THE FIELD NATURALIST

Quarterly Bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

January—March 2024 **Issue No: 1/2024**

General Club Trip, 30th April 2023

CHIMBORAZO HILL/LA JOSEFITA, Brasso Seco Extension Trace, Gran Couva

By Chrisalene Dedier, Dan Jaggernauth, Kris Sookdeo

(Left): Bamboo Path; (Right): Green Tree Frog

All photos by Chrisalene Dedier

Assembly to Chimborazo occurred at 7 am in front of Preysal Secondary School. Twelve persons made the trip, which was 2 hours in duration taken at a moderate pace.

When one googles the name "Chimborazo," the most popular information which pops up is Chimborazo Mountain which is a popular, inactive, stratovolcano in Ecuador. However, for the record, there is also Chimborazo/La Josefita, which is a hill located in Trinidad and Tobago with an elevation of approximately 156 metres and can be accessed via the Brasso Seco Extension Trace, Gran Couva.

On the commencement of our walk along the Brasso Seco Extension Trace, we were fortunate to see the yellow oriole (*Icterus nigrogularis),* also known as small cornbird or golden oriole, constructing its nest. Whilst another yellow oriole was feeding on the fruit of the rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*).

In the not too far distance, songs of the channel billed toucan filled the air.

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Inside This Issue

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

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July – September 2023

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

The club warmly welcomes the following new members

Maria Noelle Riley **Kalm Toussaint** **Ibrahim Abdullah** **Mark Joseph** **Niaomi Reyes**

(Continued from page 1)

The heavy presence of bois flo was an indication of a secondary forest.

Midway through the trail, the sweet aroma of the pomerac fruit and a grafted mango permeated the air.

Other plants/trees observed along the trail were the famous sohari leaf (*Calathea lutea*), synonymous with Divali/Hindu Prayers where it is used in place of a plate to serve food.

Shadon beni is a popular herb seasoning for Trini foods. *Heliconia Bihai* is also known as the balisier. Royal palm is also known as cabbage palm. *Guazuma ulmifolia* is also known as bois d'ome—the fruit edible, and when placed in water you get a sweet taste similar to that of molasses. Poui trees–the third flowering of poui is an indication that it will be raining soon. Resurrection fern (*Polypodium polypoidoes)* dries up when there is a lack of water during the dry season and resurrects when the rain falls in the rainy season. *Repsalis baccifera* cactus also known as old man's beard. Vervain (*Verbena*) attracts hummingbirds; it improves lactation in breast-feeding women. Rabbit meat, also known as railway daisy, attracts lots of butterflies and bees. Bamboo (*Bambusa vulgaris*) is the largest and fastest growing grass in the world. It is a versatile grass, which can be used in the construction, furniture and handicraft industries. Paw-paw (*Carica papaya*) was also present. There was evidence of recent fires in a number of the bamboo patches.

Fern

Old Man's Beard Fern

We spotted a few termite (*Isoptera*) nests in trees and a lineated woodpecker on a bois cano tree.

Other birds heard along the trail were the banana quit, house wren and tinamou. **Studies indicate that the cocrico is only found in Tobago but it was spotted in the area of the Chimborazo trail.**

Highlights of the trail

About 20 minutes along the trail on the left-

(Top left): Bamboo shoots ; (Top Right): Yellow Flycatcher and Tattoo Jep Nest; (Bottom left): Bird Nest and Jep Nest; (Bottom right): On the descent from Chimborazo

hand side, there is a lookout point with a spectacular view of Flanagin Town and Brasso Venado.

Among the other animals seen on the trail were the following:

- Monkey frog/green tree frog (*Phillomedusa trinitatis*) - a leaf-nesting frog, which lays its eggs between two leaves over a water source.
- Butterflies - postman, white tail morpho, tiger, blue emperor.
- Head shell of a manicou crab—most likely eaten by a hawk.

We spotted a yellow-breasted bird that had constructed its nest next to the jep tattoo (*Synoeca Surinama*). The insects served as both protectors of the bird's young from predators and a source of food. We also saw another bird's nest below a *Polybia* sp. wasp nest.

At the peak we saw a large *Ficus* sp., and enjoyed a view of Tamana Peak and an old TSTT antenna.

Bird Trip Report, 15 January 2023

MANZANILLA TO KERNAHAN

By Matt Kelly

Front Row (sitting) from left to right: Chrisalene Dedier, Brian D'Abreau, Brandon Woo, Brian Woo Upper Row (standing) from left to right: Aaron Rampersad, Christianne Zakour, Xaria Ragbir, Xavier Ragbir, Vishal Ramgersammy, Garth Ragbir, Leandra Dass-Ragbir, Jerome Foster, Elizabeth Seebaran, Natasha Ramgolam, Richard Lakhan, Chandra Heetal, Chantal Leotaud, Shane Manchouck, Selwyn Gomes, Matt Kelly.

Photo by Matt Kelly

We all had to get up super early for this trip! The first meeting point was at 4:20 a.m. at Massy Stores Super Center at Tacarigua. All 20 participants arrived on time at 6:00 a.m. at Kernahan Trace. I was designated as the "Group Leader."

Kernahan Village is located in Trinidad's Southeast, off the Manzanilla-Mayaro Road. It borders to the North along the Nariva Swamp and the Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary, and to the East by the Atlantic Ocean. The whole area is primarily composed of whitish sand, with large marshes common, and occasional islands of palms or hardwood trees. The chances are very high that your next watermelon will come from here, as this is the main area of the country for melons. This is by no means a posh area, and people here live very near to the earth. On our way out, we saw vendors selling big river conchs, watermelons, cantaloupes, coconuts, coconut water, and some other produce along the highway. We missed the opportunity to visit Ismael Angelo's bookshop, "The Book Junkie", at the corner of Kernahan Trace, as it was at the time closed.

Jerome Foster and Brian D'Abreau led the way. We birded the road and canals on Kernahan Village Road, past the fire tower, and walked up to the melon fields. Some of our highlights were: 3 savannah hawks, a ringed kingfisher, and 2 white-tailed, gold throated hummingbirds. Later we came upon a perched aplomado falcon, surveying a large melon patch, who tolerated us for quite a few minutes. We also saw 6 blue and gold macaws fly along the horizon. We tallied 44 species here, while birding for about 3 hours, 15 minutes.

I found a dead and flattened common coral

Top left: Common Black Hawk *Photo by Matt Kelly* **Top Right: American Pygmy Kingfisher** *Photo by Brandon Woo*
Bottom left: Aplomado Falcon *Photo by Richard Lakhan* **Bottom right: Silvered Antbird Photo** *by Richard Lakhan*
Bottom middle: Osprey *Photo by Brandon Woo*

snake (*Micrurus circinalis*) right on the Kernahan Village main road, near some houses where we were walking. Apparently, no one seemed concerned about it. Chrisalene Dedier mentioned that she came here for a night trip with the Herp Group, and they saw one. They must be common here.

I asked a local man if he had ever seen the "stork" (jabiru stork, *Jabiru mycteria*), and if he knew if there were any about "Yes, I see them," he said, "but no, as soon as they land, someone will shoot them for meat." I asked, "Have you ever shot one?" "No," he said, "I would not shoot one." (I hoped not).

Another man was walking with a casting net, looking for Cascadoux catfish (*Hoplosternum littorale*, otherwise known as the "Cascadura", "Cascadu" or "Brown Hoplo") in the roadside canals. These small armored catfish are a part of the Trinidadian cultural heritage. Legend has it that once you eat Cascadoux, you will either: 1). Never leave Trinidad, or 2). Always come back. The fisherman said he was not having good luck that day. It's no wonder, as for many years now, their populations have been in steep decline. He said the cascadoux need to come up for a breath once about every 20 minutes. That is when he catches them. We hope there would still be plenty left to breed in the future!

We drove back out to the main coastal road and headed 1.3 km. south to Cascadoux Trace. There we birded for about 50 minutes. This trace is where the roadside hawk and the crane hawk were seen last year, but not this year! We tallied 19 species (with some repeats) on Cascadoux Trace. I saw 2 separate and active colonies of the crested oropendola, and we saw a female carrying nesting material. Many members saw, from a small bridge overpass, the yellow and black banded puffer fish (*Colomesus psittacus*) in the brackish water. When agitated, this toxic fish has the ability to blow itself up, like a balloon, exposing a surface of small sharp spines, a very effective deterrent.

On the drive to Kernahan along the Manzanilla-Mayaro Road, it was dark, and we only saw the extent of the severe flood damage on the way out from several temporary roads in place. During the severe rains and flooding last November and December, the Manzanilla-Mayaro coastal road sustained severe damage, with large sections of it being swept away. Many buildings were severely damaged. The road was officially closed on November 23, 2022, and did not re-open until 13 days ago on January 2, 2023. This was not the first time this road has been closed due to severe weather damage. On the way back, heading north on the Manzanilla-Mayaro Road, we tallied another 22 species (with some repeats) for a total of 66 species for the day.

At our last stop, near Snow Cone Man, near the river, we were treated to a nice finale. We had 2 silvered antbirds, that came to someone's call. A few of the group were lucky enough to be close and to get photos. There were 3 black-crested antshrikes, and a green kingfisher. We were lastly treated to an up-close-and-personal appearance of a young male American pygmy kingfisher, the smallest kingfisher in the Neotropics.

On this trip, it was my real pleasure to meet two young budding birders: Brandon Woo and Xavier Ragbir. At 15, Brandon has been birding now for several years. He has a nice Canon camera kit, with long lens, and he has been stunning the T&T birding community with his spot-on bird photos. Not only does he just photograph the birds. He also knows them by sight and has honed an expert ear for their myriad and complex calls. Xavier Ragbir, at only 10-years old, has been birding since he was 6. His copy of Kenefick's "Birds of T&T" is just about worn out. He uses the checklist in the back of the book to record his sightings, and the checklist is mostly full. He is an avid eBirder, and active on Xeno Canto. He told me that he follows me on eBird. I was touched. Both of these boys have a deep passion for birds, and it warms the heart to see them in action. It really gives hope for the future.

