



# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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March 2016

## Global Environment Facility's Site Visit at AWNC

By Kimberly Chu Foon

The Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP) provides financial and technical support to projects that conserve and restore the environment while enhancing people's well-being and livelihoods. It has funded several of AWNC's activities over the last few years, including some of our educational materials and workshops for community members such as bamboo building and chocolate making.

In early March, GEF held a four-day Expanded Constituency Workshop for over 100 participants from various countries throughout the Caribbean region. The last day of this workshop was designated as a site visit where participants would get the opportunity to learn about a successful GEF SGP project. The Asa Wright Nature Centre was selected as the site for this final day and we were proud to showcase our work over the years under the small grants programme.

On the day of the site visit, five information stations were set up at and around the AWNC main house. Each station represented a beneficiary of our GEF SGP project. These included conservation and research, education, ecotourism, community and finance. Staff members most familiar with each aspect of the project were able to share their experiences with the participants. Community members were also present to display items such as handmade crafts, chocolates and ponche de crème. At the end of the presentation at each station, participants received a "passport stamp" to confirm that they had been there and had learned all about the activities for that project.

Those involved were taken on a nature walk with our naturalist tour guides. Many of them had not seen much of Trinidad due to the intensive workshop so this was an excellent opportunity for them to do so. At the end of the day, participants were treated to a wonderful poem entitled "The Verandah" by our staff member Pamela Allemany.

A special thank you goes out to all of the staff who made this day possible. It was truly a team effort that turned out to be a wonderful success for the Centre as well as the GEF workshop.



Participants in the 'Mango Room' Photo by Ann Sealey



Martyn and Kimberly at the Conservation Station Photo by Ann Sealey



Pam looks on as GEF employees observe her handiwork Photo by Ann Sealey



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## 'In the America's' T&T Episode Showcases Asa Wright

By Johanne Ryan

Last year, we told you in our newsletter about the film crew of television series *In the Americas* visiting Asa Wright. Now, the episode on T&T, entitled 'Trinidad and Tobago: Where East meets West', has been released. It is a wonderful showcase of T&T's culture and environment. We would especially like you to check out the segment in which our very own Naturalist Guide, Jessie Pitt, leads series host David Yetman to the Dunston Cave at AWC. Jessie tells David Yetman all about the fascinating oilbirds. Catch the episode at

<http://intheamericas.org/works/trinidad-and-tobago-where-east-meets-west/>



A scene from the episode: Jessie and David Yetman at the Dunston Cave

### YOUNG ENVIRONMENTALIST OF THE MONTH

If you think your child, aged 5-16, 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 [asawrightconsedu@gmail.com](mailto:asawrightconsedu@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 Centre, which includes viewing birds/animals on the verandah, a nature tour and use of the clear water pool.





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## North Carolina State University Volunteers Return for Round Two

By Kimberly Chu Foon

Students from North Carolina State University returned to the Centre in March to continue the work completed last year by their group. If you are a frequent reader of our Newsletter, you may recall that the NCSU students in 2015 were responsible for building our oilbird platform and the nest boxes that can now be observed on our driveway. This year, the new group of volunteers worked alongside our maintenance staff, Winston Rojas and Cordel Rampaul, to rebuild our oilbird shed which was damaged by a large tree. They also helped to repair several of our trail railings along the Oilbird and Bamboo Valley trails. As coffee seemed to be a favourite of theirs, we gave them the opportunity to help us with some coffee harvesting as well.

Towards the end of their time with us, the group spent two days volunteering in the Valley Schools Outreach Programme. This was very well received by the young primary school students and they were all very excited to learn from them. Their lesson plans were fun filled with a variety of interactive activities that got the students on their feet and spending time outdoors. Some of their topics included pollution and water, global warming and land and plants.



*NCSU volunteers painting their newly built shed*  
Photo by Kimberly Chu Foon



*The railing repair line* Photo by Kimberly Chu Foon



*Beth Wright (left), facilitator from Peacework, looks on as volunteers interact with students of the Arima New Government Primary School* Photo by Johanne Ryan



## Japanese Volunteer Meets Trini Students

By Johanne Ryan

If you throw a plastic Coca-Cola bottle on the roadside, it is likely to stay intact for years. Yes, it will be moved. After the rain, water may carry it to drains and rivers and it will eventually reach the sea. But that plastic bottle will not decompose for hundreds of years. In fact, it may take approximately 450 years to break down. Hence the disposal of garbage, or municipal solid waste (MSW), is a worldwide issue which must be managed urgently.

