



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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

June 2015



Margaret ffrench and Carol James at Asa Wright. Photo by Johnny ffrench

In Tribute to Margaret ffrench

By Carlos James
Honorary Life Member and Past Board Chairman 2004-2010, Asa Wright Nature Centre

Margaret ffrench, *nee* Southern, an Englishwoman, became the consummate Caribbean lady to many of us, not by birth but by passion, because she appeared to embrace so much of tropical nature in the Caribbean, both as an avid birdwatcher and as an accomplished painter and artist, incorporating elements of local iconography in her work. She also immersed herself into Trinidad culture where her love of music and for teaching others the joys of music, in collaboration with her musically gifted husband, led them to form the Orpheus Choir of Music Festival fame in Trinidad and Tobago. Such *Caribbeanness* may have begun during her short three-year stint in Barbados, then it became more apparent in her beloved Trinidad



Margaret ffrench, with her daughter Linnet, during her last visit to Asa Wright in 2013
Photo by Johanne Ryan

where she lived for almost 30 years feeding her passion for nature, music and the arts, all of which flourished in harmony with those of her lifelong partner, the famous ornithologist, Richard ffrench.

Margaret met Richard at Oxford University and married him in 1953, sharing a beautiful relationship for 57 years until Richard's passing on 2010. Many will remember Margaret fondly as a teacher at St. Peter's school in the compound of the Point-a-Pierre oil refinery where Richard not only taught the classics, but became head teacher and leader/conductor of the school choir. Their love for tropical nature in their adopted country, Trinidad and Tobago, particularly birds and the myriad habitats in which they existed, was nourished during their first holiday visit to Trinidad from Barbados. Their subsequent meeting at Springhill, Asa Wright, in 1956 initiated a special phase of their lives within the local conservation community and Richard became a founding member and Board Chairman of the Asa Wright Nature Centre for a brief period during 1970 to 1971. Margaret supported him as a genuine life partner and accompanied him in the field as often as family life permitted while raising their four, also remarkable children in Trinidad. We of the Asa Wright Nature Centre celebrate the life and times of this remarkable lady and extend our love, comfort and support to her children and other family members.

Glimpses of the Guides

By Johanne Ryan

Name: Cherry Ann Dookram
Position: Naturalist Guide
Working at AWC since: 2014



Cherry Ann at Asa Wright
Photo by Johanne Ryan

Cherry Ann hails from Manzanilla, which of course you know, is quite a distance from Asa Wright Nature Centre. One of our newer guides, Cherry Ann has completed a Tour Guiding course at the Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) and a course in Travel, Hospitality and Tourism at the School of International Travel and Languages (SITAL).

Continued on page 2



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



JUNE • PAGE 2

June 2015

Continued from page 1

What are your hobbies?

Acting – I used to do plays in school.
Writing – I write poems and songs.

What do you like most about working at AWNC?

The scenery. Coming to work makes me feel happy, seeing all the different scenes you pass on the way. The rainforest, there are a lot of things, things you expect and don't expect to see. I like seeing things I don't expect to see, interacting with people and talking. Learning about different cultures, Asa Wright is a good place for that.

Most memorable experience working at AWNC so far?

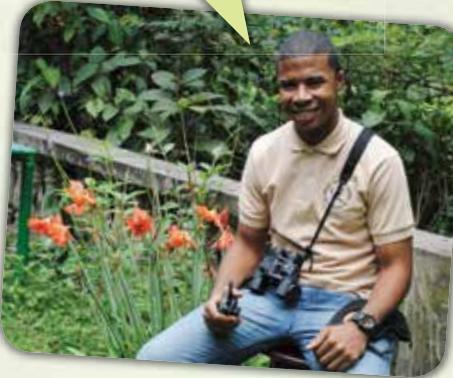
My first day. I didn't expect to see so many birds in one place. I see birds at home but not so many in one place. My favourite bird is the Golden-headed Manakin, I like how they dance.

Another one is being here when the snake (Dos Cocorite) ate the Swallow Tanagers. I was monitoring the Swallow Tanager chicks, I would check on them each day. After a few times (days), I just saw the snake in the nest and I realised what happened.

