

ENVIRONMENT

A Naturalists' View: Lagoon Bouffe



TRACKS in the soft mud reveal that spectacled caiman.



CLUMPS of the bromeliad *Aechmea aquilega*.

THE TTFNC visited Lagoon Bouffe during the month of May. Located along Edward's Trace in Guayaguayare, it is unique among our mud volcanoes in that it comprises of several low vents which are so situated that the mud and water discharge accumulates to form a large "lake."

The clearing that surrounds a mud volcano is known as a tassik and the Lagoon Bouffe tassik is one of the largest in Trinidad. Mud volcanoes owe their existence to the presence of natural gas deep underground that slowly escapes to the surface, bringing with it water, dissolved salts and some trace amounts of oil.

Large stands of sea-side mahoe (*Pariti tiliaceum*) grow around the boundary of the Lagoon Bouffe tassik. As the name implies, these plants are typically found in coastal environments. Their presence at this mud volcano is due to the dissolved salts that are present in the volcano's discharge, adequately replicating seaside conditions. These plants have been documented from at least two other inland sites, at Matura and Mt Tamana, which were most likely colonised back when sea levels were higher and these areas were part of the shoreline.

The drier ground around the tassik

is colonised by clumps of the bromeliad *Aechmea aquilega*.

More typically seen as an epiphyte growing on trees, these bromeliads occasionally take to the ground in suitable areas and can be seen growing in a similar fashion at other mud volcanoes in the country. Other notable trees around the tassik include the matapal (*Clusia rosea*) and the cannonball tree (*Couroupita guianensis*).

Despite the hostile conditions, animals do live in the shallow mud and water slurry in the lake.

These tracks in the soft mud reveal that spectacled caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*) are present. The caimans share the water with small guppies (*Poecilia reticulata*) and birds such as the striated heron (*Butorides striata*). Mammals, such as red brocket deer (*Mazama americana*), are known to visit the lake to search for and consume the valuable salt in the mud.

For more information on our natural environment, you can contact the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club at admin@ttfnc.org or visit our website at www.ttfnc.org. The Club's next monthly meeting will be held on July 10 at St Mary's College, PoS.



THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB



LAGOON BOUFFE



PARITI TILIACEUM