made the connection: The bird was trying to build a nest. Well, I wanted to help out.

Taking an empty cereal box I happened to have at the time, I reshaped it into a birdhouse, cutting a small hole about two inches in diameter to serve as the entrance, and installing a small piece of junk as a perch. Then, using an old bracket and some epoxy, I attached the birdhouse at the top of a wooden post in the porch. This home-made nest box, which was constructed in less than an hour, is at least four years old now – well before the emergence of COVID-19.

On the very day of setting up the nest box, at least one sucrier flew into it. I am not a birdwatcher, as such. However, over the past years, as I sit in the porch, drinking a cup of coffee or doing some work there, I made some observations, for example, many flights in and out of the nest box; sucrier perched at the entrance of the nest box apparently feeding young ones inside it; the apparent first flight of a young sucrier (sugar bird, bananaquit, *Coereba*



Birdhouse and circular fluorescent lamp in porch. *By Peter Reis*

flaveola) with an adult bird nearby. The last time I saw a sucrier fly into the birdhouse was about three or four days ago.

Other types of birds, for example, kiskadee, mocking bird, humming bird, blue jean, palm tanager etc...visit the porch. However, it's only the sucrier that has used the birdhouse.



Your
Ideas and Observations
A Quarterly Update

LIFE IN A DEAD ZONE

by Chris K. Starr

One day in my 3rd-floor hotel room in Cotonou, Benin, I awoke at dawn to what sounded like the mating call of our familiar crapaud, *Rhinella marina*. As far as I knew, this neotropical toad hadn't been introduced into West Africa, but it did sound like it, so I got up and went to the balcony for a look. Scanning the nearby part of the city below, of course I didn't see any crapauds. In fact I didn't see animal life of any kind.

And then it struck me that I had seen almost none in the days I had been in Cotonou. No cats, no dogs -- I did see two dogs later -- hardly any lizards and no other herptiles, the occasional pied crow and another wild bird in sparse numbers, very

few of the lovely little compact goats they have in West Africa, virtually no spiders, and not even any social insects except the occasional colony of crazy ants. Rather remarkably, I didn't see honey bees or any other kinds of bees, although in my wanderings I had come upon flowering trees, some with seed pods, so someone must have been pollinating. In my room at night there weren't even mosquitoes, although there was plenty of standing water in the area.

Much of the city is reasonably well vegetated, and it isn't all grasses, so why weren't there plenty of bugs to feed at the flowers and on the leaves, and plenty of lizards running about snarling down the

bugs and a variety of birds eating the lizards and seeds?

Beyond that, standing on the balcony and watching Cotonou wake up for the day, it occurred to me that I had never seen much in the way of wildlife in any city of coastal-zone West Africa. This contrasts with what one finds in comparable cities in the tropics of Asia or the New World.

So, why are west-African cities such a dead

zone? The climate is certainly conducive to abundant animal life, and I am not aware that the soil, water and air are especially polluted. It is not as if the people were hunting wild vertebrates to extinction. It may be that Africa is notably less biodiverse to begin with than the other tropical regions, together with a severe trashing of much of the environment, but I find this explanation weak.

I leave this question to you as a puzzle. 

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



THE SCIENTIFIC ASSOCIATION OF TRINIDAD

by Hans Boos (posthumous)



Editor's note: This article was written in November 2016

To fully understand and appreciate the history of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club, the history of its progenitor has to be considered—**The Scientific Association of Trinidad**. The Scientific Association of Trinidad published its first compilation of papers titled “The Transactions of the Scientific Association of Trinidad 1863-1866.” These consisted of 91 pages. Twelve papers by the following authors, and on the following subjects, were printed:

- i. W. Mitchener, of 23 Red Lion Street, Holborn, London, printed these “Transactions.”
- ii. Anderson, (Alex. W.) A paper on the Cemetery of Lapeyrouse. p. 1-10.
- iii. Caird, (Henry Wm., M.A.) On Earthquakes. p. 13-18.
- iv. Guppy, (R. J. Lechmere,) On the occurrence of foraminifers in the Tertiary Beds at San Fernando, Trinidad. p. 11-12.
- v. On Acclimatization. p. 19-20.
- vi. On Later Tertiary Deposits at Matura, on the East Coast of Trinidad. p. 33-44.
- vii. Annual Report to the Scientific Association for the year 1864. p. 45-52.
- viii. Guppy, (Henry F.J., F.A.S.L.) Notes on the Consumption of Spirituous Liquors in Trinidad. p. 81-87.
- ix. Annual Report to the Scientific Association for