Name: Jessie Pitt

Position: Naturalist Guide

Working at AWNC since: 2014



*Jessie at Asa Wright
Photo by Johanne Ryan*

Jessie is our youngest member of staff here at Asa Wright but you would not know it from the maturity with which he interacts with everyone. He is always ready to point out a bird on the verandah or search for a bird for a guest. He has quickly picked up bird calls and has an ease of interaction on tour. He likes to take photos of the wildlife at Asa Wright and you can find him on the verandah with a friendly smile. Jessie first visited Asa Wright when he was about ten years old and thoroughly enjoyed the visit. Jessie is currently studying

Human Resource Management at the Cipriani Labour College.

What are your hobbies?

Photography, birdwatching, football. I am a sports fanatic.

What do you like most about working at AWNC?

The environment, being apart from the busy urban environment. The friendly staff. Working here has opened my eyes and mind to how much Trinidad has to offer, to how diverse Trinidad is. It has given me deeper appreciation for where I am and made me more proud.

I never thought I would end up working here, it is a beautiful place. The thought of working here is great.

Most memorable experience working at AWNC so far?

There are a few highlights for me. Seeing the Spectacled Owl, Ornate Hawk-eagle and Tayra. I was unaware that we had these animals and to be face to face with them was amazing.

The many friendships I have made along the way, they have made me grow as an individuals.

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.





Tracking the Ocelot

By Peter O'Connor

Some of you may be aware of my quest to meet an ocelot in the wild. It rivals Herpetologist/Board Member Bob Thomas' search for the bushmaster in desire, if not in time. Bob has sought his Bushmaster for over 30 years, while my quest is just seven years on.

When I came to Asa Wright in 2008 I learned of Mukesh Ramdass' sighting of an ocelot along our driveway. Senior Guide Mukesh encountered the cat, eating the remains of an agouti at about 6:00 am.

So I began my pre-dawn walks, out to the gate and back, every morning at Spring Hill. Over the years, I encountered opossum, armadillo, miscellaneous small snakes, many very aggressive crabs, and once, a large tamandua anteater crossed the road right in front of me, never even looking up at me.

But no ocelot. I even started walking barefooted, to move silently and surprise my "target". In October 2011, I came across tracks at the bottom of the Bamboo Valley Trail. The trail was being cleared and work had stopped at about 1:30 pm; I walked down just after 4:00 pm, and the pug marks were there! She had walked down Bamboo Valley, crossed the bridge and up towards Chaconia, in the middle of the day.

When Board Member Mike Rutherford set up his camera trap in Bamboo Valley in 2014, there she



The Ocelot's Footprint
Photo by: Peter O'Connor

was. During the night, once during the day, and once with her cub. She was here. She was walking our trails in the day and in the night. She was watching me pass.

Tuesday 23rd June was a rainy, misty morning, but I was out there walking. On my way back at 5:10 am, just short of the last stream before the compound, eyes shone brightly in my beam. Something was just below the road. As I trained my light, it bounded across the road in just two leaps and up the steep brush-covered embankment, disappearing without a sound. Agile, long-legged and with a long tail, but I saw no markings on its body. Too agile, too silent in the brush to be a dog, was it my ocelot?

When I told the story at breakfast, Kimberly Park, one of our guests, said that she was looking out of her window at 5:00am. She saw a cat moving swiftly between the cottages. She thought it large for a domestic cat, and noticed markings – "spots" – on its rump as it disappeared.

The timing of the two sightings, the descriptions of what we had seen, suggest, but do not confirm, it may have been ... but ... Wow in between the buildings?

Might my quest be fulfilled in the next few mornings? Stay tuned.



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



JUNE • PAGE 4

June 2015

Salisbury University at Asa

Dr. Tami Ransom and
Dr. Reema Persad-Clem

On June 6th 2015, 17 undergraduate students from Maryland's Salisbury University visited Asa Wright for the first time. The students, along with their instructors, Dr. Reema Persad-Clem and Dr. Tami Ransom, were part of a Wildlife Conservation course focusing on conservation issues that are important both globally and to Trinidad, such as habitat degradation, global warming, and sea level rise. During their time in Trinidad, the students spent a total of 10 nights at Asa Wright. For part of their stay, the students worked on small group projects, with a focus on projects that might benefit the Nature

Centre. Projects included: producing a more accurate map of the current trail system; designing an ethogram activity for visiting school children; examining the correlation between human trail use and animal use of trails; studying the activity patterns of leafcutter ants; creating a frog resource manual for the Centre; producing a Bellbird brochure and accompanying cards focusing on keystone species, producing an ethnobotanical guide to some plants commonly found at Asa Wright; and conducting a study of the differences in hummingbird species diversity at the bird blind compared to the herb garden. The staff and guides at Asa Wright were invaluable resources for the completion of these projects. We greatly enjoyed our stay and learned a tremendous amount while



*The Salisbury University Group
Photo by Elspeth Schalk*

at the Centre. The students spent another five days completing their projects upon returning to the US. All materials produced are being sent back to Asa Wright, and will hopefully be of use to both guides and future guests.

