



# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



www.asawright.org Tel: (868) 667-4655 Email: asawright@tstt.net.tt

July 2015



*The group*

## Glimpses of the Guides

By Johanne Ryan

**Name:** Natalie Clement  
**Position:** Naturalist Guide  
**Working at AWC since:** 2014



*Natalie enjoys the forest atmosphere*  
Photo by Cherry Ann Dookram

Natalie hails from the village of Matura. She holds a degree in Hospitality and Tourism from the SITAL College of Tertiary Education and completed a course in Tour Guiding at the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme. Natalie also works right in her own 'backyard', doing turtle patrols with Nature Seekers.

*Continued on page 2*

## Seeing for themselves

By Peter O'Connor

The staff at Asa Wright generally know of the wonders of Trinidad's beautiful nature sites, from the descriptions of awe struck guests returning from the Caroni and Nariva wetlands, or the Aripo savannahs or Blanchisseuse forests, and of course the turtles at Matura and Grande Riviere.

It is of course important for all of us at Asa to know something of these wondrous places, so we can share in the appreciation shown by our guests. So in July, our chefs, kitchen and dining room staff set off together for Grande Riviere to see the Leatherback Turtles and our endemic Pawi Bird (Piping Guan). Our team of 17 persons enjoyed dinner and the overnight stay at the Mt Plasir Hotel on the beach at Grande Riviere. Unfortunately no adult turtles came up, but several hatchlings were seen, scrambling across the sand, heading for the sea

and their destiny.

The following morning we journeyed to the edge of the forest to see the Pawi, and were treated to clear sightings of three birds, feeding quite close to us. Most of us had never seen the Pawi before.

Fulfilled by these sightings, we returned to Mt. Plasir and a good creole brunch before returning to Arima. And now we have more members of staff who can relate to, and speak of, the wonders of Grande Riviere!



*Kurchelle shows Indira how to use the telescope* Photos by Ann Sealey





# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



JULY • PAGE 2

July 2015

*Natalie Clement from page 1*

**What are your hobbies?**

Singing, hiking. I love nature. I hike all over Trinidad. The best places I have hiked to so far are Rio Seco and Paria Falls.

**What do you like most about working at AWNC?**

The atmosphere – it brings out something in me. By being here, I feel like it's worth living. I like the birds and different animals, and meeting and interacting with different types of people.

**What has been your most memorable experience working at AWNC so far?**

The first time I came here and saw the birds. I never knew there were so many different types of birds and that they had specific names. My favourite is the Silver-beaked Tanager. Since I have started working here one person who stood out was Denise when she taught us how to identify the different types of hummingbirds.

**Name: Tonya-Lee Phillip**  
**Position: Naturalist Guide**  
**Working at AWNC since: 2014**



*Tonya on AWNC's Discovery Trail*  
*Photo by Johanne Ryan*

**T**onya holds a BSc. in Geography from the University of the West Indies. She likes flying (airplanes), already has her Private Pilot's License and hopes one day to be a helicopter pilot.

**What are your hobbies?**

Going to the beach, Latin dancing, partying. I used to dance in school whenever there was any celebration.

**What do you like most about working at AWNC?**

The environment – the natural and work environment. It is relaxing to work here. I am gaining an interest in birds. I didn't know there were so many hummingbirds and other birds in Trinidad.

**What has been your most memorable experience working at AWNC so far?**

Seeing an anteater here – it was the first time I saw it. The first time I saw a Fer de Lance was exciting. That day I was actually looking out for a snake and I saw one.

I have learnt a lot about birds and nature so far. I enjoy not just sharing it with guests but also with family. I had a good time when my sister came and spent the entire day. I taught her about the birds. My immediate family is not really into nature so it is nice to know that I can be the one to teach them.

## 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 of 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.





# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



JULY • PAGE 3

July 2015



*A traditional Hog Island send-off Photo by Johanne Ryan*

## Puffins and more

Story by Johanne Ryan

I breathe in the cool, crisp air as our boat makes its way across Muscongus Bay. As I set foot on Hog Island, I am enthralled by its beauty and peace. Spruce, pine and birch trees traverse the 330 acres, where wildlife abounds. An osprey and its chicks sit in their nest. The atmosphere invokes a sense of wonder.