Several countries have tackled their waste problem with many strategies. One such country is Japan where the 3 R's have been at the forefront of waste management. Japan sees 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' as key in dealing with MSW.

In our Valley Schools Outreach programme we have taught students about littering and the 3 R's. When it comes to trash and other environmental problems, education can help students form a link between what is and what could be. A litter-strewn neighbourhood park, for example, could be a clean and beautiful one if we all disposed of the litter in the right place. And if we recycle, the amount of waste produced would decrease. What is the connection between Japan and AWNC's teaching about littering?

In February, we were happy to host volunteer Ai Sugano, of Otsuma University, Japan, who did a presentation on Japan's recycling system for students of the Arima New Government Primary School. Students listened attentively as Ai spoke in her native language. We had the help of Monifa Blondell of Island Buddy Limited, who translated for us 'Trinis'. In Japan, garbage is separated into several categories for recycling. The categories, which vary by area, may include burnables, non-burnables, PET plastic bottles, other plastics, glass bottles, tin cans, small appliances and recycled paper. If items are incorrectly separated, the garbage is not collected. Ai also showed students the correct way to dispose of a plastic water bottle. First, you rinse the bottle. Then you remove the label and bottle cap. The label and cap must be placed in the bin



*Ai, with Monifa, speaks to the students*

*Photo by Johanne Ryan*

for 'burnables'. Finally, you crush the bottle. If the label is left on the bottle, it will not be collected. It was enlightening for students and AWNC staff to find out how Japan recycles. After this, children also learned about recycling in Trinidad and Tobago.

Ai's visit was a great opportunity for students to learn about Japanese culture. Students eagerly looked on as Ai swiftly folded an origami crane, a bird of the Japanese wetlands. Most children in Japan learn to make an origami crane, she said. Ai taught students to say hello (konnichiwa) and goodbye (sayonara). They were fascinated by the Japanese script. On request, Ai wrote students' names in Japanese writing, in their copybooks.

AWNC was happy to have Ai from Japan and Monifa from Island Buddy Limited at the classes. We say thank you in Japanese – 'Arigato gozaimasu'.



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## Unusual Sightings

By Martyn Kenefick

A juvenile Ornate Hawk-Eagle was seen well from the balcony on the 19th February. Nowadays, seeing the Ornate Hawk-Eagle at Springhill is quite a major event. They used to breed on the property but no longer do. It may be that their decline in the area is due to Black Hawk-Eagles taking over their territories. Despite this, Mukesh had a chance encounter with an adult which flew up from the entrance road early on 4th March and a different adult, this one with a much paler ginger crown, perched out in the open and was well seen from the balcony on the 20th and 21st March.

Finding a new species for Springhill nowadays is unusual. Finding two, in just a four-week period is almost unheard of. But it happened. After dark on the 29th February, a White-tailed Nightjar was found in the top car park. Whilst it is commonly found feeding along forested roads in Tobago, here in Trinidad it has a distinct preference for open lowland savannah. Not to be outdone, on 4th March, Ann found a Yellow-rumped Cacique getting far too close to some Oropendola nests, causing loud mayhem in the process.

Island-wide, the most exciting event of the period was a bird of prey photographed flying over Los Blanquiales on 5th March. Whilst this awaits assessment by the T&T Status and Distribution Committee, there is every likelihood that this is a Slender-billed Kite and a first documented record for the country.

We're approaching that time of year where birds from mainland South America arrive in Trinidad to breed. The first Swallow-tailed Kites, a party of 16, were seen catching flying insects over Salybia on 27th February and on the same day produced our first Swallow



*A Western Reef-Heron  
Photo by Daniel Lynch*

Tanagers of the season, a pair on Lalaja. The first was seen at the Centre on 7th March and a pair was found in a suitable nesting location on the 14th.

