



# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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July 2016

## My internship in Arizona

By Barry Ramdass

In April and May 2016, I participated in an internship based in Portal, Arizona. During my stay, I was able to feed my passion for birdwatching, as from my first morning in the US, I started birding.

I visited a number of habitats within the desert, national and state parks and conservation facilities. One of my most memorable experiences was seeing the expressive, Great horned owl. Visiting the Kartchner Caverns State Park, was also a memorable experience. I experienced my first wheelchair accessible cave. The history and preservation of this cave was most interesting and heartwarming. Visits to other conservation facilities and museums allowed me to see a variety of professional and innovative displays. The Chiricahua Desert Museum, specialised in eco-friendly displays. There was a great exhibition of live snakes and lizards. At private locations, I was exposed to different types of bird feeders, some of which can be used here in Trinidad and Tobago.

I took part in a week-long bird tour that was based at the Southwestern Research Station, a beautiful research facility with accommodation situated along Cave Creek Road, San Simon. The bird tour, which hosted participants from four different states, was led by Mr. P.D. Halve. I was impressed with Mr. Halve's ability to adapt to any situation in the field. With a checklist of the birds of southwest Arizona, I birded



A display Photo by Barry Ramdass



Sherry and I. Sherry is an expert on hummingbirds. Photo courtesy Barry Ramdass



Here I am in the Saguaro National Park, standing next to a cactus that is approximately 150 years old.

Photo courtesy Barry Ramdass

within Portal from the 29th of April to the 6th of May and grabbed 125 species of birds, and many other critters.

I learnt much from well-researched professionals and fellow environmental interpreters. So I can surely say that I returned from Arizona a more knowledgeable birder and environmental interpreter. Thank you, Asa Wright Nature Centre, for making my trip possible.





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## ECIAF students intern at the Centre



Elizabeth and David filling the feeders at the Centre Photo courtesy AWNC

By Kimberly Chu Foon

It has always been a goal of the Centre to provide opportunities for both local and international volunteers/interns as it is a great opportunity for those involved to gain experience within the environmental field and put their skills to great use. Students from the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry (ECIAF) have been interning with AWNC on an annual basis for several years. ECIAF has provided quality training to its students in the fields of agriculture, forestry and agriculture teacher education. The diploma in Forestry is a two-year programme in which every student must complete a compulsory two-week internship at various sites, one of which is AWNC.

This year, the Centre hosted Elizabeth Naipaul and David Hargreaves for their internship. Over the course of two weeks, they were able to gain a little insight into the operations of an environmental

organisation and also learn about tour guiding, bird monitoring and landscaping.

Elizabeth grew up in Talparo and decided to pursue a diploma in Forestry because it gave her an opportunity to follow her passion and love for nature. Below is a short interview conducted with Elizabeth.

### **What do you like most about your Diploma in Forestry?**

I like it because it enhances my understanding of conservation, the environment and its protection.

### **Where do you see yourself in the next five years?**

I want to be an environmentalist. I would also like to teach kids. I enjoy doing that, it's fun. I want to give back to the community, the country, and the world. I want to preserve what we have and share it with others around the world.

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## ECIAF students intern at the Centre (continued)

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### What did you enjoy most about your time at the Asa Wright Nature Centre?

Everything, especially the learning experience. Appreciating the people that come here and who enjoy what we have to offer. I also love the history of this place. I love to hear the experience of others when they come to the island. The giving aspect of it. The wow factor. I also enjoyed working with the kids. They are so intrigued about learning about plants.

David is from Morvant and decided to pursue a diploma in Forestry because he loves the outdoors and found it to be an opportunity where he could learn much more within this field. He is particularly interested in the legal aspect of forestry. Below is a short interview conducted with David.

### What do you like most about your Programme?

Definitely the legal and conservation aspects and I also like the education part as well. With little

children, everything is new to them and you can help them to expand their minds and understand why it's important to protect our wildlife and resources.

### Where do you see yourself in the next five years?

Hopefully financially stable. Educated and able to learn more and push myself. I would like to be employed in the Forestry Division and one day become a Conservator.

### What did you enjoy most about being here?

The interaction with the tour guides and the guests. It's a great educational outlet which teaches people the importance of the forest and why we have to protect it. I enjoy the public awareness aspect and being able to learn new things. There's a lot of things that I never knew about birds and plant species that I was able to learn here.



*Looking for a place to visit on a field trip?*

Asa Wright host camps from **9:30 a.m. - 2:30 pm.**

Tour, museum, recycling craft session or games.

For more information email: [asawrightconsedu@gmail.com](mailto:asawrightconsedu@gmail.com)

or Call: **667-4655** for more information.

Dates for the camp visits

*August 9th-19th*



## Long-billed Gnatwren (*Ramphocaenus meanurus*)

By Johanne Ryan

A rattling call is heard through the forest. Out pops a small, brown bird. Two characteristics stand out – it has a long, thin, straight bill and a long tail that points in the air. As the bird moves, the tail moves too. It darts quickly through the undergrowth and is soon out of sight. You just had an encounter with the Long-billed Gnatwren.

Let's find out more about this tiny creature. The Long-billed Gnatwren is often found in pairs or flocks of mixed species. It is an insect feeder but also gleans foliage for spiders. It is just about 13 cm long, and its body, minus the bill and tail may measure up close to the size of a bananaquit or sucrier.

This Gnatwren is common in Trinidad where breeding has been recorded in February, April, June, and August. You won't find it in Tobago but you can find it from southern Mexico, right through to South America up to Peru, Bolivia and Brazil. In Trinidad, moulting has been observed in December. To identify the nest, look for a cup with a diameter of about 8 cm. The nest is compact and deep and is made of thin stems, dry grass and leaves and is lined with thin, black fibres. The nest usually sits just a few centimetres off the ground, in the fork of a small plant



Photo by Wendell Reyes

or on the branch of a sapling. The Gnatcatcher lays a clutch of two white eggs that have reddish-brown spots at one end. And it is interesting to note that both parents share the nesting responsibilities.

On your next nature walk or birding trip at Asa Wright or anywhere else on the island, look out for the Long-billed Gnatwren.

### References:

- French, R. (2012). A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Hilty, Steven L. (2003). Birds of Venezuela. New Jersey. Princeton University Press.



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## Sunday Brunch

A hearty "Thank You" to all who joined us for brunch on July 3rd. Over 70 persons came out to enjoy our sumptuous local dishes, freshly baked breads and our own estate-grown coffee. Keep checking our Facebook page to get details on when we will host another brunch! Or you can taste Asa Wright's 'sweet hand' by partaking in our buffet style lunch, which is served every day. Call us at 667-4655 to make a reservation for lunch.



More of the delicious menu Photo by Ann Sealey



An assortment of breads were served  
Photo by Ann Sealey



Patrons at brunch Photo by Dr. Carol James

## 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.