My kudos go out to Elizabeth Seebaran and Jerome Foster for organizing the trip.

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The Bird List: 66 Species ID'd:

#	Name	Binomial	Notes
3	Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	*Dendrocygna autumnalis*	Along Mayaro-Manzanilla Road. 2 adults, 1 immature.
24	Ruddy Ground Dove	*Columbina talpacoti*	
1	White-tipped Dove	*Leptotila verreauxi*	
21	Smooth-billed Ani	*Crotophaga ani*	
4	Striped Cuckoo	*Tapera naevia*	All heard calling. Kernahan.
2	White-tailed Goldenthroat	*Polytmus guainumbi*	Very brief appearances. Kernahan.
1	Blue-chinned Sapphire	*Chlorestes notata*	Female on vervain plant. Cascadoux Trace.
2	Copper-rumped Hummingbird	*Saucerottia tobaci*	Near Snowcone Man.
1	hummingbird sp.	*Trochilidae sp.*	
1	Purple Gallinule	*Porphyrio martinica*	
3	Limpkin	*Aramus guarauna*	Kernahan.
27	Southern Lapwing	*Vanellus chilensis*	Kernahan.
20	Wattled Jacana	*Jacana jacana*	Kernahan.
41	Sanderling	*Calidris alba*	On Manzanilla beach.
2	Spotted Sandpiper	*Actitis macularius*	
1	Anhinga	*Anhinga anhinga*	Nariva River
3	Brown Pelican	*Pelecanus occidentalis*	Nariva River
3	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*	Nariva River
1	Snowy Egret	*Egretta thula*	Nariva River
28	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	
4	Striated Heron	*Butorides striata*	
40	Black Vulture	*Coragyps atratus*	Guesstimate.
6	Turkey Vulture	*Cathartes aura*	Guesstimate.
1	Osprey	*Pandion haliaetus*	Over Manzanilla beach.
4	Common Black Hawk	*Buteogallus anthracinus*	
5	Savanna Hawk	*Buteogallus meridionalis*	
1	Ringed Kingfisher	*Megaceryle torquate*	Kernahan.
1	American Pygmy Kingfisher	*Chloroceryle aenea*	Very cooperative for photos. Near Snowcone Man.
1	Green Kingfisher	*Chloroceryle americana*	Near Snowcone Man.
1	Rufous-tailed Jacamar	*Galbula ruficauda*	Near Snowcone Man.
1	Red-rumped Woodpecker	*Dryobates kirkii*	Heard. Could have been 2 different locations.
1	Lineated Woodpecker	*Dryocopus lineatus*	Cascadoux.

#	Name	Binomial	Notes
3	Yellow-headed Caracara	*Daptrius chimachima*	
1	Aplomado Falcon	*Falco femoralis*	Very good views.
1	Gray-cowled Wood-Rail	*Aramides cajaneus*	Heard in mangrove canal on Cascadoux.
2	Green-rumped Parrotlet	*Forpus passerines*	
6	Blue-and-yellow Macaw	*Ara ararauna*	Flyover on the horizon. Kernahan.
3	Black-crested Antshrike	*Sakesphorus canadensis*	All heard calling. Near Snowcone Man.
3	Barred Antshrike	*Thamnophilus doliatus*	
2	Silvered Antbird	*Sclateria naevia*	Near Snowcone Man.
3	Yellow-chinned Spinetail	*Certhiaxis cinnamomeus*	Kernahan.
2	Pale-breasted Spinetail	*Synallaxis albescens*	Kernahan.
2	Ochre-lored Flycatcher	*Tolmomyias flaviventris*	
5	Yellow-bellied Elaenia	*Elaenia flavogaster*	
8	Pied Water-Tyrant	*luvicola pica*	
14	Great Kiskadee	*Pitangus sulphuratus*	
11	Tropical Kingbird	*Tyrannus melancholicus*	
1	Rufous-browed Peppershrike	*Cyclarhis gujanensis*	
32	Southern Rough-winged Swallow	*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*	
13	House Wren	*Troglodytes aedon*	
6	Tropical Mockingbird	*Mimus gilvus*	
2	Spectacled Thrush	*Turdus nudigenis*	
2	Red-breasted Meadowlark	*Leistes militaris*	On wires. Kernahan.
17	Crested Oropendola	*Psarocolius decumanus*	Female carrying nesting material.
3	Yellow Oriole	*Icterus nigrogularis*	
4	Shiny Cowbird	*Molothrus bonariensis*	
1	Giant Cowbird	*Molothrus oryzivorus*	Kernahan.
6	Carib Grackle	*Quiscalus lugubris*	
1	Northern Waterthrush	*Parkesia noveboracensis*	Nariva River
4	Masked Yellowthroat	*Geothlypis aequinoctialis*	Kernahan.
3	Yellow Warbler	*Setophaga petechia*	
2	Dickcissel	*Spiza americana*	Both heard.
2	Blue-gray Tanager	*Thraupis episcopus*	
9	Palm Tanager	*Thraupis palmarum*	
2	Bicolored Conebill	*Conirostrum bicolor*	Nariva River
13	Blue-black Grassquit	*Volatinia jacarina*	
10	Bananaquit	*Coereba flaveola*	

General Club Trip, 26 February 2023

BUSH BUSH

By Chantal Leotaud

At the southeast corner of Nariva Swamp is a peninsula extending northward into the Nariva Swamp called Bush Bush. The area supports a Seasonal Evergreen Forest and has been declared a wildlife sanctuary. On Sunday 26th February 2023, some members of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists Club (TTFNC) made our way to the Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary. Within ten minutes of our motorcade arriving at the Manzanilla Forestry Post, twenty-five of us were accounted for; we then made our way to the trail start at Bush Bush, Nariva.

Our hike leader, Dan Jaggernauth, immediately started pointing out flora and fauna of interest as the group walked along the sandy trail road towards the trail start. We walked past some agricultural land that had watermelon and ochro plants, and on the other side of the marsh banks were cattle egrets and wattled jacanas. The coconut palms and mangoes were plentiful, and there were great sunny views. The group came together under a monkey apple tree to observe some verveine at around 8:50 a.m. and had a 5 minute introductory talk about the trail we were on our way to check out. It took the group roughly half an hour to walk from the vehicles to the trail start.

Dan pointed out a few cocorite palm plants, their features and fruits. We observed many cabbage white butterflies amongst some black sage as we trekked past some royal palm and moriche palm (macaw food). There was an *Eschweilera subglandulosa* (guatecare) tree at the trailhead. We observed some of the dried fruit from the native tree on the ground, that had marks on them as though nibbled on by birds. Guatecare is an evergreen tree with fibrous dark bark and has dark greyish green, alternating leaves. The leftover dried fruit that we saw scattered on the ground were urn-shaped and woody, and about 3 cm long. The wood is tough and durable, similar to that of the cannonball tree.

The group then followed the forest trail in, while listening to great antshrike calls, and shortly after, spotted a woodcreeper. We then stopped to observe the features of a Bactris major (gru gru tree) and noted that the fruit can be opened to drink its water and the pulp can be eaten. There were a few *Couroupita guianensis* (cannonball trees) in the forest. This tree was used for lumber a long time ago. The leaves were simple, and all of the cannonball trees that we spotted were in flower. The flowers have a strong pleasant fragrance. The flowers had six orange-red petals. The fruit were large, heavy, spherical in shape, and brown.

A short distance away, the group followed Dan

1. **Sign post with general trail information about the Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary**
2. **Swamp bloodwood tree**
3. **Monkey Slug Moth**
4. **Cannonball Tree**
5. **Rest House**
6. **Tirite Field**

Photo by Chantal Leotaud

off the main trail, along a track that circuited towards a swamp bloodwood tree (*Pterocarpus officinale*s) with buttress roots. That was the first time the group heard the red howler monkey call, at around 9:25 a.m., at that part of the forest. When we moved closer towards the swamp bloodwood tree we saw, within a buttress cavity, a colony of ten resting greater white-lined bats (*Saccopteryx bilineata)*. As is characteristic of this species, the bats had two prominent buffy stripes extending from their neck to rump on their upperparts, and dark gray underparts. The males seemed to challenge each other with feisty taps of their feet in the direction of each other at times. This colony had four males and six female bats. The females are usually slightly larger than the males.

Close to the ficus tree, we saw a monkey slug caterpillar (*Phobetron hipparchia*) on the leaf of a heliconia plant. The caterpillar caught our eye for its unusual colour. The monkey slug caterpillar, while in its larval stage before becoming a moth, is mostly seen in its mature caterpillar stages when it's more brown or yellow-brown in colour. The caterpillar we saw at Bush Bush was bright yellow.

Shortly after, around 10:10 a.m., the group stopped to look at a mountain rose (*Brownea coccinea*). The bark was finely fissured and brown. The leaves were compound and bright orange-red flowers hung on some of the branches. Near the mountain rose tree, we saw a whistling fruit of the forest on the forest floor. Dan blew into the fruit to show us how the whistling fruit of the forest got its name. The *Hernandia sonora,* or toporite, as it is commonly known, had a grey-brown bark and its leaves were simple and alternate.