Hog Island is home to the Audubon Camp in Maine, where environmental education camps have been conducted since 1936. Now, all the Hog Island programmes are run by Project Puffin, a seabird restoration programme pioneered by Dr. Stephen Kress, which successfully brought Atlantic Puffins back to Eastern Egg Rock. For 2015, the Hands-on Bird Science Session was inaugurated into the series of



*Hummingbird banding Photo by Johanne Ryan*

camps and I was excited to receive the opportunity to attend the camp. I was ready for this avian experience.

Guided by our experts, we prepared museum specimens and recorded bird songs. I had the privilege of recording the songs of Great Blue Herons, Great Black-

backed Gulls and Herring Gulls. Our group was taught the technique of point counts and the extra treat was seeing birds like the Black-throated Green Warbler – a new species for me. We delved into songbird

*Continued on next page*



# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



JULY • PAGE 4

July 2015

## Puffins and more (continued)

From previous page

and hummingbird banding. Hummingbirds are banded with a ring so tiny, they fit just around the wire of a safety pin. I was thrilled to be able to hold the Ruby-throated Hummingbird and feel the beating of its heart.

Nearby islands were sites for special activities – Wreck Island, where Great Blue Herons have been historically nesting, and Ross Island where Great Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls nest. We were fortunate to observe some chicks. I thoroughly enjoyed the bird walk along the Great Salt Bay Wildlife Preserve, inhabited by the charismatic Bobolinks there to observe video recording. My sightings included Yellow Warblers, Cedar Waxwings, an Osprey with a catch of the day and a woodchuck, for the first time. A special trip, was the one to Eastern Egg Rock to see the Atlantic Puffins. I looked on eagerly as Puffins whizzed past our boat and floated on the water. The allure of a puffin is not to be underestimated. The story of the Puffins' return is nothing short of inspirational. Atlantic Puffins nested at Eastern Egg Rock until about 1885, but had fallen prey to hunters who took the last of the surviving colony. Project Puffin, started in 1973, involved a lot of hard work – transplanting puffins, regular feeding, special diets and wooden puffin decoys.

Our days were punctuated by scrumptious and healthy meals prepared by Chef Cleo and the volunteers. Stimulating evening programmes wound down the days. We heard about Project Puffin from Dr. Stephen Kress, Tom Johnson's work on line transect surveys and hummingbird research from Fred Dietrich. Scott Weidensaul, Director



The Atlantic Puffins Photo by Johanne Ryan



Seals on one of the islands Photo by Johanne Ryan

of the Hands-on Bird Science Camp, engaged us with his presentation on Project SNOWstorm. For the project, scientists use GPS-GSM transmitters to track Snowy Owls to learn more about their behaviour and the reasons for their irruptions. On their journey, some Snowy Owls would spend months on floating ice.

What a delight to have spent another week on Hog Island! I participated in the Educator's Week in 2011. I would like to thank the instructors and volunteers – the powerhouses of the camp. Thank you for the Guillemot birthday cake! Thank you to the National Audubon Society, the Asa Wright Nature Centre and the U.S. Friends of Asa Wright for making my trip possible.

Preparing a bird study skin of an American Robin  
Photo by Caroline Stern



**'Morning Prime' Appearance**  
The Asa Wright Nature Centre's Conservation Officer, Kimberly Chu Foon, made an appearance on the *Morning Prime* television show on Monday 20th July 2015. The live programme aired on Channel Four. During the interview, she was able to highlight the conservation and education work done by the Centre, some of the activities that visitors can do here, and the importance of environmental education in young children.



## The 18th Hummingbird in Trinidad and Tobago: The Amethyst Woodstar

By Kimberly Chu Foon

It's always an ecstatic moment for birders when a new species arrives on the scene. It turns out that several weeks ago, a new hummingbird made its way to the "Land of the Hummingbirds" and it is called the Amethyst Woodstar (*Calliphlox amethystina*). The first sighting was of a juvenile male (see image) on May 24th to June 14th 2015 at Lopinot by the Asa Wright Nature Centres Chairman, Graham White. Two more sightings came shortly after at the Asa Wright Nature Centre on June 17th to 18th and at Yerette on June 30th. Upon initial observation, it may be easy to mistake this hummingbird with the Rufous-shafted Woodstar, which is rare in Trinidad but has been recorded on several instances. As to why there is a sudden appearance of this hummingbird in Trinidad. It has been suggested that an out-of-ordinary occurrence in their natural range may have resulted in these birds venturing to Trinidad at this particular time. It remains to be seen whether more sightings of this bird will be reported.