the year 1865. p. 88-91

- x. Hill, (The Hon. Richard.). On the Preservation and Preparation of Meats and Meal; and on the Jamaican Kokkenmoddings. p. 21-24. (In a letter read to the S. A. T. 8th Sept. 1864.)
- xi. Law, (Thomas.) Suggestions how to Establish and Cultivate an Estate of One Square Mile of Land or 640 Acres of Cocoa. p. 65-80.
- xii. Leotaud, (Antoine, M.D.) Du Chocolat. p. 25-32.
- xii. Mitchell, (The Hon. H., Ph.D.) On the Megascicator of Mr. H. Warner. p. 53-64.

In the Annual Report for the year 1864, R. J. Lechmere Guppy states that the Scientific Association of Trinidad was founded in January of 1863.

He goes on to state that “The principal object of our Association is, by uniting, to enable the members to co-operate in promoting original research, and to make additions to the total sum of knowledge;” “It rather aims to copy, at an humble distance, and according to its means, the Scientific Societies of Europe, such as the Geological Society, the Linnean Society, &c.&c.”

It would appear that one of the rules established for the Association limited the number of their membership in some way, for Guppy writes on p. 51 in the same Annual report, “It is obvious from the nature of its [The Scientific Association] constitution and objects that the Association cannot canvass for additions to its number.”

The first record of an official meeting was at Mr.

Robert Guppy's house in San Fernando on January 8th 1866. R. J. Lechmere Guppy was away in London and the seven members included his father Robert Guppy, and his brother Henry Francis Jeune Guppy. The others were the President, Mr. Horace Deighton, Dr. Kirkman Findlay, Mr. Henry William Caird, Mr. Henry Prestoe and Dr. William Casper Kelaart.

By 1866 the Association had decided to rename the "Transactions," and called them "Proceedings" wherein were to be published the records of the meetings of the Association and to publish scientific papers generated by the members and others who would submit them for consideration and publication. Part I was published in December of 1866.

The meeting of February 13th 1866 was recorded as being held at Mr. Henry Guppy's house in Laventille(?) and a donation of a paper by R. J. Lechmere Guppy was announced. It was "On the Terrestrial and Fluvial Mollusca of Trinidad" (see Bibliography).

On Tuesday March 13th 1866 the Association met again, this time at the President, Mr. Horace Deighton's house and some examples of the rocks from the railway cutting that was being made to extend the tramway from the Embarcadere to the dock at San Fernando were displayed; Robert Guppy was supervising this major work.

This cutting through of a considerable hill to facilitate the passage of the rails for the tramway, was causing quite a stir, for at the next meeting of the Association, on Monday April 9th 1866, held at "La Falaise", Mr. Guppy's house in San Fernando, it was agreed that the members should make a special visit to examine what was referred to as "the great cutting."

This visit was apparently made and was fully discussed at the meeting the next month when the members met on Tuesday May 22nd 1866 at the President's house.

The members hosted the meetings in their houses so as to spread the responsibility around, for the next meeting was held in Edward Street at Mr. Caird's house, on June 12th 1866. The next carded meeting on Tuesday July 18th 1866 at Mr. H. Guppy's house in Laventille Circular, had to be aborted due to poor attendance of the members who did not tally to over a dozen at that time.

Because of this circumstance there must have

been some sort of drive to recruit a few more members, for at the very next meeting, held at Mr. Caird's house on Tuesday, August 7th 1866, four "gentlemen" were elected. At this meeting Antoine Leotard's recently published book "Oiseau de L'isle de Trinidad" was noted, and congratulations were to be sent to the author who was ailing, and hopes were expressed for his recovery from a serious illness.

The next meeting was held at Mr. Lechmere Guppy's house on St. Ann Road on Tuesday, September 11th 1866 where the notice of the resignation from the Association of Mr. Thomas Law was announced.

Alexander William Anderson's paper on "Sugar Making in the West Indies" was received and the Hon. Henry Mitchell's paper "On the Use of Sulphites in Medicine" was read. This paper was published in the Proceedings at pages 5-9.

Also published was a paper by R. J. Lechmere Guppy, cataloguing the Land and freshwater molluscs of Trinidad (see Bibliography). In this paper he referred to two earlier papers he had published in the Annals and Magazine of Natural History, wherein he had described several new species of molluscs (see list below.)