After a couple of brief rest stops, allowing us to regroup, we walked through mahoe forest and approached a wide fire trail. The fire trail runs along the eastern part of the peninsula with the swamp visible on the far side, to our right. Some of the group pointed out that beneath the leafy trail, the soil was sandy. About twenty minutes before arriving at the rest house, our turning point, at about 10:50 a,m., Dan brought the group's attention to a field of *Ischnosiphon arouma* (tirite) under the forest canopy. Tirite grows from an underground rhizome and is much used in traditional basketry and weaving. By 11:10 a.m., the group arrived at the rest house.

We were greeted by a white-fronted capuchin (*Cebus albifrons trinitatis*) which was shortly after joined by another, then a few more of the monkeys. There were about ten of the capuchins around the rest house, moving through the canopy. One of the monkeys threw a mango in Dan's direction. These capuchins are known for practising their own forms of farming by throwing cannonball fruit to the forest floor; the impact splits the fruit open attracting insects that the monkeys would then feed on. It is unclear whether the monkey threw the mango as a practice of farming insects, or otherwise. The group spent about twenty minutes at the rest house before regrouping to return to the forestry post. The rest house was once used as a research station to study mosquitoes. It is said that many species of mosquitoes could have been found in the area and studied on-site at a lab. We circuited the trail and regrouped at the forestry post by our vehicles at around 1:00 p.m., completing the Bush Bush, Nariva general trip 2023.

Bird Trip Report, 24-26 March 2023

TOBAGO

By Matt Kelly

Group photo at the Bloody Bay Visitor's Centre, Saturday, 25 March 2023 *Photo by Matt Kelly*
Back Row [L to R]:
Chantal Leotaud, Feroze Omardeen, Jeffry Wong-Sang, Andrew Proudfoot, Selwyn Gomes, Kayah Hypolite, Annette Vvesyrtmark (visiting from Denmark), Kayah Hypolite's mom, Peter Bundgaard (visiting from Denmark), Diana Renault, Leonard Chan Chow, Stephanie Omardeen, Traudl Lackenbauer (visiting from Germany - 80 years old), Sheldon Edwards, Marva Celestine, Manuel Brieske, Sandra Celestine, Chamilla Brieske, Shane Manchouck, Matt Kelly
Front Row [L to R]:
Yufei Wu, Dan Jaggernauth, Gennike Mayers & "Vision" (the blind dog, who made it to the top), Kathleen Hinkson, Roma Wong-Sang, Mirza Griffith, Annette Griffith (85 years old, made it to the top), Steven Griffith, Rehanna Omardeen, Chrisalene Dedier

On Saturday morning, March 25th, 2023, the group walked from the Bloody Bay Visitor's Centre to the top of Centre Hill, which is now established as the highest point in Tobago. Pigeon Peak, between Speyside and Charlotteville was historically designated as the highest peak.

Twenty-eight species of birds were identified on the walk to the peak of Centre Hill by Matt Kelly (mostly heard). 

#	Name	Binomial	Comments
7	Rufous-vented Chachalaca	*Ortalis ruficauda*	Heard loud and clear.
4	Pale-vented Pigeon	*Patagioenas cayennensis*	Calling
2	White-tipped Dove	*Leptotila verreauxi*	Calling
3	White-tailed Sabrewing	*Campylopterus ensipennis*	Seen and heard calling
1	Broad-winged Hawk	*Buteo platypterus*	Attacked by Peregrine
3	Collared Trogon	*Trogon collaris*	Calling close
3	Rufous-tailed Jacamar	*Galbula ruficauda*	
3	Golden-olive Woodpecker	*Colaptes rubiginosus*	Heard
1	Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*	Attacked Broad Wing
18	Orange-winged Parrot	*Amazona amazonica*	All around
1	Barred Antshrike	*Thamnophilus doliatus*	
1	Plain Antvireo	*Dysithamnus mentalis*	
1	White-fringed Antwren	*Formicivora grisea*	Heard
2	Olivaceous Woodcreeper	*Sittasomus griseicapillus*	Heard calling
2	Stripe-breasted Spinetail	*Synallaxis cinnamomea*	Heard
16	Blue-backed Manakin	*Chiroxiphia pareola*	Seen & calling, all males
1	Ochre-lored Flycatcher	*Tolmomyias flaviventris*	Calling
1	Yellow-bellied Elaenia	*Elaenia flavogaster*	Calling
1	Scrub Greenlet	*Hylophilus flavipes*	Calling
3	Chivi Vireo	*Vireo chivi*	Heard Singing
1	Rufous-breasted Wren	*Pheugopedius rutilus*	Heard Singing
3	Yellow-legged Thrush	*Turdus flavipes*	Heard Singing
1	White-necked Thrush	*Turdus albicollis*	Heard Singing
4	Crested Oropendola	*Psarocolius decumanus*	
3	Shiny Cowbird	*Molothrus bonariensis*	At Visitor's Centre
6	Blue-gray Tanager	*Thraupis episcopus*	
1	Red-legged Honeycreeper	*Cyanerpes cyaneus*	
16	Bananaquit	*Coereba flaveola*	Heard

General Club Trip May 2023

ARIMA VALLEY

By Nkosi Carter-Fisher

This report presents the findings and observations from a scientific field trip to Arima Valley, Trinidad, focusing on the biodiversity of insects, birds, and plant species. The impact of noise pollution, particularly from nearby quarrying activities, on the local fauna and flora was also examined. The study documented various species of butterflies, birds, and plants, highlighting their ecological importance. The discussion emphasizes the need for conservation efforts to mitigate the negative effects of noise pollution on biodiversity.

The Arima Valley in Trinidad is a region of exceptional ecological significance, characterized by its lush rainforest and remarkable biodiversity. Nestled amidst this tropical paradise, the valley is home to a wide array of plant and animal species, many of which are endemic to the island. However, the fragile ecosystem of Arima Valley faces numerous threats, including the encroachment of human activities, such as quarrying. As such, it becomes imperative to study and document the biodiversity of this unique environment, shedding light on the importance of rainforests and the preservation of Trinidad's exceptional natural heritage.

Trinidad, located in the southern Caribbean, boasts an extraordinary ecological setting. Its position at the juncture of South America and the Caribbean has endowed it with a rich blend of species from both regions. The island is particularly renowned for its diverse rainforests, which are among the oldest in the Americas. These rainforests harbour a plethora of plant and animal species, many of which are endemic.

The biodiversity found in Trinidad's rainforests plays a vital role in maintaining the ecological balance of the island. The interdependence between species and their habitats contributes to a complex web of interactions, including pollination, seed dispersal, and nutrient cycling. Furthermore, rainforests act as carbon sinks, mitigating the impacts of climate change and helping to regulate local and global weather patterns. Preserving these rainforests is crucial not only for the island's unique biodiversity but also for the well-being of the planet as a whole.

However, the fragile equilibrium of Trinidad's rainforests faces numerous challenges. Human activities, such as quarrying, agriculture, and urbanization, encroach upon these pristine ecosystems, posing a significant threat to their integrity. One such area affected by these activities is the Arima Valley, where the scientific field trip took place. It is here that the impact of noise pollution resulting from nearby quarrying activities on the local fauna and flora was investigated.

In conducting this scientific field trip, the aim was to study and document the diverse plant and animal species in Arima Valley, shedding light on their ecological significance. Additionally, by examining the influence of noise pollution on the biodiversity of this area, the study sought to underscore the importance of preserving the delicate balance of ecosystems in the face of human disturbances. Through this research, we can better understand the intricate connections between species, their habitats, and the anthropogenic factors that threaten their existence.

Site Selection: An area within Arima Valley and near Simla Centre, was chosen as the study site due to its reputation as an area of significant biodiversity and its proximity to human activities, particularly quarrying operations. The valley offers opportunities to observe and document various plant and animal species.

Data Collection: The field trip encompassed systematic observations and species identifications, employing data on the following insects, birds, and plant species:

a. Insects: The study focused on butterflies, with particular attention given to their morphology, colour patterns, and flight behaviour. Observations were made in different habitats and along designated trails within the Arima Valley. Butterfly species were identified using field guides,

expert knowledge, and visual cues.

b. Birds: Bird species were identified based on visual sightings, calls, and songs. The field researchers used binoculars and recorded the unique features and behaviours of each species encountered. Field guides and expert consultations were utilized for accurate identification.

c. Plants: Plant species were meticulously documented and identified based on their morphological characteristics, such as leaves, flowers, and fruits. Field researchers paid close attention to the diversity of plant life within the study area, including trees, shrubs, herbs, and grasses. Reference materials, including botanical guides and expert assistance, were utilized to ensure accurate identification.

The findings from this field trip highlight the significant biodiversity present in Arima Valley, Trinidad. Various butterfly species, including the postman butterfly and tiger butterfly, contribute to pollination and add vibrancy to the ecosystem. The observed bird species, such as the palm tanager, kiskadee, and copper-rumped hummingbird, play crucial roles in seed dispersal and pollination.

The study, however, also revealed the detrimental effects of noise pollution resulting from nearby quarrying activities. The constant noise disturbance disrupts the natural behaviours of birds and some insect species, affecting their foraging patterns, mating calls, and overall reproductive success. This disruption could lead to a decline in species populations and a loss of biodiversity in the area. It has been noted that there were fewer species found near the active quarries.

To mitigate the negative impact of noise pollution, it is imperative to implement measures to minimize noise emissions from quarrying activities. This could include using noise-reducing technologies, implementing buffer zones, and adhering to strict regulations. Additionally, raising awareness among stakeholders about the importance of preserving natural habitats and biodiversity is essential.

The field trip occurred near a village where there was active human activity excluding quarrying. These were a few parlours and homes with drains connecting to the river. While human activity has remained relatively minor, it could be a source of water and minor air pollution that can harm the biodiversity within the area. Likewise, further development could result in more encroachment within the rainforests, with ecologically important vegetation ending up destroyed to make room for homes and other infrastructure.

