



# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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January 2014



Photo by Peter O'Connor

Asa's Eco Team at Aripo, from left: Johanne Ryan, Kimberly Chu Foon, Denise Etienne.

## THE ENGINE ROOM

Most people know the Asa Wright Nature Centre as an idyllic sanctuary and bird watchers' paradise. Of course, you come to stay in our lodge, and discover beautiful birds with our wonderful Nature Guides. You enjoy the early mornings on our verandah with the birds surrounding you, and

the beautiful panorama of rainforest spread beyond, and at the end of the day, you watch the night arrive with nectar-sipping bats replacing the humming birds at the verandah feeders. You will enjoy our cuisine, the trips off-site to the many special birding sites beyond our valley, and the night walks in the forest under the stars, and wonder at their brightness in the absence of ambient light.

But all of these wonders are not the reasons we are here. Yes, they all provide the support and the means for us to fulfil the Mission of the Centre, which is "To preserve a part of the Arima Valley in its natural state; to create a conservation and study area; and to protect the wildlife thereon for the enjoyment and benefit of all persons of this and succeeding generations".

And your presence here supports this Mission, the actual work of which is done by a small team of dedicated persons who work as Education, Conservation and Outreach Officers from an office below the Verandah. Our "ECO Team" of Johanne Ryan (Education), Kimberly Chu Foon (Conservation) and Denise Etienne (Outreach) are the ones who do the work to fulfil our Mission Statement. They work with schoolchildren, environmentalists and with the valley communities to ensure that you, and your children will enjoy and benefit from our preserving a beautiful and pristine rainforest in our valley and beyond. Their office is really the "Engine Room" for the Centre's Mission. We will tell you more about these people in subsequent editions.





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## MOLLY MOVES ON

The end of January saw the departure from Asa Wright of one of our best known and loved Nature Guides. Molly Calderon has been associated with the Centre for many years, and has decided to call it a day (and night, for our Guides are here to escort you on your night walks and to ensure that when the birds awaken with the dawn, that the feeders will be filled with sugar water). Molly has had a long association with Asa Wright – her father was the first guide at the Centre – and she will be missed by all. Best wishes to you, Molly, and thank you for the memories!

Photo by Peter O'Connor

*Molly at the Staff Christmas Lunch*



# The 2013 Christmas Bird Count



Photo by Vishnu Debie

*Participants looking for birds at the 2013 Christmas Bird Count*

Have you ever participated in a Christmas Bird Count? If you haven't, you can always try out the next one just around Christmas time. The annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is a census of birds that was developed by the National Audubon Society. It is done in many different places and by people from a wide range of backgrounds. Avid birdwatchers however, usually take keen interest in this event. The aim of the count is to provide basic population data that can be quite useful in conservation biology. It also serves as a fun day out for many!

The Christmas Bird Count in Trinidad for 2013, occurred on Sunday 29th December. Counts were done at the

Asa Wright Nature Centre, Caroni Swamp, Caroni Plains, Aripo Livestock Station, Caura/ Lopinot Valley, La la ja, Las Lapas/Morne Bleu, Wallerfield, Maracas Valley amongst a few others.

What a fantastic event it was! People from all over came together to participate, even a few eager kids tagged along. Geared up with their binoculars and bird checklists, they ventured out into the field where they tried their best to spot as many birds as they could. Although it may sound easy, counting birds can be quite difficult. Some birds are easy to spot but others can be excellent at hiding and at times you can only depend on their calls to identify them.

At the end of it all, a total of 192 bird species and 9,163 individual birds were recorded! Some highlights included Bright-rumped Attilas at Maracas Valley, a mottled owl at the Aripo Livestock station and Red-bellied Macaws at Cumuto/Arena Forest/Piarco.

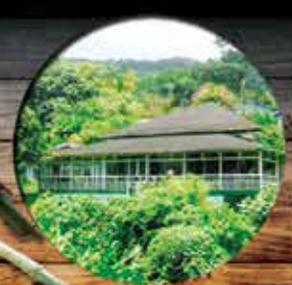
Thanks to all of the enthusiastic participants at this event, the CBC was able to cover a wide area and get quite a good tally in. If you're interested in participating in the next CBC, feel free to contact the Asa Wright Nature Centre for further information.

Written by: Kimberly Chu Foon



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Photo by Richard Butler

## RED BROCKET DEER SIGHTING

Frequent readers of our newsletter may recall an article on the Red Brocket deer in our September 2013 issue. It turns out it was in good timing because we recently had a sighting of a deer down at our Dunston Cave! On Saturday 11th January a group of eight guests ventured down to the cave on the 8:30 a.m. Oilbird Tour with their guide Barry Ramdass. As they neared the cave that they spotted the deer in what would be the first

sighting in a very long time. The deer entered the cave as they approached it and a quick snapshot was taken by one of the guests as they went inside. He graciously provided us with the photo. It's always a good sign to have sightings of animals that are considered to be rare. Hopefully there will be many more to come!

Written by: Kimberly Chu Foon



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## Turquoise Tanager (*Tangara mexicana vieillotii*)



Photo by Caleb Walker

Turquoise Tanagers are rarely found alone. While their light chirps do not stand out, their colour certainly does. The Turquoise Tanager is one of a kind in Trinidad – it does not resemble any other species found here. Look out for it at forest edges, in secondary growth and in cultivated areas.

Apart from Amazonia, its major stomping ground, and Brazil's Atlantic forest, the only other place this bird is found is on the island of Trinidad. In fact, the subspecies *Tangara mexicana vieillotii* is said to be endemic to Trinidad. This subspecies is distinguished by a darker blue

head and breast but brighter yellow underparts.

Our special Tanager owes its name to the turquoise patches on the upperwing coverts or the 'shoulder' area. The bird also has a blue face, rump and flanks. However, it has a black crown, back, wings and tail and yellow underparts.

This five and a half inch bird forages for fruit and sometimes insects. They often take fruit of the *Miconia* spp. and *Cecropia peltata* (Bois Canoe). At the Asa Wright Nature Centre they are regularly seen eating berries from Wild Tobacco and *Trema* trees.

In Trinidad, breeding has been recorded from April to October. In its nest of moss and roots one would find a clutch of three grey-green eggs.

Come to the Asa Wright Nature Centre and you may be fortunate enough to add Turquoise Tanager to your Life List!

By Johanne Ryan

*References: french, Richard. A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago. Cornell University Press. 2012.*

*Hilty, Steven L. Birds of Venezuela. Princeton University Press. 2003.*

### YOUNG ENVIRONMENTALIST OF THE MONTH

If you think your child has done something helpful to preserve the environment, please feel free to share it with us. Either write a short story, or send a few pictures to [dinetienne44@gmail.com](mailto:dinetienne44@gmail.com)

He/she may be selected as our Young Environmentalist for the month! Once your child is featured in our monthly newsletter, he/she and two adults will be given a complimentary day visit to Asa Wright Nature Center, which includes viewing birds/animals on the verandah, a nature tour and use of the clear-water pool. Ages 5-16.

