



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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December 2013



OUR CHAIR UNDERWATER



Photo courtesy <http://www.nautiluslive.org/>

Dr. Gobin with shellfish samples

Most of our readers are perhaps not aware that our Chair of the Board of the AWNC (Dr. Judith Gobin) is in fact a Marine scientist! And recently Judith was selected to join a Caribbean research mission on-board the exploration vessel E/V Nautilus during the period - 10th to 15th November, 2013.

The Nautilus is a 64-meter research vessel operated by Dr Robert Ballard and his Ocean Exploration Trust (OET) team. Dr Ballard is internationally known for finding the wreck of the Titanic and the German military ship Bismarck. The Nautilus carried out ROV (Remote Operated Vehicles) exploration and mapping of the Kick'em Jenny volcano (off Grenada), known as the most active and dangerous submarine volcano

in the Caribbean Sea. During the exploration, samples of volcanic rocks and gases were collected for geochemical analysis and there was also detailed high resolution mapping of the crater floor.

On this exciting mission, the Nautilus team discovered what appears to be cold seeps with typical chemosynthetic biological communities at a depth of around 2,000 m (approx. 6,000 ft)! Chemosynthesis is the breakdown of chemicals (possibly methane here) to provide energy and food whereas photosynthesis uses sunlight. The biological community included: giant mussels, tube worms, scale worms (and other marine worms), gastropods, and many other organisms. The seeps were located in the "debris avalanche deposit" to

the west of Kick'em Jenny volcano in the Grenada Basin.

Dr. Gobin has described this experience as "amazing" and a "one-in-a-lifetime opportunity" while confirming that the cold seep was the highlight of the expedition! She continued "for Grenada and the Caribbean, this is a monumental scientific discovery of which we should all be extremely proud." The E/V Nautilus is expected to explore the Gulf of Paria and the east coast of Trinidad with Dr. Gobin later this year. The exploration team will conduct mapping and ROV exploration of areas with potential methane/petroleum seeps and mud volcanoes in search of diverse micro and macro biological communities.

By: Dr. Judith Gobin





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TOUR GUIDE TRAINING WORKSHOP

It is always great to learn new things and to reinforce what you may already know. At the Asa Wright Nature Centre, workshops are a tool that we use to provide individuals (both staff and community members) with valuable information that can prove useful in their activities. A few weeks ago, we held a tour guide training workshop that ran for four days from the 9th to the 12th of December.

Frequent readers of our newsletter may recall an article highlighting the cocoa rehabilitation workshop. This workshop was done in collaboration with CDE under component 5 of the regional project titled Caribbean fine and flavor cocoa industry commercialisation. The tour guide training workshop also formed part of this regional project.

There was a great attendance at the workshop by both staff and members of the Brasso Seco community. The sessions covered a number of interesting topics including soft skills, customer service, health and safety, ecotourism, tour guide training skills, product development, history/culture and pricing of tourism products.

Rhikkie Alexander, the Managing Director of Nature's Love Consultancy and an experienced naturalist guide was the facilitator for this event. He has a wide background in a number of different fields and thus he was able to provide quite an interactive learning experience for everyone involved.

We are always trying to develop new ideas for great workshops that can be of benefit to those participating. It is our goal to host more of these workshops in the future. If you have a creative idea for a workshop we'll be glad to hear it! The more minds we have coming together the more we can achieve.

Written by: Kimberly Chu Foon



Photo by Kimberly Chu Foon

Rhikkie Alexander addresses participants of the workshop



Asa Wright Nature Centre's first Weather Station

Wouldn't it be wonderful to know exactly what's going on with the weather at home or at work? Well the Asa Wright Nature Centre can do exactly this! We purchased our first weather station (Vantage Vue) and had it set up this month.

Personal weather stations can be quite valuable as they provide data on different weather parameters such as rainfall, humidity, atmospheric pressure, wind speed and direction amongst many others. Using this data with appropriate software can allow people to observe trends in weather patterns over time which can prove useful in associated research etc. They can also, to some extent, provide you with a personal weather forecast!

It is important that your station is set up in a good location where there is open space, little to no buildings around and no trees, power lines or anything else above. This ensures that the parameters recorded are accurate.

If you are interested in setting up your own, there are many different types that are available. Be sure to research the device that you are considering by looking at the type of data you will be getting as well as reviews by other users. This will

ensure that you are getting a good quality device.

In the meantime, the Centre will continue to lead the way in monitoring the weather here in the Arima Valley rain or shine!

Written by: Kimberly Chu Foon



Photo by Peter O'Connor

The set up of our new weather station



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OH IT'S SO RIGHT, AT ASA WRIGHT

Poem by A. Rhikkie Alexander, composed 12th December, 2013 at the Veranda at Asa Wright

The patio hardly sleeps,
Though ever eager to receive
Nature's enthusiasts.

Smiles, laughter, pleasure
Piercing binoculars,
Patient telescopes,
All fascinated and overjoyed
At nature's wonders.

Tea or coffee occupy one hand,
While binoculars embrace the
other.

Humming bird's perched to sip,
Feeders filled with liquid sugar.

The atmosphere filled with
excitement
And misty fog,
Yet nature always nurtures her
many delights,
As guests, friends and all,
Feel so right, at Asa Wright.





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CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES



Photo by Peter O'Connor

Staff members look on as Dianne Jeremiah serenades the crowd

Christmas at Springhill Estate saw our staff partaking in our Christmas luncheon. It was a 'Trini' event, with an Asa Wright twist. No Trinidadian Christmas meal would be complete without ham, pastelles and 'black cake'. We had this and more – a delectable Christmas meal that was crafted by the skillful hands of Asa Wright's own chefs.

After an address by CEO, Mrs. Simon-Wallace, staff members participated in a lively gift exchange that was organised by Marjorie

Sawh-Walker. To get us all wrapped up in the Christmas Spirit,

Dianne Jeremiah gifted us with a heartfelt rendition of 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas'. A sincere thank you goes out to everyone who made this luncheon possible.

Written by Johanne L. Ryan





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YELLOW-HOODED BLACKBIRD

(Agelaius icterocephalus)



Photo by Pierre-Yves Bilat

On a leisurely drive down the Solomon Hochoy Highway, you may spot Yellow-hooded Blackbirds balancing on stalks of grass lining the road. They live in these savannahs and freshwater marshes of Trinidad and Tobago and may roost in mangroves and the once abundant sugarcane fields as well.

Gregarious Yellow-hooded Blackbirds also inhabit territories spreading from Colombia to Venezuela, Brazil to Peru. The males of these medium-sized

birds, about 7.5 inches in length, have a conspicuous sunny yellow head. The rest of the body as with all Blackbirds, is black. Be on the lookout for the female, whose appearance may deceive you. She is rather brown with yellow only extending down the throat.

These blackbirds cluck and wheeze instead of vocalising musical songs. They feast on all sorts of insects like beetles, butterflies, moths and dragonflies. They also include seeds, particularly rice, in their diet. Their

nests may usually be found among water-plants and rice-plants. Males build and defend their nests while the females incubate the nest and feed the young.

Written by Johanne L. Ryan

References: French, Richard. A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago. Cornell University Press. 1991

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

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.