The scientific field trip to Arima Valley, Trinidad, provided valuable insights into the biodiversity of the region, particularly regarding insects, birds, and plant species. The observed species contribute to the ecological balance and functioning of the ecosystem. However, the detrimental effects of noise pollution from nearby quarrying activities highlight the urgency of implementing measures to protect and preserve the delicate ecosystems in the area. Continued efforts in conservation and sustainable practices are crucial to ensure the long-term viability of the biodiversity in Arima Valley.

Table 1: Plants

Common Name	Scientific Name
Wild cucumber	*Cucumis myriocarpus*
West Indian cherry	*Malpighia emarginata*
Yellow plum	*Spondias mombin*
Avocado	*Persea americana*
Sapodilla	*Manilkara zapota*
Pommerac	*Syzygium malaccense*
Shame plant	*Mimosa pudica*
Croton gossypifolius (blood wood)	*Croton gossypifolius*
Rubber tree	*Hevea brasiliensis*
Bull grass	*Paspalum fasciculatum*
-	*Paspalum conjugatum*
-	*Piper sp*
Wild tobacco	*Nicotiana tabacum*
Macaw flower	*Heliconia bihai*
St. John's Bush	*Hypericum perforatum*
Geiger tree	*Boraginaceae*
Man killer	*Mataborro banana*
Sandbox tree	*Hura crepitans*
Money bush	*Centella asiatica*
Caimite tree	*Chrysophyllum cainito*
Graterwood	*Lantana sp*
Milkweed	*Asclepias curassavica*
Guava tree	*Psidium guajava*

Table 2: Insects

Common Name	Scientific Name
Postman butterfly	*Heliconius melpomene*
Tiger butterfly	*Mechanitis polymnia*

Table 3: Birds

Common Name	Scientific Name
Palm Tanager	*Tangara palmarum*
Kiskadee	*Pitangus sulphuratus*
Copper-rumped Hummingbird	*Amazilia tobaci*
Barred Antshrike	*Thamnophilus doliatus*
Rufous-browed Peppershrike	*Cyclarhis gujanensis*
White-tailed Trogon	*Trogon viridis*

General Club Trip 25 June 2023

LOPINOT RAINFOREST

By Nkosi Carter-Fisher

The Team

All photos by Nkosi Carter-Fisher

This comprehensive report presents the findings and analysis from a field trip to Lopinot rainforest in Trinidad. The study aimed to document the diverse species of birds, plants, insects, and fishes found within the rainforest. Additionally, the report explores the environmental challenges faced by the area, including deforestation caused by illegal farming activities in the mountains and the potential risks posed by pesticide and fertilizer runoff. The historical significance of the Lopinot House, its current state of disrepair, and the need for its preservation are also discussed. The report emphasizes the importance of conservation efforts to protect the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the rainforest.

This report presents the findings and analysis from a scientific field trip conducted in the Lopinot rainforest, located within the heart of Trinidad's lush rainforest ecosystem. Lopinot is not only known for its exceptional biodiversity but also holds historical significance, as it is home to the iconic Lopinot House, an estate where enslaved individuals once toiled in the cocoa industry. The Lopinot House, however, now stands in a state of disrepair, emphasizing the urgency of restoration and maintenance due to its deteriorating condition and potential safety hazards.

Lopinot rainforest, with its captivating natural beauty and cultural heritage, provides a captivating backdrop for exploring the intersection of history, agriculture, and environmental conservation. The rainforest has a rich agricultural history, with cocoa cultivation being a prominent industry in the past. The abandoned cocoa plantation within Lopinot rainforest serves as a reminder of the region's agricultural legacy, intertwined with the complex history of enslaved labour.

Beyond its historical significance, Lopinot rainforest is recognized for its exceptional biodiversity. Rainforests are known as hotspots of biodiversity, hosting a plethora of plant and animal

Lopinot Village viewed from the mountains

species that are intricately interconnected within their ecosystems. The incredible variety of life found within rainforests plays a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance, supporting pollination, seed dispersal, and nutrient cycling. Furthermore, the rich biodiversity of rainforests serves as a potential source for scientific research, pharmaceutical discoveries, and inspiration for sustainable practices.

During the field trip to Lopinot rainforest, however, the presence of illegal farming activities in the surrounding mountains came to light. These activities contribute to deforestation, which disrupts the delicate balance of the ecosystem and poses severe environmental challenges. Deforestation in the mountains can lead to soil erosion, loss of habitat for numerous species, altered water cycles, and increased vulnerability to landslides.

The purpose of this report was to document specific plant and animal species encountered during the field trip. By identifying and documenting these species, we gain valuable insights into the intricate web of life within the Lopinot rainforest and recognize the importance of biodiversity conservation. Protecting the delicate balance of ecosystems in rainforests is paramount for the well-being of both the native species and the human communities that depend on these ecosystems for essential ecosystem services.

In the following sections, we will delve into the methodology employed during the field trip, present the documented species, discuss the environmental challenges posed by illegal farming and deforestation, and draw conclusions on the significance of conserving the Lopinot rainforest's biodiversity and cultural heritage. Through this report, we aim to shed light on the importance of safeguarding this unique rainforest ecosystem for future generations.

The field trip to Lopinot rainforest employed systematic observation and identification techniques to document the various species present within the rainforest.

Preliminary research and site selection

First, preliminary research was conducted to familiarise the team with the expected animal and plant species that could be found, and the viability of the trip was noted with routes needed to properly conduct the field trip. Strategic locations within the rainforest, including the Lopinot House and its surrounding areas, were chosen based on their potential for species diversity.

The field trip encompassed systematic observations and species identifications, employing data on insects, birds, and plant species.

Insects: The study focused on butterflies, with particular attention given to their morphology, colour patterns, and flight behaviour. Observations

were made in different habitats and along designated trails within the Arima Valley.

Birds: Bird species were identified based on visual sightings, calls, and songs. The field researchers used binoculars and recorded the unique features and behaviours of each species encountered.

Plants: Plant species were identified based on their characteristics, such as leaves, flowers, and fruits. Field researchers paid close attention to the diversity of plant life within the study area, including trees, shrubs, herbs, and grasses. Reference materials, including botanical guides and expert assistance, were utilized to ensure accurate identification.

Fishes: The fish species were identified based on their morphological characteristics such as their shape, gills, scales, fins and size. The field researchers observed the river ecosystem the fish were in and how that might have impacted their health.

Data Collection: Detailed field notes and photographs were captured to document species encountered. Information such as species names, scientific names, habitat characteristics, and notable behaviours were recorded.

Trees

Common Name	Scientific Name
Cedar tree	*Cedrela odorata*
Samaan\Saman tree	*Samanea saman*
Forest flame tree	*Delonix regia*
Fat pork fruit	*Chrysophyllum cainito*
-	*Epiphytes*
Moringa oleifera	*Moringa oleifera*
Chinese tamarind	*Vangueria madagascari-*
Peewah	*Bactris gasipaes*
Dragon fruit	*Selenicereus undatus (formally Hylocereus un-datus)*
Silk cotton tree	*Ceiba pentandra*
Wild dasheen	*Colocasia esculenta*

Insects

Common Name	Scientific names
Cicada	*Cicadoidea sp.*
Butterflies	*Lepidoptera sp.*
Dragonflies	*Anisoptera sp.*

Fishes

Common Name	Scientific Name
Guppy	*Poecilia reticulata*
Long-whiskered Catfish	*Pimelodidae*
Coscorob	*Aqquidens pulcher*
Guabine	*Hoplias malabaricus*

Birds

Common Name	Scientific Name
Trogon bird	*Trogonidae sp.*
Cornbird	*Crested oropendola*
Parrot	*Psittaciformes sp.*
Pygmy owl	*Glaucidium sp.*
Hummingbird	*Trochiliade sp*
Southern lapwing	*Vanellus chilensis*
Kiskadee	*Pitangus sulphuratus*
Black vulture	*Coragyps atratus*

The scientific field trip to the Lopinot rainforest provided valuable insights into the diverse array of species inhabiting this lush and ecologically significant area. The tables presented various plants, insects, birds, and fish found within the rainforest, shedding light on the rich biodiversity present in the region. Each species plays a crucial role in maintaining the delicate balance of the ecosystem, contributing to the overall health and stability of the rainforest.

The plant species identified during the trip encompassed both native and non-native varieties, showcasing the rainforest's unique botanical diversity. Notable plant species such as the cedar tree (*Cedrela odorata*) and samaan tree (*Samanea saman*) hold significant cultural and economic value, with their timber widely used for construction and furniture making. Additionally, the flamboyant or forest flame tree (*Delonix regia*), though native to Madagascar, serves as a striking ornamental plant, contributing to the rainforest's aesthetic appeal. The presence of diverse epiphytes, including various bromeliads, and ferns, highlights the rainforest's ability to support a wide range of plant life.

The insect species observed, including cicada insects (*Cicadoidea sp.),* butterflies (*Lepidoptera sp.),* and dragonflies (*Anisoptera sp*.), exhibit fascinating behaviours and ecological roles. Cicadas, known for their loud buzzing calls, aid in nutrient recycling and tree growth through their life cycles. Butterflies contribute to pollination and serve as indicators of a healthy ecosystem, while dragonflies act as agile predators, controlling insect populations and serving as bioindicators of water quality.

The avian diversity in the Lopinot rainforest is equally remarkable. From the trogon birds (*Trogon sp*.) known for their colourful plumage and distinctive calls to the kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*), a medium-sized flycatcher with bold yellow and black plumage, each bird species playing an essential role in the ecosystem. Birds like the parrots (*Psittaciformes sp*.) contribute to pollination and seed dispersal, while the black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) play a vital role in maintaining ecosystem health by cleaning up carrion.

