



# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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## Rainy Mountain Days



Following the devastating dry season earlier this year, we saw the forests begin to sing again with the April showers. And now, in August we are seeing rainfall to make up for all the deficits of the dry season!

At the Asa Wright Nature Centre the rainy season brings a different ambience to the forests. Mostly, the early mornings are fine, with stars shining bright in the pre-dawn sky. Our birds sing loudly with the daybreak, the antshrikes and mocking birds being the first to serenade.

Clouds of mist rise out of the valley, different hidden streams sending up their mist at different times, like alternating puffs of steam.

But as beautiful as this rising mist is, it is going up to become the afternoon clouds, and to bring the afternoon rains. And these come in over the ridge to the east, roaring as loudly as waterfalls, until they arrive at the Centre, pounding on our roofs for a while until they move on, far more silently than they arrived.

In the wake of each passing shower, the birds begin to sing again, and the elusive Mot Mots come out to the feeding tables below the verandah, joined by noisy Oropendolas with their young, now learning to feed themselves. Above them flit half a

dozen Jacobin Hummingbirds, flashing their green, blue and white iridescence in the sudden sunlight.

An after-rain walk along the driveway will see you regularly challenged by the red mountain "manicou" crabs, which come out to forage. These are aggressive creatures who will snap their claws at you. However, they are also the favourite food of the Great Black Hawk, so you should be on the lookout for these raptors, perched close by, or even feeding along the road!

Along the trails the raindrops continue to fall from the treetops long after the shower has passed. The sunbeams which filter through holes in the canopy focus on the sights you should see – spotlighting brilliant red *Chaconia* flowers set amidst the shades of green; a tight geometric spider web, with rainbows shining in its glistening raindrops; or a brilliant blue marbled butterfly, sparkling

like a sapphire in the sunbeam!

And sometimes the afternoon showers spring forth brilliant rainbows across the valley! Persons lucky enough to be on the verandah at these times may see a flock of Orange-winged parrots flying home across a rainbow!

And Rainy Mountain nights... when the full moon wears a faint rainbow halo, or if the night is cloudless, the stars shine brightly through the rain-washed sky. Nights when you see the lightning dancing in the distance beyond the valley, or when you lie, half awake in your cottage, listening to the night, the streams below chattering to you, and the passing rains quietly pattering upon the roof!

Most people visit us in the northern hemisphere winter, our dry season. But Asa Wright has many moods, and the Rainy Mountain time is a mood you should experience.

# AWNC hosts monthly Introspective Retreats

The Asa Wright Nature Centre is collaborating with Dr. Theo Ferguson, developer of the leadership development programme, *Leading From Above The Line*, in the hosting of a series of monthly one-day Introspective Retreats. Four very successful retreats, which are open to the public, have been held to date. The next retreat is scheduled for 3rd October 2010.

These Introspective Retreats are helping individuals to retreat from the “busyness” of living in order to better reflect on their true life intentions and to determine corrective actions they may need to make to improve the quality of their lives.

Specifically, participants have been benefiting by:

- Having a better understanding of



Dr. Ferguson pictured here at a Hummingbird seminar he held at Asa Wright Nature Centre.

themselves and their true intentions in life.

- Learning to harness their personal power through a better understanding of the five sources of inner power.
- Developing greater leadership awareness through a better understanding of their leadership potential.

Dr. Ferguson sees the Asa Wright Nature Centre, world-renowned as a place of peace, tranquillity and nature, as an ideal venue for the retreats.

He has now decided to use the Asa

Wright Nature Centre as the venue for his 8-day Leadership Self-Discovery Retreat commencing October 2010.

And his other major interest is being an outstanding bird photographer, who has a permanent exhibit of some of his work in the Dining Room of the Asa Wright Great House. A special edition album of his work was presented by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to the visiting heads of State at last year's Summit of the Americas and Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings in Port of Spain.

## BOAT-BILLED FLYCATCHER

(*Megarynchus pitangua*)

Quick, think of a bird that has yellow underparts, a brown back and a black head with a white band encircling the crown... no, it's not the ubiquitous Kiskadee. To the untrained eye, the Boat-billed Flycatcher is often mistaken for possibly one of the most well-known birds in Trinidad, the Great Kiskadee. However, as a birder so very well knows, to successfully identify this bird one must take a closer look.

The Boat-billed Flycatcher belongs to the family of Tyrant Flycatchers, one of the largest of all bird families. The most distinguishing feature of the Boat-billed Flycatcher is its oversized, curved bill, a feature which can be attributed to the origin of its name. Another notable trait is the olive-brown tinge to the feathers on its back as opposed to the plain brown colour of the back of the Great Kiskadee. Similar to the Kiskadee, there is a concealed yellow patch on the crown. At the sound of its call, one can also recognise the Boat-billed Flycatcher. The Boat-billed Flycatcher does not make the



Photo Dr. Theo Ferguson

renowned call of “kiss-ka-deeee!” Its call is a loud, irksome “choip, choip, choip, choip”. Still, at times some of its vocalisations are similar to those of the Kiskadee.

Also known as the Broad-billed Kiskadee, this nine-inch bird is much more common here than one may think. Found perched high up in trees at forest edges, semi-open forest, coffee and cocoa plantations, it builds stick nests in the foliage. It forages for insects, small vertebrates and occasionally, berries.

Cicadas are a particular favourite at mealtime and are normally struck against a branch before eating.

The Boat-billed Flycatcher, being exclusive to the New World, ranges from Mexico to Argentina and, of course, Trinidad. It breeds from February to June, usually laying between one and three eggs. Boat-billed Flycatchers tend to be found in family groups, youngsters remaining with parents for months until coming of age.

So the next time you spot a Kiskadee perched atop a wire a more detailed scan may reveal its true identity – the Boat-billed Flycatcher. If not, a trip to the Asa Wright Nature Centre just may provide you with your first sighting! –JH Ryan

### References:

- French, Richard. 1991. *A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*.  
Hilty, Steven L. 2003. *Birds of Venezuela*.