Rufous-shafted Woodstar

(Chaetocercus jourdanii)



Photo by Roger Neckles

By Johanne Ryan

The Rufous-shafted Woodstar competes with the Tufted Coquette for the title of smallest hummingbird in Trinidad and Tobago; both measure up to 7cm long. As it forages for nectar, it can sometimes be mistaken for a large bee because it is

so small. The Woodstar has a liking for the nectar of Vervain and the shrub *Leonotis neptaeifoliae*.

The Rufous-shafted Woodstar is native to Colombia, Venezuela and yours truly, Trinidad. The male Woodstar is quite a beauty with a bright purple gorget and prominent white band on the chest. The female is less conspicuous. It is mainly rufous on the front with dark ear patches.

The Rufous-shafted Woodstar inhabits humid forest borders and partially cleared areas near forest, as well as second growth woodland. The birds are not opposed to popping into a flower garden. The Trinidad and Tobago Rare Bird Committee reports that in the last 20 years, there have just been three documented sightings, all in the Northern Range. The last time this species was seen was back in June 2008 at Morne Bleu. Then, four birds were seen by Martyn Kenefick and our very own Chair Graham White. However, we now have a

new sighting added to the list. We were fortunate to spot the Rufous-shafted Woodstar right here at Asa Wright, early in May. So we see it fitting to highlight this special bird this month.

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The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



JUNE • PAGE 5

June 2015

AWNC Ventures Across the Country

Photos and article
Kimberly Chu Foon

June became a month for travel when Asa Wright was invited to attend several booth displays for various initiatives. Events this month included Atlantic LNG's Biodiversity Display, University of Trinidad and Tobago's (UTT) celebration of World Environment Day and Environmental Management Authority's (EMA) Open Day in commemoration of its 20th anniversary. Also noteworthy was the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP), UNDP Knowledge Fair which occurred towards the end of May.

Our booths were geared with some of our fun and interactive games such as "Spin the Wheel" and "Name that Sound", several of the display cases that can be found in our museum and a wide range of giveaways including our animal posters, stickers, books and calendars.

The GEF SGP Knowledge Fair kick-started our travels and was held at the UWI Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business. The theme this year was "Igniting Global Envirominds, Transforming Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow". Several of GEF SGP's grantees were invited to attend with the aim being to encourage collaboration between them through networking and sharing best practices. The two-day event was packed with a number of exciting activities including capacity-building workshops, musical performances and a UTT fashion show.

The Atlantic LNG Biodiversity



Tonya engages the young school students at our Atlantic LNG booth



Visitors try their luck on our Spin the Wheel Game at the GEF SGP Knowledge Fair.

Display in Egypt Village, Point Fortin, was perhaps one of the busiest with thousands of school students visiting us over the three-day period. Many of them stood in awe as they looked at our venomous snake displays which were a popular feature during all of the events. Several schools tried their luck on the Spin the Wheel game where their knowledge on animals and plants was tested. The reward for a correct answer was a range of our giveaways for use in their classroom.

UTT's display at Trincity Mall also brought many visitors to our booth as their curiosity got the better of them and they



Brandon highlights some of our Animal displays at UTT's event

took time off of their shopping to visit us. As the event occurred on World Environment Day, it was an opportunity to highlight the significance of this day to many of our visitors and to educate them about the importance of biodiversity conservation.

We closed off our month of travel with the EMA's Open Day at the Valencia Visitor Centre. Several residents of the area came by for a visit and were not only treated to the booths but also to live animal displays including agouti, macaws and ocelots.

AWNC enjoys spreading our environmental messages and initiatives and it's great to venture beyond The Arima Valley for the purpose of education. Let's hope there are many more opportunities like these to come.