In the aquatic ecosystem, the fish species, such as guppy (*Poecilia reticulata*), coscorob (*Aequidens pulcher*), and guabine (*Hoplias malabaricus*), contribute to nutrient cycling and serve as indicators of freshwater ecosystem health. Guppies are known for their adaptability and ease of care, making them popular in aquariums. On the other hand, coscorob and guabine are essential to maintaining a balanced aquatic community.

However, the illegal farming practices in the mountains surrounding Lopinot rainforest pose significant environmental consequences and raise pressing concerns about the sustainability of the ecosystem. Deforestation resulting from these activities has far-reaching impacts on both the terrestrial and aquatic environments.

One of the immediate consequences of deforestation is habitat loss. As the forests are cleared for farming, many plant and animal species lose their natural homes, leading to a decline in biodiversity. Endangered and endemic species that are reliant on specific habitats for survival face an increased risk of extinction. Moreover, the

Deforestation occurring within the mountain, humans clear the mountains to farm various crops, contributing to environmental destruction.

destruction of vegetation disrupts critical ecological processes, such as nutrient cycling and soil stabilization, further degrading the ecosystem's health.

Deforested areas are also vulnerable to soil erosion, especially during heavy rainfall. Without the protective canopy of trees and root systems to hold the soil in place, rainwater washes away the fertile topsoil, depleting essential nutrients for plant growth. The erosion contributes to sedimentation in nearby rivers and streams, altering aquatic ecosystems and reducing water quality. High sediment loads can suffocate aquatic organisms, clog gills, and disrupt their food sources, posing a threat to fish populations like guppy, catfish, coscorob, and guabine.

Additionally, illegal farming practices involve the use of pesticides and fertilizers to maximize crop yields. When these chemicals are applied to the land, they can leach into nearby water bodies through runoff, leading to water pollution. Pesticides, specifically, have detrimental effects on aquatic organisms, such as fishes and amphibians, disrupting their endocrine systems and impairing their reproductive capabilities. The contamination of water sources not only poses a threat to aquatic life but also raises concerns about public health when local communities depend on these water bodies for drinking and irrigation.

Addressing the issue of illegal farming in the Lopinot rainforest requires a multi-faceted approach. Promoting sustainable land-use practices and engaging local communities in conservation efforts are crucial steps to curb deforestation. Education and awareness campaigns can help foster a sense of responsibility among farmers and residents, highlighting the value of maintaining intact ecosystems for the wellbeing of both nature and society. Collaboration between government agencies, environmental organizations, and local stakeholders is essential in enforcing laws and implementing effective land management strategies.

In conclusion, the scientific field trip to the Lopinot rainforest unveiled the remarkable diversity and ecological significance of the area. The abundant plant, insect, bird, and fish species showcased the rainforest's essential role in maintaining a delicate balance within the ecosystem. Each species observed contributes to the rainforest's health and stability through crucial ecological functions such as pollination, nutrient recycling, and population control.

However, illegal farming practices and deforestation in the surrounding mountains pose severe threats to the rainforest's sustainability. Habitat loss, soil erosion, and water pollution resulting from these activities endanger the diverse array of species that call the Lopinot rainforest home. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort, involving sustainable land-use practices, community engagement, and collaborative conservation initiatives. Preserving the rainforest's biodiversity is not only vital for the well-being of its inhabitants but also essential for the long-term health and resilience of the entire ecosystem.

Lopinot House and mud oven where cocoa was processed. The oven and its environs appear to be in disrepair.

General Club Trip 29 October 2023

MOUNT HARRIS FOREST RESERVE

By Sarah Sooknanan and Romano Macfarlane

Start time: 8:00am
End time: 12:00pm
No. of attendees: 18

The group's first stop was along Paul Street on the bridge over the Cunapo River to look at caimans (*Caiman crocodilian*), where we met up with Romano and Sarah.

The second stop was along the Cunapo Southern Main Road to Mount Harris, at the remarkable sandstone boulder. The age of the stone was stated by the signage as sixty million years. This stone was said to be growing and remains a geological wonder in Trinidad.

Both marbled signs on the boulder needed cleaning, as most of the information on them was illegible; further, the sign on the southern side was broken. Dan Jaggernauth managed to do some cleaning, making the writing much more visible. In so doing though, there arose an additional issue regarding the information on the sign which bore the words "worthless trees".

The group considered making a request in writing to the Conservator of Forest to have the Club undertake the replacement of the sign and have it reworded.

The stretch of (*Buchenavia tetrap*road at this point is lined on both sides by yellow olivier *hylla*) and bois mulatre (*Pentaclethra macroloba*) trees. The group identified a possible new species of wasp hanging from one of the mature bois malatre, or fine leaf tree, located along the roadside.

The third stop and official starting point of the tour was at the forestry house. This location was shaded by mature teak (*Tectonia grandis*) trees possibly over 30 years of age. It was noted by the group that the leaves of the teak trees could be used for fuel and that the mature teak trees contained a substance that made them resistant to heat.

There were also several fruit trees, including mango (*Mangifera indica*), pomerac (*Syzygium malaccense*) and Chinese coconut (*Cocos nucifera*), on the property of the forestry house.

At the forestry house itself, two species of wasps were identified with their nest located at the back of a chair; they were the Neotropical spider hunting wasps (*Trypoxylon fabricator*) and (Trypoxylon *maidii*).

The distinct cries of red howler monkeys (*Alouatta seniculus*) could also be heard from the house.

The group also noticed that the sign for the forestry house was severely rusted and on the verge of collapsing; it was in need of urgent replacement.

Continuing along the Cunapo Main Road from the forestry house, trees such as, pois doux (*Inga fastuosa*), caimite (*Chrysophyllum caimito*), wild sugar apple (*Annona mucosa*), wild nutmeg or cajuca (*Virola surinamensis*), which provided food for the pawi, as well as a very large samaan tree, (*Samanea saman*) were spotted. Worryingly, however, the group noticed several dead coconut palm trees that had succumbed to lethal yellowing. An interesting observation by the group was the growth of a bois canot plant from the tip of one of those dead palms.

The sides of the road were also carpeted by milkweeds (*Asclepias curassavica*), attracting many amalthea and peacock butterflies. Malanga bush (*Colocasia sp*) resembling the dasheen (Colocasia *esculenta*) was also noticeable.

The group entered the property of a resident of the area, Mr Mohan Narine. Mr Narine's property contained several interesting plant species, including a spice tree (*Cinnamomum sp*) used as an aromatic for cooking as well as for medicinal properties, the mapepire bush used as a snake repellant for dogs, an Azteca ant (*Azteca sp*) colony which contained a large ants nest on it, and the congo lalla plant (*Eclipta adpressa*) used for fevers.

As the group turned right, off the main road, and trekked into the Mount Harris forest, a thick canopy of yellow olivier (*Buchenavia tetraphylla*) and bois mulatre or fine leaf (Pentaclethra *macroloba*) trees lined both sides of the trail. 'Ecological ladders' from liana also crisscrossed overhead in several areas serving as natural ladders for the various animal species in this forest reserve.

Some species of the heliconia were also

identified in the reserve including the parrot's beak heliconia (*Heliconia psittacorum*), red palulu (*Heliconia bihai*) and riqui riqui (*Heliconia hirsuta*). With respect to the *Heliconia hirsuta*, Professor Christopher Starr pointed out that nectar was produced by its flower since ants were found in it, highlighting an important animal-plant relationship.

Other plant species named in the reserve included the wild hops (*Humulus lupulus*), crappo (*Carapa guianensis*), terete terete palms used for weaving baskets, balata (*Manilkara bidentata*), as well as carpets of coco ferns (*Oceaniopteris gibba*).

Additionally, the group also identified some species of fungus including the orange-bladder fungus (*Glaziella aurantiac*) and mushroom bracket fungus (*Pycnoporus sp.*).

On the trail towards our destination, we passed a location where honeybees (*Apis mullifera*) were kept in the reserve.

Calls of a channel-billed toucan (*Ramphastos vitellinus*) were also heard through the trees of the reserve.

The group also recognized that this tour could become part of the Ministry of Education's primary and secondary schools field trip programme, as well as be included in the Ministry of Tourism's "Staycation" programme, as it provides a wealth of invaluable knowledge on the various species of flora and fauna at one of our country's main forest reserves.

On the way back to the starting point we observed a dead female green honey creeper (*Chlorophanes spiza*) on the road, which may have been struck by a vehicle.

Summary of Flora and Fauna

FLORA.

- Bois mulatre or fine leaf (Pentaclethra macroloba)
- Teak (Tectonia grandis)
- White olivier (Terminaliera amazonia)
- Yellow olivier (Buchenavia tetraphylla)
- Crappo (Carapa guianensis)
- Samaan (Samanea saman)
- Cajuca or wild nutmeg (Virola surinamensis)
- Mango (Mangifera indica)
- Pomerac (Syzygium malaccense)
- Chinese coconut (Cocos nucifera)
- Pois doux (Inga fastuosa)
- Caimaite (Chrysophyllum caimito)
- Wild sugar apple (Annona mucosa)
- Balata (Manilkara bidentata)
- Milkweed (Asclepias curassavica)
- Malanga (Colocasia sp)
- Congo lalla (Eclipta adpressa)
- Parrot's Beak Heliconia (Heliconia psittacorum)
- Red palulu (Heliconia bihai)
- Riqui riqui (Heliconia hirsuta)
- Wild hops (Humulus lupulus)
- Terete
- Coco fern (Oceaniopteris gibba), Balata (Manilkara bidentata)
- Orange bladder fungus (Glaziella aurantiac)
- Mushroom bracket fungus (Pycnoporus sp.)

