



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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May 2015



An Oilbird and chick. Photo by Harold Diaz

In the Americas films at The Dunston Cave

By Kimberly Chu Foon

In the Americas with David Yetman is an HD television series that has taken viewers on adventures across the lands of the western hemisphere. It has been developed by Dan Duncan, an Emmy Award-winning director and David Yetman, an established writer and host. The local people, history, culture and environment are just some of the topics covered in this production. "Panama's Wild West", "Reefs, Ruins, and Revivals: Belize's Melting Pot", "Favelas and Samba - Brazil" and "Bogota to the Amazon: A trip across Colombia" are just a few of the fantastic episodes created for the show's fourth season.

In March, the filming crew decided to give Trinidad and Tobago a visit.

Our country has much to offer both historically and culturally but it was still a great surprise to see that the show eventually made its way to our tiny twin island. Even more thrilling was that word got out about the Centre's Dunston Oilbird Cave and they ventured up the Arima Valley in hopes that they could get footage of the spectacular species for the series.

Our guide, Jessie Pitt, took them on a tour to The Dunston, Cave where they were able to get some great shots of the Oilbird and we hear that he is soon to be famous given that he is starring in some of the scenes as well. Other features that they are likely to cover for the programme include the swamps, as well as the unique cultural diversity within the country. Look out for the episode to air in October of this year. The following link will lead you to their website which has full videos of their previous episodes (<http://intheamericas.org/>).

Glimpses of the Guides

By Johanne Ryan

Name: Barry Ramdass
Position: Naturalist Guide
Working at AWNC since: 2006



Barry on the Verandah
Photo by Pamela Allemany

Barry was introduced to birdwatching at the tender age of six when his Uncle Sookdeo used to carry him along on tour guiding trips whenever he had small groups. In his last year of high school, he worked at AWNC on weekends. With over 20 years' birding experience, Barry has developed his expertise in birdwatching with great passion. Barry was one of the four AWNC participants in a two-week introductory course on bird

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banding, which included participants from the Caribbean and South America. He is currently studying Business Management at the School of Accounting and Management.

What are your hobbies?

Cricket, hiking, swimming, hanging out at home with family on a Sunday evening. I have played cricket professionally (Moosai's Sport Club, Fulham Cricket Club) and was recognised in zonal cricket on a national level.

What do you like most about working at AWNC?

Finding new birds for guests, developing professional birdwatching tours, meeting and interacting with diverse groups of people that come to AWNC. I also like snakes and have personally studied them here at AWNC. I did a two-month study on venomous snakes at Asa Wright.

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

I have several. Meeting Prince Charles. I was actually supposed to give him a walk but it didn't happen because of rain. I showed him a Double-toothed Kite in the scope. He had never seen that bird before. He said "Wow, how far is that? Did you spot that?"

Seeing a Grey-necked Wood-Rail eating at the feeders. Photographing the Ornate Hawk-Eagle that I saw the other day. I never thought that when next I saw it I would have a camera or even one good enough to get a photo of it.

In 2009, a university group from Arkansas visited. I spent a lot of time with them and built a bond with them. I taught them cricket, but even after four days no one understood how to play. Some of them still email me saying that they practise cricket in their yard.

Name: Elsa Thomas
Position: Naturalist Guide
Working at AWNC since: 2007



Elsa speaks to a group from ASJA Boys' College. Photo by Johanne Ryan

Elsa has worked at AWNC since 2007 and is certainly one of our more experienced guides. Currently, she works part-time, covering Saturdays here at Springhill.

Should you pop in on a Saturday it is likely that you may meet Elsa and be taken by her on tour. Overnight visitors can join Elsa on the night walk or be treated to a nature movie in the sitting room.

What are your hobbies?

Dancing, singing, getting together with friends.

What do you like most about working at AWNC?

The quiet serene atmosphere, the natural environment.

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

The six-month internship that I did with the Multi-sector Skills Training (MUST) Programme was very enjoyable for me. Through the programme, I was trained in hospitality and tourism. At that time (when I just started working here), the birds here were new to me. My favourite bird is the Toucan (Channel-billed).