In terms of its range, the Amethyst Woodstar is distributed throughout several countries in South America including eastern Colombia, southern Venezuela, the Guianas, eastern Ecuador, northeastern Peru, Brazil, Paraguay and north-eastern Argentina. Its movements are poorly understood but it is listed mainly as sedentary with some local dispersion. It is primarily found in



*Amethyst Woodstar by Graham White*

habitats such as forest edges, open or semi-open areas, savannah and scrubland and feeds on the nectar of a variety of brightly coloured flowers including *Anacardium*, *Bowdichia* and *Calliandra*. To obtain their source of protein, particularly during the breeding season, they sometimes feed on small spiders and insects.

The Amethyst Woodstar is small and measures from 6 to 7 cm in length. The upperparts of this species has a dark green-bronze appearance with a white spot on each flank. The underparts are mottled green-gray. The male is outstanding with its brilliant, iridescent, amethyst-coloured throat located just above a white collar. Behind each eye is a white spot and the bill is short, straight and black in colour. His tail is deeply forked. The female has pale orange underparts and her dark green outer tail feathers are shorter than the male's and have a black band and pale tips.

With the arrival of this new species, birders better keep an eye out! Who knows what else may show up!

*Please note that the above is subject to ratification by the Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee.*

### References:

BirdLife International 2012. *Calliphlox amethystina*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2015.2. <[www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)>. Downloaded on 31 July 2015

Fogden, M., Taylor, M. and Williamson, S. (2014). *Hummingbirds A Life-size Guide to Every Species*. Harper Design.

Züchner, T. & Kirwan, G.M. (2013). *Amethyst Woodstar (Calliphlox amethystina)*. In: del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., Sargatal, J., Christie, D.A. & de Juana, E. (eds.) (2013). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (retrieved from <http://www.hbw.com/node/55648> on 29 July 2015).



# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



JULY • PAGE 6

July 2015

## Republic Support

By Peter O'Connor

We are encouraged by the increasing awareness from corporations and individuals of their need to support ecological and environmental programmes and projects. Support can take many forms, from clean-up or tree planting volunteerism, to the funding of entities whose missions are to protect and preserve the environment.

Asa Wright's Valley Schools Outreach Programme (VSOP), where we work to develop environmental awareness and appreciation among the schools in our valleys, is an ongoing practical education project. On Thursday 10th July, we were pleased to welcome Nadia Williams and Rehanna Ramroop, both from Republic Bank's Social Investment Department to meet our Conservation Officers Kimberly Chu Foon and Johanne Ryan, and to join us for lunch. Following the luncheon, our Chairman, Graham White accepted Republic's generous donation of \$10,000.00 to the VSOP.

The *Bellbird* sends a loud "Thank you!" to Nadia and Rehanna and Republic Bank for their support!



*AWCN Chair, Graham White receives a donation from Republic's Rehanna Ramroop Photo by Johanne Ryan*

## Rush Hour of the Leaf Cutter Ants

By Daniel Keller

While many of my classmates from SU focused on the birds and vegetation at Asa, I scrutinised life on the forest floor and thus became enamored with what I believe to be Asa's most diligent worker, the humble leafcutter ant. I watched these little workaholics march tirelessly around the clock, hauling scores of leaves and flowers and whatever they could get their powerful mandibles around. I even saw one carrying an old potato chip scrap! I wondered what exactly are the work hours of these guys. Did they break, or get days off or cancellations due to inclement weather? I wanted to know!

So for four days, every few hours I hiked on one of Asa's nature trails in search of the ants' highways and measured their traffic patterns. I took into account the time of day, temperature, humidity and many other environmental factors to better understand when these little guys were clocking in and clocking out. I found that leafcutter ants were five to 10 times more active during nighttime surveys (at 9 p.m.) compared to dawn, mid-morning, noon, afternoon and dusk surveys. Interestingly, while ants were not active during heavy rains, I did not find any correlations between ant activity and either temperature or humidity. In the future, I might like to expand the survey to track movements of the different castes.