FAUNA

- The Neotropical spider hunting wasp (Trypoxylon fabricator)
- The Neotropical spider hunting wasp (Trypoxylon maidii)
- Camoati wasp (Polybia occidentals)
- Azteca ant (Azteca sp)
- Red howler monkey (Alouatta seniculus)
- Channel-billed toucan (Ramphastos vitellinus)
- Green honey creeper (Chlorophanes spiza)

Lecturer series, 11 April 2024

EXPLORING THE BELLY OF THE NORTHERN RANGE, FEBRUARY 16-24, 2023,

by Mario Russell and Christopher (Chris) Kelshall

Map of exploration of the Northern Range

All photos by Christopher Kelshall

In the Northern Range Trinidad, there is the dominant ridge line that starts at Scotland Bay and extends eastward to Penzance in Rampanalgas. Best described as the "Belly of the Northern Range", this ridgeline is 134km or 83.26 miles long. It is the principal ridgeline that separates Maracas Beach from Santa Cruz Valley, Cumaca from Matelot, and Rio Seco from Grand Riviere.

Six hikers associated with the Island Hikers Group, Chris Kelshall, Samraj Ramlakhan, Michael Charlerie, Gregory Leotaud, Lawrence James, and Michael Sando Ned of Trinbago Backpackers, took on the gruesome challenge of hiking the ridgeline. It is the first time something like this has ever been done and it took the group 8 months of preparation. The mastermind behind the expedition was Chris Kelshall; it had been his childhood dream. He was a student of the late great land surveyor and explorer Glenn Wilkes. Using a series of old and modern maps, he would carefully study the course and plot the route. His navigation equipment would be a GPS, and a Garmin In-Reach emergency communicator, along with his cell phone.

The route included 29 peaks to ascend, and a calculation of the total ascent would be 10,467.20 metres and the descent would be 10,458.02m. Bear in mind our highest peak El Cerro Del Aripo is just 940m and nothing in comparison to the challenges one has to face to accomplish the distance. It would take the group 9 days and 8 nights to accomplish this expedition. The course was divided into 9 legs and the average daily hiking distance was calculated to be between 12km to 18km. Day #5 had the longest distance of 22.51km. The group would hike between 8-12 hours per day. Climbing the rugged terrain with heavy 40-pound (18kg) backpacks allowed the average pace to be just 1.4km per hour which seemed slow but was relatively steady given the harsh conditions.

In the preparation, each leg of the trail needed to be scouted. Only Leg #8 remained untouched because of its rugged terrain. One of the main concerns was water, which is scarce on the

The exploration crew

mountain peaks. To get water, they would have to scout out the areas where there is a likely source of a river. Growing abundantly in some parts of the forest is a thick vine locally called water-kay which when cut can supply water. It was a lifesaver when water reserves were low. To abstract the water, the vine has to be cut at both ends while keeping the ends up to prevent the water from draining onto the ground. Holding the vine upward, the water can be poured into a cup. Although the water may look brown it is quite safe to drink and full of refreshing electrolytes.

During the first 2 days of the expedition, the team crossed several roadways, where they had a support vehicle to replenish them with fresh supplies. Their main source of food was backpacking freeze-dried meals which are light to carry and required two 2 cups of boiling water in order to provide a meal. To sleep, each member of the team carried a hammock. Being on the main ridge line meant unfettered wind and, at times, a horizontal rain made for frigid conditions. At night the summits get extremely cold so having the necessary clothing was vital.

Day #1. The boat landed at Scotland Bay at 6 am, where the team would wait for a few minutes for the sun to come up. The route passed over the hills of Scotland Bay to Mt. Observatory, Macqueripe, then onward to the tracking station. We had to spend the first night at Mt Pierre in the vicinity of the Chaguaramas plane crash site. Distance hiked 16.56km, duration 11hrs, and 54mins, average walking speed 1.4km/hr.

Day #2. From Mt Pierre, the route continued to North Post Road, Zion Hill Diego Martin, and then onward to La Vigie Paramin, Fond Pois Doux Road, and to the hills on the Maracas North Coast road by the Pichon Cove overpass. The team spent the 2nd night on the Maracas Bay skyline. Distance 18.09km, duration 8hrs. 54 mins, average walking speed 2km/hr.

Day #3. The team continued along the Maracas ridgeline, passing over Balata Ridge, La Vigie #2, LLoango, the Cross, and a steep ascent to the summit of El Tucuche from the back end. The team continued along the old El Tucuche Bench trail and spent the night at the Naranjo Waterfall where they could replenish their water supply. Distance 15.43km, duration 11.33km, average walking speed 1.3km/hr.

Day# 4. The team headed to the Rest Hut, Brasso Santos Trail, and over the four precipitous hills of Caura (Mt Christoffel, K4, Cabasterre, and Jubilee) to finish at Las Lapas Junction situated on the Arima, Blanchisseuse Road. Exhausted from a long day of hiking, they had just reached the halfway point. The group spent the 4th night at Las Lapas where friendly resident Michael and his wife catered meals for them. Distance 14.97km, duration 12.43hrs, and average walking speed 1.8km/hr.

Day #5. The team left Las Lapas and headed up the Mt.Bleu ridge line to the summit of

El Cerro Del Aripo. After doing several scouts and successfully connecting the pathway between El Cerro and Cipriani Peak the team felt, for safety reasons, to forgo this region because of the dangerous clifflike terrain between Cerro Del Madamas, Acantillado, Rocas, Mt Shastra or Pawi and Cipriani Peak. Instead, they made the descent to Madamas to spend the night at Geoff's Cabin, located deep in the forest, Daily hiking distance was calculated to be between 12km to 18km. Day #5 had the longest distance of 22.51km. The group hiked between 8-12 hours per day. Climbing the rugged terrain with heavy, 40-pound backpacks allowed the average pace to be just 1.4km per hour—which seemed slow but was relatively steady given the harsh conditions.

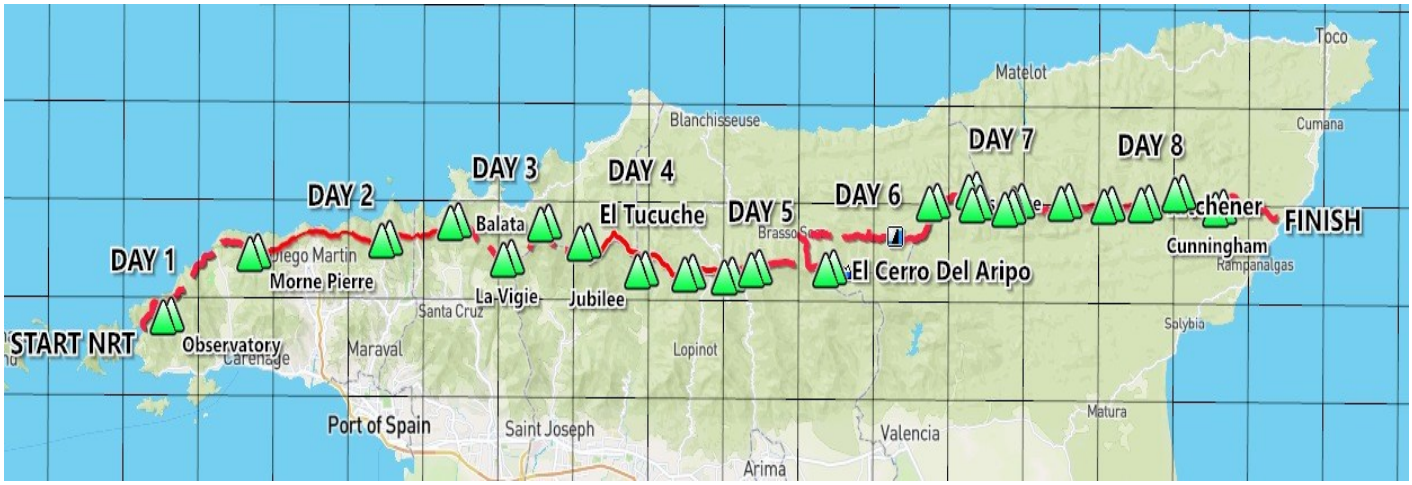
Day# 6. From Geoff's camp the team headed up the Madamas River to the Madamas, Platanal Pass to an area known as God's Place. The region can be best described as no man's land. The group spent 3 nights and 4 days in this unchartered territory. Gerard, a villager from Penzance, Rampanalgas, joined the team for this brutal part of the journey. Distance 12km, duration 8.51hrs, average walking speed 1.4km/hr.

Day #7. North of the Cumaca Valley are the mountains of Mt. Oropuche, Mt Blair, Zeno, and East of Zeno. It is mountain after mountain and some of the peaks, like Zeno, are almost vertical. The team was delighted to see a concrete stone trig at Mt Oropouche. Distance 12.12km, duration 9.37hrs, average walking speed 1.3km/hr

Day #8. Kruger Hill to Grand Riviere intersection and beyond. This part of the journey was not scouted, and the terrain was so confusing that at no time could Chris take his eyes off the navigation equipment. There is an area called Mars located north of Rio Seco, it is just below the main ridgeline. The landscape consists of the most rugged terrains one will ever come across. Distance 12.58km, duration 11.39hrs, average walking speed 1.1km/hr.

Day #9. Kitchener to Mt Cunningham and Rampanalgas. The terrain consists of constant up-and-down steep ridges. It seemed never-ending. Distance11.77km, duration 8.20hrs, average walking speed 1.4km/hr.

The End



Map of peaks covered across time

The main wildlife seen on the trail were deer and 3 wild pigs. Surprisingly, during the expedition, no venomous snakes were spotted except for a 6 foot+ long mapepire balsain across the forest trail during Day #5. Interviewing the group, they all agreed it was more challenging than expected and that they would never do it again; it is a once-in-a-lifetime expedition.