On September 26th 1866 there was an earthquake felt in Port of Spain and R.J. Lechmere Guppy presented a short note on the occurrence in the next meeting held at Mr. Deighton's house in the Queen's Collegiate School on October 9th 1866. This was the annual meeting and Dr Mitchell was elected the new President and Henry Guppy the Secretary.

In 1866 little was known of the causes of earthquakes as is exemplified by Guppy's comments where he tried to describe the direction from which the wave of the shock emanated, and from the opinions expressed in the article by Henry William Caird, "On Earthquakes" published in the Transactions of the Scientific Association 1863-1866, pages 13-18.

The knowledge of plate tectonics was quite a number of years in the future. The theory of plate tectonics was put forward in 1915 by Alfred Wegener in his book "The Origin of Continents and Oceans," but his conclusions were not accepted for several decades afterwards,

One of the new members' houses was the venue

for the next meeting. A Mr. John Persse Lambert had been elected in August. His address is given as Edward Street and it seems strange that no street number was given. Perhaps the houses were not numbered at that date. A paper on Manjack in Barbados, by a Corresponding member, the Hon. Francis Goding was read.

New member, Mr. Octavius Harley's house on Queen's Park was the venue for the next meeting on December 11th 1866. At this meeting another new member was elected- Doctor Louis Alexander Le Roy, Esquire, M.D. Ph.D., and the award of the Gold Medal of the Societe Medico-pratique of Paris to Dr. Leotaud was announced for his treatise on the Birds of Trinidad. The resolution was passed that the Governor of the island at that time, The Hon. Mr. Gordon, be asked to become an Honorary Member of the Association.

It was also resolved at this meeting that as complete Bibliography as possible of the "Literature of every kind relating to the Island of Trinidad," should be compiled. R. J. Lechmere Guppy published the first installment of this Bibliography, listing about sixty-two works, including several of his own published papers (see Bibliography).

Part II of the Proceedings was published in June of 1867. The first meeting of that year was held at Dr. Kelaart's residence Colombo House (on Pointe a Pierre Road) in San Fernando on January 4th 1867.

Three papers by R. J. Lechmere Guppy were presented; "On the Tertiary Molluscs of Jamaica;" "On Tertiary Brachiopoda from Trinidad;" and "On Tertiary Echinoderms from the West Indies." Also presented was "On the Relations of the Tertiary Formations of the West Indies," by Guppy with a "Note on a new species of *Ramina*," by Henry Woodward.

By the time the next meeting was held, on Tuesday February 12th 1867, chaired by the President Henry Stuart Mitchell, M.D, one of their most revered members, Dr. Antoine Leotaud, had died on the 23rd of the previous month. The Obituary notice of his passing was read, which included a brief history of his life.

As this was an Annual Meeting, the annual report by the Secretary, Henry F. J. Guppy, was read and he lamented the paucity of papers presented over the past year.

However the Governor, The Hon. Mr. Gordon,


who had previously been invited to be an Honorary Member, attended the meeting and his presence must have given the members a considerable lift to have such an important personage in their midst.

The following meeting held on Tuesday 12th March 1867, was chaired by the Hon. Louis Antoine Aime de Verteuil, who took the opportunity to read his contribution to the Association. It was a paper entitled "Hygienic Considerations on Port-of-Spain,," with observations on many aspects of the growing city and recommendations that could be relevant even today. Statistics of births and deaths and the conditions on the drainage and roads are all handled in this document that runs to approximately thirty pages in the Proceedings at pages 104 to 134.

For the meeting on Tuesday 9th of April 1867, chaired by Alexander William Anderson, R.J. Lechmere Guppy continued to read his papers on the molluscs of Trinidad, by presenting a paper, "Additions to the Catalogue of the Land and Freshwater Molluscs of Trinidad." Herein he lists at least two new species, which he had described and published elsewhere (see list below)

His writing, ever prolific, R. J. Lechmere was at it again and had published in the Proceedings record for the meeting on Tuesday 14th May 1867, (which was chaired by Mr. Anderson again), a "Note on Petroleum and Naphtha." In this note he distinguishes between "Pitch Oil" and "Petroleum Oil" and "Kerosene Oil."

The last meeting, held in the first half of 1867, on Tuesday 11th June was chaired by Dr. Mitchell and featured a paper by himself on the use of Sulphites in Medicine (sic).

There were no more publications of the Proceedings in the years following and some of the membership of the Scientific Association seem to have morphed into the Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club in the subsequent years.. 

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List of species described by R. J. Lechmere Guppy.