Also, early on when I started working here, I saw an 8 foot Fer de Lance. I saw the needle-like fangs because Rojas (Asa Wright's 'snake' man) was holding the snake in his hand. I got to feel the scales. People think a snake's body is slimy, but it is not; it is dry and scaly.

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 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.





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Young Environmentalist of the Month



Nicholas Philip (left) works with another member of the club.

By Indira Chickree

The environmental club which is called the BioSci Revolution Club of ASJA Boys' College, Charlieville, has embarked on its termly community-building project – a landscape in the front of the school. This project was spearheaded by the Project Manager – Aesthetics, Nicholas Philip of Form 4 of the club. The project was completed during a two-day period – Friday 20th February and Monday 23rd February. On day one, the students toiled in the sun to remove the existing plants and prepared the soil. On day two, the plants were added – Crinum Lilies, Spider Grass and Yellow Iris. All plants were donated by our principal, Mr. Idris Khan. Nicholas Philip coordinated the 26 students who contributed to this project. Since the landscape has been developed, Nicholas Philip has been responsible for maintaining it by ensuring that the other members are committed to watering daily, fertilising weekly and removing the weeds. Congrats to this young environmentalist and we look forward to hearing more stories from future conservationists.



Students of ASJA Boys' work on their project.



*A glimpse of the finished product.
Photos courtesy Indira Chickree*



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Rose-breasted Grosbeak

(Pheucticus ludovicianus)

By Johanne Ryan

In late April, Asa Wright welcomed an unexpected visitor – the Rose-breasted Grosbeak – foraging among the branches. Described by Richard french as a scarce visitor to our islands, this cardinal seemed an appropriate fit for T&T as it bears the colours of our national flag – red, white and black. Many naturalists have been inspired by its sweet song. The Rose-breasted Grosbeak breeds in forests of eastern North America but spends its winter in tropical Central and South American locales. It has an omnivorous diet mainly



The Rose-breasted Grosbeak we saw in April. Photo by Ann Sealey

consisting of insects, seeds and berries. Though it commonly forages among leaves, it sometimes sallies for insects.

Males can be aggressive and attack any male trespassers on their territory. The male has an interesting courtship display. It spreads its wings and tail partly, pulls its head back and advances to the female in song. After choosing a mate, there is an equal playing field for both parents. The males and females build the nest, incubate

the eggs and feed the young ones. During incubation, as the male and female exchange places, they both sing softly to each other. Should the female start a new nest, the male will take care of those that have not yet flown the coop.

At present, the bird's population seems to be stable, but we must protect its habitat throughout the Americas to ensure that the Rose-breasted Grosbeak continues to thrive.

References:

<http://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/rose-breasted-grosbeak>

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Rose-breasted_Grosbeak/lifehistory

french, Richard. A guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago. Cornell University Press. 2012

Staff Outing Day: Bonding with your coworkers has never been such fun!

By Robyn Bath-Rosenfeld

The Asa Wright Nature Centre staff is known for being a family, which is also literally true since many are related and married to each other. This familial culture is part of the reason for the Centre's success, and what keeps Asa Wright running as a well-oiled nature machine. It only seemed fitting that on May 27th we celebrated this family and all of the hard work we achieve on a daily basis. This year our lodge manager, Ann Sealey, brought back the annual Staff Outing Day just as the rainy season threatened to begin. We gathered six miles down the

road from the Centre at a popular river lime location. For those of you who don't know, a 'river lime' is Trini-defined as any gathering of friends near a river with music and drinks included.

From 11:00 a.m. (aren't we all allowed to sleep in on Staff Outing Day) till 6:00 p.m. we danced, we drank, we ate, we laughed, we conquered. Everyone joined efforts to cook an amazing spread of roti, dhal, channa, pork, chicken, and duck. The food was so amazing I personally had to resist temptation to take no more than three to-go boxes home with me. The Centre is always a place to be formal and courteous, and while we have our fun at the office, everyone is happy to let loose at a staff lime.

I'm sure everyone is already excited for next year.



Men can cook.



Staff enjoy the camaraderie. Photos by Ann Sealey