See a list of the 25 peaks that were ascended along the route. Several of which are not measured (thus the blank heights)

Starting in Scotland Bay and Heading East (not in ascending or descending order):

1. Observatory 427m (1402ft)
2. Asmath,
3. Morne Pierre 521m (1708ft)
4. Paramin,
5. Morne Mal D Estomac aka the La Vigie Lookout 671m (2200 ft)
6. Balata 576m (1890ft)
7. La Vigie#2 671m (2200ft)
8. Maracas Hill 716m (2350ft)
9. El Tucuche 937m (3075ft)
10. Mt Christoffel 625m (2050ft)
11. K4 488m (1600ft)
12. Cabasterre 549m (1800ft)
13. Jubilee 688m (2258ft)
14. Limon 701m (2300f)
15. Guacharo (Textel Station),
16. Morne Bleu 839m (2753ft)
17. El Cerro Del Aripo 940m (3085ft)
18. Gods Place,
19. Mt Oropuche 650m (2134ft,)
20. Mt Blair 620m (2036ft)
21. Zeno 622m (2042ft)
22. East of Zeno,
23. Kruger 609m (1997ft)
24. Kitchener 539m (1767ft)
25. Cunningham 414m (1357ft)

Additional 4 peaks: El Cerro Del Madamas 830m (2723ft); Acantilado 804m (2637ft); Mt. Pawi 770m (2526ft); Cipriani Peak.

Birding Trip Report, 17 February 2024

PLUM MITAN/ CALTOO TRACE

by Matt Kelly

Group photo. [L-R] Marie-Noelle Riley, Brian Woo, Brandon Woo, Avinash Jackree, Averil Ramchand, Vishal Rangersammy, Brian D'Abreau, Jerome Foster, Elizabeth Seebaran, Everett Ramdeo, Matt Kelly

Photos by Matt Kelly

Brian D'Abreu picked me up in town at 4:00 am. We were the designated co-leaders for this trip, and were on our way to the designated meeting place at the Massy Stores Super Center at Tacarigua at 4:40 am. The group was 11-strong, and we headed out to Caltoo Trace near the Plum Mitan Village, which is just on the east side of the Nariva Swamp. Elizabeth Seebaran, the newly elected TTFNC President, led the way. I doubt if I could find it with all the turn-offs and winding roads, in the dark.

Caltoo Trace is a very large flat agricultural area, bordered by the Nariva Swamp on the East, and some small hills to the NE, including Brigand Hill. The whole area is laid out in a grid pattern with canals running between the grids for watering the crops. There are some wet areas, which have produced some nice wetland birds in the past. As we arrived at Caltoo Trace, several Blue and Yellow Macaws were seen in the air.

We walked along the main canal on Caltoo Trace. We saw at least two savanna hawks, and at least two grey-lined hawks, with an occasional pair of blue and yellow macaws flying by. The swamp immortelle trees were attracting a lot of birds, especially hummingbirds. There was the sighting of a striated heron flying out of the reeds, carrying a snake. We saw two crested caracaras, in a flock of western cattle egrets, following a farm tractor, as it plowed the earth. At one point, we found a female black-throated mango on her nest, feeding her two babies. Along the Nariva Swamp side, we saw a group of at least 5 red howler monkeys in the trees. We birded for a little over 5 hours in the hot sun, but fortunately, there was a nice breeze.

Later, on our return, we stopped at Tururе, just west of Sangre Grande. There, we found an abundance of very active grassland yellow finch,

(Top Left): Blue and Yellow Macaws cruising (Top Right): Grassland Yellow Finch at Turure—*Photos by Matt Kelly* **(Bottom left): Female Black-throated Mango at nest, feeding her young (Bottom Right): White-headed Marsh Tyrant on the nest, built right next door to a wasp nest at Turure—***Photos by Jerome Foster*

which were quite photogenic. One juvenile was begging. There was also an interesting, occupied and active nest of a white-headed marsh tyrant, which had built is nest directly next to a wasp's nest (see photo).

We logged in at least 63 species for the day. Overall, it was tiring, but an excellent day of birding, with an excellent group. I can't wait to go back!

At least 5 Red Howler Monkeys on the Nariva Swamp border —*by Jerome Foster*

Species list

#	Species	Binomial nomenclature	Notes
62	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	*Columba livia*	Well over 50 flying together
4	Plain-breasted Ground Dove	*Columbina minuta*	At least 4, maybe as many as 6, photos
13	Ruddy Ground Dove	*Columbina talpacoti*	
1	White-tipped Dove	*Leptotila verreauxi*	Calling
21	Smooth-billed Ani	*Crotophaga ani*	
4	Striped Cuckoo	*Tapera naevia*	All calling
13	Short-tailed Swift	*Chaetura brachyura*	
1	Little Hermit	*Phaethornis longuemareus*	Feeding on red tubular flowers near the ground
5	Ruby-topaz Hummingbird	*Chrysolampis mosquitus*	At least 5, probably more, mostly at Swamp Immortelles
7	Black-throated Mango	*Anthracothorax nigricollis*	One female feeding 2 immatures at nest
1	Copper-rumped Humming-bird	*Saucerottia tobaci*	At Swamp Immortelles
2	White-chested Emerald	*Chrysuronia brevirostris*	At Swamp Immortelles
1	Limpkin	*Aramus guarauna*	Flyover
7	Southern Lapwing	*Vanellus chilensis*	In produce fields
33	Wattled Jacana	*Jacana jacana*	At least
1	Solitary Sandpiper	*Tringa solitaria*	Canal embankment
5	Striated Heron	*Butorides striata*	One flying off carrying a snake
53	Western Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	Following farm tractor
14	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*	
125	Black Vulture	*Coragyps atratus*	Guesstimate for both locations
4	Turkey Vulture	*Cathartes aura*	
1	Plumbeous Kite	*Ictinia plumbea*	Flyover
2	Long-winged Harrier	*Circus buffoni*	
4	Savanna Hawk	*Buteogallus meridionalis*	2 in each location
2	Gray-lined Hawk	*Buteo nitidus*	One fight with a Savana Hawk
1	Zone-tailed Hawk	*Buteo albonotatus*	Flyover
2	Crested Caracara	*Caracara plancus*	Following farm tractor
1	Yellow-headed Caracara	*Daptrius chimachima*	Flyover
1	Yellow-crowned Parrot	*Amazona ochrocephala*	
19	Orange-winged Parrot	*Amazona amazonica*	At least
8	Blue-and-yellow Macaw	*Ara ararauna*	
2	Black-crested Antshrike	*Sakesphorus canadensis*	Pair, together

#	Species	Binomial nomenclature	Notes
2	Barred Antshrike	*Thamnophilus doliatus*	Pair, together
1	Yellow-chinned Spinetail	*Certhiaxis cinnamomeus*	
4	Yellow-bellied Elaenia	*Elaenia flavogaster*	
1	White-headed Marsh Tyrant	*Arundinicola leucocephala*	Occupied nest, next to wasp nest at Turure
6	Pied Water-Tyrant	*Fluvicola pica*	
8	Great Kiskadee	*Pitangus sulphuratus*	
6	Tropical Kingbird	*Tyrannus melancholicus*	
3	Rufous-browed Peppershrike	*Cyclarhis gujanensis*	
5	Gray-breasted Martin	*Progne chalybea*	
8	Southern Rough-winged Swallow	*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*	
1	Long-billed Gnatwren	*Ramphocaenus melanurus*	
9	House Wren	*Troglodytes aedon*	
5	Tropical Mockingbird	*Mimus gilvus*	
1	Spectacled Thrush	*Turdus nudigenis*	
2	Red-breasted Meadowlark	*Leistes militaris*	Adult male carrying food, Turure
4	Crested Oropendola	*Psarocolius decumanus*	
4	Yellow-rumped Cacique	*Cacicus cela*	
2	Yellow Oriole	*Icterus nigrogularis*	
2	Shiny Cowbird	*Molothrus bonariensis*	
1	Giant Cowbird	*Molothrus oryzivorus*	
2	Carib Grackle	*Quiscalus lugubris*	At Turure
9	Yellow-hooded Blackbird	*Chrysomus icterocephalus*	
2	Masked Yellowthroat	*Geothlypis aequinoctialis*	
4	Yellow Warbler	*Setophaga petechia*	
38	Dickcissel	*Spiza americana*	One flock had 30+
5	Silver-beaked Tanager	*Ramphocelus carbo*	3 male, 2 female, all together
6	Blue-gray Tanager	*Thraupis episcopus*	
1	Palm Tanager	*Thraupis palmarum*	
6	Grassland Yellow-Finch	*Sicalis luteola*	Turure, could have been more
8	Blue-black Grassquit	*Volatinia jacarina*	
8	Bananaquit	*Coereba flaveola*	

CAIMAN HILL WORKERS HOPE FOR A NATIONAL PARK

By Mario Rusell

Caiman Hill workers

All photos by Mario Rusell

We all know daily exercise is important for our health and mental wellbeing. Citizens are looking for destinations where they can take walks in the mountains and at the same time feel safe and secure. They want to feel comfortable and know they would not be ambushed or have their vehicle broken into. In the North, the most popular places are the Queen's Park Savannah, Lady Chancellor Hill and in recent times the trail above Chancellor Lookout known as The Pines or Breezy Hill. In Chaguaramas, there is Mt Catherine and in the Tucker Valley Region, there is the golf course, Bamboo Cathedral and Plane Crash Site. In the east, a popular destination is St Michael Road, which includes Saltfish Hill, Marabunta Trail and continues onwards to Lopinot. Mt St Benedict Pines is another area of interest for those seeking exercise.