- *Vaginulus Sloanei* Guppy (= *Veronicella laevis* Férussac)
- *Bulimulus multifasciatus* var, *imperfectus*

Guppy.

- *Bulimus aureolus* Guppy
- *Plekocheilus auris-sciuri* Guppy
- *Vertigo Eyriesi* Guppy (= *Vertigo Eyressi* Drouët)
- *Simpulopsis corrugatus* Guppy
- *Conulus vacans* Guppy
- *Cyclotus trinitensis* Guppy (= *Cyclotus translucidus* Sowerby)
- *Cyclotus rugatus* Guppy
- *Helicina nemoralis* Guppy
- *Helicina barbata* Guppy
- *Adamsiella aripensis* Guppy
- *Paludestrina spiralis* Guppy
- *Anodon Leotaudi* Guppy
- *Helecina (Perenna) lamellosa* Guppy

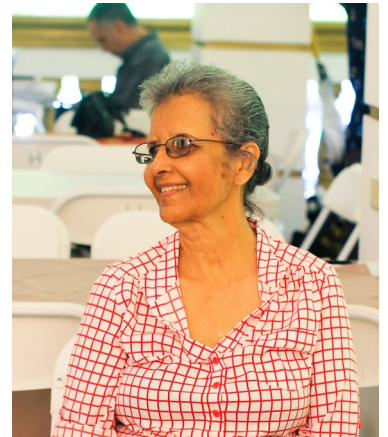


December 2019

CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON FLASHBACK

Photos by Stephanie Warren-Gittens





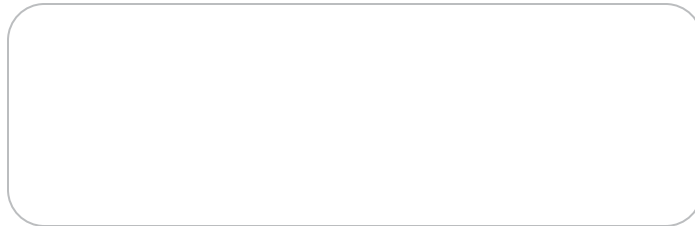
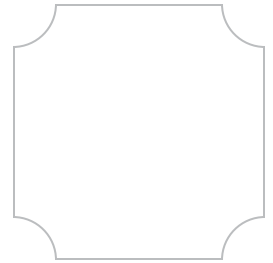
MANAGEMENT NOTICES

Monthly club meetings continue virtually via Zoom until further notice due to the current COVID-19 regulations and restrictions

Official Club trips were also been put on hold during the period July– September 2021, due to COVID-19 regulations and restrictions, until further notice

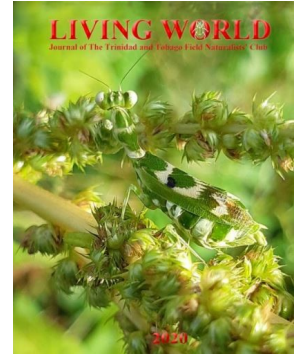
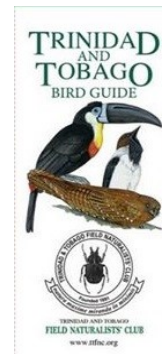
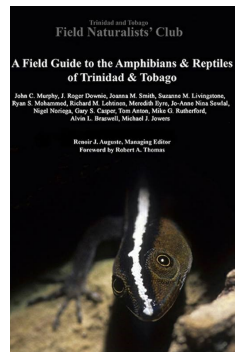
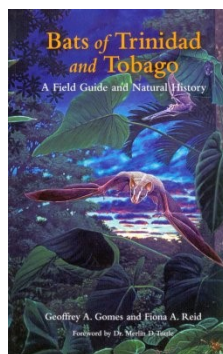
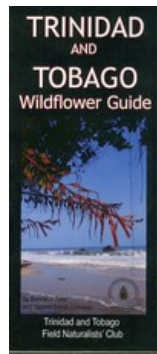
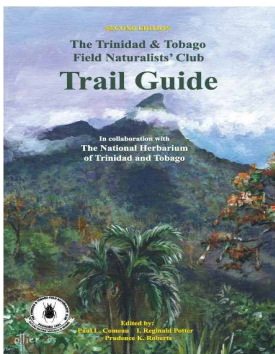
The Club celebrated its **130th anniversary** this year!

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); 2020 Living World Journal (\$60); TTFNC Bird Guide (\$50).

MISCELLANEOUS

Your 2022 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!



Do you have an article to submit for the next QB?

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 'QB2022' in the email subject label.