One of the best places to find unusual migrating warblers is the hilly cocoa estates at Gran Couva. On 5th March, an adult Tennessee Warbler was found. This species was first found in Trinidad as recently as 2014 and there have now been five recorded sightings. The following day, it was joined by a female Blackburnian Warbler, itself an extremely rare bird with only four documented sightings in the last 20 years. In the same tree, both American Redstart and Tropical Parula fed actively. By coincidence, another Blackburnian has been reported – this time from Grande Riviere.

There is still a bit of mystery surrounding the status of Variegated Flycatcher in Trinidad. In Richard French's day, it was considered to be a rare austral wanderer found occasionally in July-August. However in recent years, birds have been photographed in 11 months

out of 12 which clearly suggests a major change. On 27th February, a pair was seen actively displaying to each other at Hacienda Jacana, the closest indication yet that this species may now breed here. One was also found at the Aripo Livestock Station on the same day.

Elsewhere, a Boat-billed Heron has become a popular find for local photographers, roosting in some waterside bamboo close to Trincity and another was occasionally seen close to the Blue River in Caroni Swamp during early March. In the south-west, up to four adult Black Hawk-Eagles were photographed soaring over Granville on 11th March and on the same date, the organised bird-banding session at Caroni Swamp had the good fortune to lure a Mangrove Cuckoo into their mist nets.

Prior to 2011, the Scaled Dove was considered no more than a vagrant from the mainland. Since then, several sites in both the north-west and south-west peninsulas have been found to contain multiple birds. At least three were photographed at Chaguaramas on 10th March and four there on the 13th.

Over in the sister isle, the long-staying Western Reef-Heron had relocated to Rockley Bay by 29th February. Both Glossy Ibis and both American Coots remain at Bon Accord and a further Glossy Ibis was found at Tobago Plantations. On 10th March, a Plumbeous Kite was seen by experienced observers gliding over Tobago Plantations. Yet to be documented for Tobago, this is only the second-ever sighting and, perhaps the most unexpected of all, a Black Vulture seen close to Speyside on 12th March. Another extremely rare sighting for Tobago was a Great Kiskadee found at Scarborough on 15th March. Did it hitch a lift on the ferry?



# Piratic Flycatcher *(Legatus leucophaeus)*

By Johanne Ryan

There are pirates that troll our forests looking to steal the abode of their next victim. These pirates are only about 15 cm long, but forceful. They are covered in feathers. They are the Piratic Flycatchers.

At Asa Wright, the first Piratic flycatchers of the season were seen on 19th February. Right in our carpark, sitting on top of a palm frond, two Piratic Flycatchers were seen attacking the nest of a Yellow Oriole. They whistled high-pitched notes and dived at the oriole, hoping to drive away.

The Piratic Flycatcher is known for seizing the nests of other birds. It never builds its own nest but survives by stealing those of other species, preferably those that build domed or enclosed nests. So it often prefers nests of the Crested Oropendola, Yellow-rumped Cacique or Yellow Oriole. Piratic flycatchers work in pairs. One distracts the owners of the nest while the other stealthily enters. If the team out-competes the owners, the owners will leave and the Flycatchers will remove any eggs from the nest. They will then lay their own eggs, usually a clutch of about two, inside.

A migratory species, the Piratic Flycatcher can usually be found in north Trinidad between February and September and visits Tobago during the middle of the year. Breeding has been recorded within that same period. In addition, it can be found from Mexico to South America – as far south as Paraguay and a restricted area in north Argentina. It inhabits semi-open country, cultivated areas, forest clearings and forest edges where it feeds mainly on berries. However, it also includes insects in its diet.

If you are going on a birdwatching trek soon, here are some distinguishing features to look for in order to identify the Piratic Flycatcher. A bold, white moustachial streak and superciliary streak or 'eyebrow'. Dark brown wings and a dark brown head and tail. Whitish underparts with brown streaking. A light yellow abdomen. And sometimes the yellow crown patch is visible. Today may be a good day to search for a Piratic Flycatcher, won't you try?



A front view of one of the Piratic Flycatchers seen in the carpark  
Photo by Mukesh Ramdass



Another view of the Piratic Flycatchers  
Photo by Johanne Ryan