*Ant activity  
Photo by Reema Persad-Clem*



# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



JULY • PAGE 7

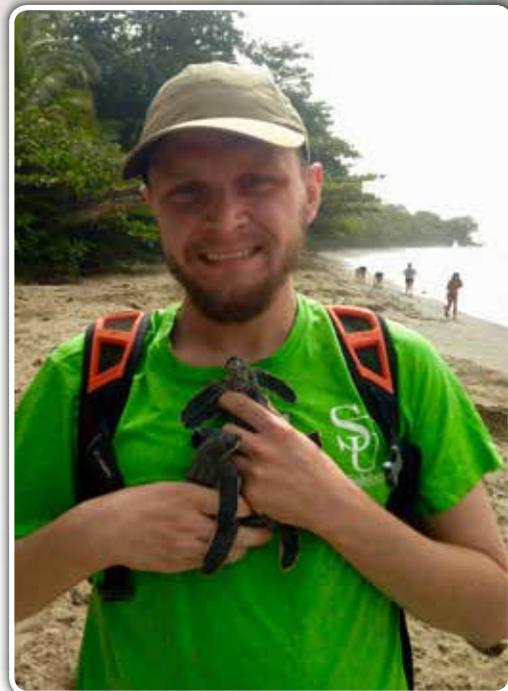
July 2015

## On Birds and Blooms

By Chase Douglas

I was intrigued by the diversity of hummingbird species at Asa and wanted to help characterise hummingbird biodiversity between the bird blind and the veranda path. I hypothesized that there would be a higher percentage of smaller hummingbirds e.g. Tufted Coquettes and Copper Rumps near the bird blind due to less competition, more suitable atmospheric conditions and preferred blooms. I predicted that the larger hummingbirds, e.g. White-necked Jacobin and the Green Hermits would prefer the veranda path because they would have to expend less energy flying to their food and because the larger nectar producing flowers suited for their specialised beaks are more common in that location. I spent four days surveying hummingbird diversity

at both locations at regular intervals during the day and also collected data on environmental variables. While I found no significant difference in the diversity of hummingbirds between the two sites and no effect of environmental variables, there were species differences in the diversity between the two sites. For instance, while the White-necked Jacobin never once appeared at the bird blind, the White-chested Emeralds appeared significantly more often near the veranda path, and the Tufted Coquette had significantly more appearances at the bird blind. Hummingbirds have preferences for certain plant species that better suit their energy and bill requirements, and my study shows that the major contributing factor in hummingbird diversity in an area is what plants are available in that area. I plan on sharing my results at a research conference at my university in April 2016.



In Trinidad Photo by Reema Persad-Clem

## White-fronted Capuchin

(*Cebus albifrons*)



Photo by Courtney van Beek

By Johanne Ryan

Monkeys never cease to amaze us, especially when they exhibit human-like behaviour. Here are some facts on one of our native species of monkeys, The White-fronted Capuchin.

• White-fronted Capuchins are diurnal and social. They associate in groups that average 25 individuals. Each

group is headed by a dominant male and female.

- During a one to two year period, the capuchin births a single young and both sexes may contribute to caring for the young.
- White-fronted Capuchins can live for an average of 40 years in the wild.
- They primarily eat fruit and occasionally take insects and small invertebrates. They, like all monkeys, are important seed dispersers.
- They have a loud alarm call used to scare off predators and warn others when a predator is near.
- There are several sub-species of this monkey which are found in a range of countries in north-western South America. However, the subspecies *Cebus albifrons trinitatis* is restricted to Trinidad.
- The White-fronted Capuchin is generally light brown with very sparse fur on the face, which makes the facial peach-

coloured flesh more apparent. The males are larger than the females.

- In Trinidad, major threats to the species are hunting and habitat destruction.
- Although White-fronted Capuchins are generally listed a Least Concern on the IUCN Red List, the subspecies *Cebus albifrons trinitatis* is listed as Critically Endangered due to its small population size in Trinidad.

At the Nariva Swamp, you may take a boat to the Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary and end up in Capuchin territory.

### References:

Mijal, M. 2001. "Cebus albifrons" (On-line), Animal Diversity Web. Accessed August 04, 2015 at [http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Cebus\\_albifrons/](http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Cebus_albifrons/)

de la Torre, S., Morales, A. L., Link, A. & Cornejo, F. 2008. Cebus albifrons. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2015.2. <[www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)>. Downloaded on 04 August 2015.