A place that is gaining popularity among fitness and nature enthusiast is Caiman Hill. The trail starts at the top of the hill inside Caiman Road in Maracas, St Joseph Valley. The distance to the Caiman Hill View Point is 2km and is along a wide-open dirt road. The trail meanders but rises constantly and upon reaching the top there is the option to divert to a steeper climb. The altitude at View Point is 430m and during World War 11, the Americans used this area as a heliport. The hill overlooks the East to West Corridor where there are breathtaking views of Aranguez, El Socorro and Caroni Plains. The trail continues further west for 2.5km and ends at another heliport located just above Quarry Road. For those looking for an extra challenge, the trail offers numerous options, where one can descend one ridgeline and climb back up another. Along the ridge, tracks descend to Champ Fleur, Mt Hope and Upper Bushe Street. The

Along the trail

ridgeline is full of panoramas that are just mind-blowing. Heading north, the trail continues up the mountain in the direction of the Maracas, St Joseph, Valley. The peak is known as Mt. Cayman (730m), however, accessing the summit is a separate challenge. To the northwest, there are stunning views of Saddle Road, Santa Cruz Valley, Petite Curacaye and Grand Curacaye Road. Prominent in the distance is Mt. La Vigie (670m), which is the highest peak in the Santa Cruz Valley.

The Caiman Ridgeline is most vulnerable to bush fires and to prevent this the trails need constant maintenance. The wild shrub grows abundantly on the trails. Over the years, hectares of mountains have been destroyed by bushfires. Three crews are employed to work the 4.5km stretch, which extends from Caiman Road all the way to San Juan. In some areas, pine trees have been planted along with Syzygium cumini, which is locally known as jamoon.

The crew at Caiman Hill is enthusiastic about its increasing popularity. They aim to set up facilities that will complement the landscape and encourage more people to visit. The technical adviser to the group is Mr Darien Jones who has professional experience in reforestation. He works with the National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme {NRWRP} which is controlled by the Rural Development Corporation. The team working the hill is spearheaded by Mr Eric Herbert, aka Shaka, who follows the guidance of Mr Jones on the reforestation program. Despite the lockdowns, Eric and his team have planted thousands of trees over the past eighteen months. They include almonds, black–heart, cedar, mangoes, nutmeg, soursop, tamarind, yellow poui, mahogany, pommerac, and penny piece. Many of the trees planted are to support and encourage wildlife in the area. Outsiders may not be aware of the significant role of reforestation. A fire can easily spread and destroy valuable real estate. The efforts by Eric and his team have been highly praised by some communities for their effort in fire prevention.

Each morning at around 6 am, the forty workers walk the 45-minute trek. Getting to the top of Mt Cayman requires great effort especially when they have to carry heavy equipment. They walk carrying their garden tools, which consist of bush cutters, weed wacker etc. They are inspired by the compliments received from people walking the hill. Their efforts have attracted a lot of visitors who go up there to exercise and hike. Even families go for walks and take their dogs. Visitors are so impressed by its ambience. Their comments are "we never knew up here is so beautiful", " it is one of T&T's

best-kept secrets". The habitat is clean, serene, scenic and safe. A variety of wildlife such as agouti, deer and manicou play hide and seek in the forest. On mornings, the red and green macaws fly daily across the valley. In the evenings, large flocks of mainly orange-winged parrots raid the trees in search of food. Echoing through the valley is the channel-billed toucans that give a "Ki-aarh" sound

Eric, who is a marathon runner, cares about promoting a healthy lifestyle. He is passionate about the project and takes great pride in his work. For his efforts, he has received high praises. He can push his team to the limits with his positive, focused and enthusiastic attitude. Through his reforestation programme, he has been able to employ many of the youths who are now in a position to further uplift themselves. The team is so proud of their achievements. They hope to turn the place into a national park. They want families to visit and enjoy nature. Their goal in the next few months is to set up a picnic area. Using material from the land, they plan to build rest huts and swings. Although they are not seeking financial assistance they do require signs to identify the name and species of the trees. They want to encourage a clean environment by placing "no littering" signs. Interested organisations are welcome to donate and can place their logo on the sign. Once they have completed their restoration goals they plan to have an official launch and invite groups involved in outdoor activities.

Wildlife– Two-headed lizard

At work

SUNDAY 31ST MARCH 2024.

SAPPHIRE WATERFALL AND POOL

By Max Sheppard

On Sunday 31st I went to Sapphire Waterfall in a group of 26 with the Field Naturalists Club. Before heading to the falls, we stopped off at Blanchisseuse - Arima main road near an eco-lodge, for a look at the planted vegetation. The plants we noted included the cocorite palm (*Attalea maripa*), which is the national fruit of Trinidad and Tobago and carapo (*Carapa guianensis*). We also noted *Inga setifera*, *Mangifera indica* (mango, which was flowering), *Philodendron sp*,. ficus *nymphaeifolia* (strangler fig), *Citrus jambhiri* (rough skin lemon), *Allamanda cathartica* (buttercup, which was bearing prickly seed -containing fruit), *Cymbopogon citratus* (lemongrass), *Tamarindus indica* (tamarind), *Asclepias syriaca* L. (milkweed), *Carica papaya* (pawpaw, which was male and therefore did not have any fruit - it was discussed that tea made from the leaf could be used as a home remedy to increase platelet count in the blood), *Saccharum officinarum* (sugar cane - we saw "bamboo cane"), *Neurolaena integrifolia* (zebapique or jackass bitters, which can be made into a tea to treat common cold and flu symptoms) and *Spondias cythera* (small pomsite, which bears fruits and flowers all year).

On the short trail to the waterfall itself, we noted *Abrus precatorius* (crab-eye grass), *Scleria secans* (sedge, more commonly known as razor grass), *Melistoma*, *Baccharis sp*., *Bambusa vulgaris* (Trinidad's common bamboo, a species of giant grass native to China), and *Spatifilium cena* (maraval lily).

Maraval Lily

All photos by Jeffrey Wong Sang

Sapphire Waterfalls

We also passed a shrine to the Hindu Monkey God Hanuman, which was near to the road. The trail leading took a little over 10 minutes for the group. The pool was quite deep (around 3.5m or11ft.) at its deepest point by my estimate) and quite swimmable. After a refreshing half-hour or so, the group headed back out.

Dan showing the seeds inside of the Carapo fruit

NATURE IN THE NEWS

Compiled by Kris Sookdeo

February 2024

Game wardens rescued an albino Burmese python at Kallian Street, Las Lomas Number Two on February 10. A 57-year-old resident was taken into custody regarding the offence of possession of a protected animal under the Conservation of Wildlife Act

A Sangre Grande businessman has sued the Chief Game Warden for seizing over 200 exotic birds from his home in Sangre Grande in September 2021, where game wardens raided his home and seized the birds included rosellas, macaws, parrots, conures, parakeets, finches, cockatoos, and sparrows. Tortoises were also seized.

Following the disclosure of plans to construct a breeding cage for flamingos at the Caroni Swamp Visitor Centre, Agriculture Minister Kazim Hosein has assured the public that no flamingos will placed in cages at the Caroni Swamp after objection were raised (including objections from the TTFNC).

Ten golden-winged parakeets and two wedge-capped capuchin monkeys were found at a residence at Blue Basin Road, Diego Martin. Six hundred and ninety-five grammes of cannabis were also allegedly found during the search.

A barge overturned off the coast of Tobago on February 7th and began leaking hydrocarbons into the sea. The leak finally ceased on March 7th.

Photo of satellite image by Maxar Technologies
(as published on the Loop T&T News on February 28, 2024

MANAGEMENT NOTICES

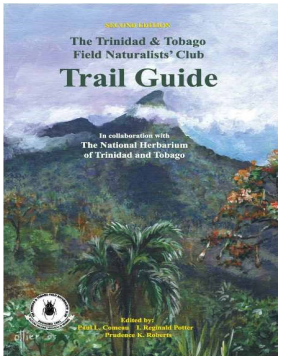
TTFNC COMMUNITY PAGE: A place for members of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club to share their passion for the natural environment https://community.ttfnc.org/

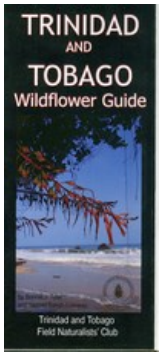
Please send us your ideas and observations to admin@ttfnc.org for inclusion in the next Bulletin!

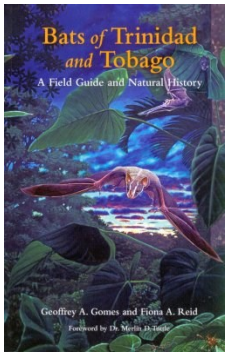
Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club
P.O. Box 642, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

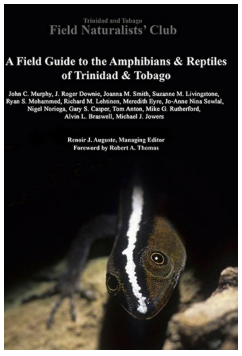
PUBLICATIONS

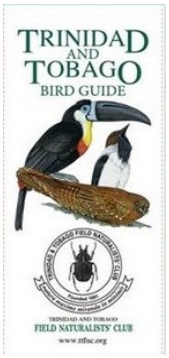
The following Club publications are available to members and non-members (*prices shown are those paid when purchasing directly from the Club*):











TTFNC Trail Guide ($150); T&T Wildflower Guide ($50); Bats of T&T ($200); Field Guide to Amphibians & Reptiles ($180); 2022 Living World Journal (*$60);* TTFNC Bird Guide ($50).

MISCELLANEOUS

Your 2024 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 'QB2023' in the email subject label.**