



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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PURPLE HONEYCREEPER

Cyanerpes caeruleus

Also called the "Yellow-legged Honeycreeper" and "Yellow-legged Grampo," this species is among the most colourful of the birds which frequent the Centre, specifically concentrating around the sugar and fruit feeders. Much debate occurs over the exact colour of the 4.5-inch male which appears to range somewhere between blue and purple. Either way, it is unanimous that its legs are unmistakably sunny yellow with black toenails. The female bird is lime green with dark striations around the face and breast, while young males look like the females and gradually morph from a nondescript green to green with dark stripes on the wings and head, to the smooth "bluish purple" body, black wings and face of the adult.

Honeycreepers of all species are typically brightly coloured and are closely related to Tanagers with which they have similar behaviour, feeding, nesting and physiology. In many cases Purple Honeycreepers are observed foraging in mixed flocks with other Honeycreeper species, Tanagers and Bananaquits (the latter being separated into its own family), typical of Tanagers.

Convenient and reliable viewing of this species is possible from almost anywhere on the estate throughout the year, especially from the verandah. Honeycreepers are easily seen and photographed as they take turns at the feeders or navigate through the Centre's many flowering trees and plants. The species is particularly prevalent at this time of year as the ending of the rainy season brings with it a sequence of flowering trees which are highly favoured by these fruit and nectar feeders. Nesting also coincides at this time, thus providing great views of both adults and juveniles.

Come have a look!

AWNC Book Launch



Feature speaker Bridget Brereton (centre) at the head table at the Nalis Book Launch.

'The Old House and the Dream'

It is much more than a history of the Asa Wright Nature Centre. It is, in fact, the real story of the Centre, from its beginnings as a cocoa and coffee estate, to its current establishment of the Nature Centre and Lodge.

Author Joy Rudder has woven a tapestry of personal vignettes to create a different type of historical record. Her book *The Old House and the Dream*, which was formally launched at an at the National Library on December 4th, reveals a history of the estate and the Centre as seen through the stories of all of the people who have been part of that history.

Joy has presented a series of short stories, told of and by people involved with the Centre over the years. The reader is in touch with the personalities and the timeline which runs through the narratives.

The personalities are brought to life "with all their warts," as historian Bridget Brereton described the book

in her keynote address at the launch. The difficulties the founders of Centre endured when the indomitable Icelander Asa Wright first accepted the idea of allowing her home to be taken over by a Conservation Trust, are described with deep personal feelings by the parties involved. The reader becomes a member of the extended Asa Wright family as they absorb the dramas which surrounded the founding of the Centre.

This is a totally readable history of a unique institution which has now become internationally recognised as one of the finest bird watching sites in the world. That it succeeded in this mission is a credit to all those who worked and fought for its survival. And Joy has brought all this to life for us!

The book can be purchased at the Asa Wright Gift Shop, Metropolitan Bookstore and Paperclip Bookstore Normandie Hotel.

The Management & Staff of the Asa Wright Nature Centre and Lodge wishes everyone a blessed Christmas Holiday and New Year!

CHOGM people visit Spring Hill



While the Asa Wright Nature Centre was not included in any visit or activity during the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Port of Spain, this did not prevent persons from coming to visit Spring Hill on their own initiative.

Nobel Laureate Professor Joseph Stiglitz, who was the keynote speaker at the CHOGM Business Forum, is an avid bird watcher and nature enthusiast. He arrived in Trinidad ahead of the Forum so that he could fulfil a long-held dream – to visit the Asa Wright Nature Centre. He spent two nights at the Centre, enjoying the nature trails and visiting the very rare Oil Birds in Dunstan's Cave. Chairman Dr. Carol James came up to join Professor Stiglitz for lunch, along with UWI Economics Professors Dr. Patrick Watson and Winston Dookeran. In his speech to the Business Forum, professor Stiglitz emphasised the economic importance of the environment and atmosphere to our livelihood on Planet Earth.

We also enjoyed a visit by the

Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mr. Ratnasiri Wickremanayake and his party. The Sri Lankans marvelled at the similarities between our Northern Range forests and the interior of their country.

Then the Commonwealth Secretary General, His Excellency Mr. Kamallesh Sharma and his wife Babba arrived for lunch and a short visit on their last day in Trinidad. They were ecstatic to conclude their busy visit to Trinidad in such beautiful and serene surroundings, promising to return and stay a few days to walk the trails and visit the Oil Birds.

Other than their enjoyment of the Spring Hill experience, all of these visitors expressed one serious concern for the Centre – and that is the ever-increasing scars on the hillsides viewed from our famous verandah. As the ongoing quarrying operations move closer and closer to Dunstan's Oil Bird Cave, we must do all that we can to protect and prevent further disruption in the life of this rare and precious bird species.



Board members of the Asa Wright Nature Centre.

Asa Wright AGM:

Directors reaffirm mandate for Northern Range Preservation

The Board of Directors held their Annual General Meeting at the Centre on November 6 and 7, and passed a resolution reaffirming the Centre's mandate to protect the world-renowned wildlife resources of Trinidad's Northern Range.

This resolution was considered necessary given the ongoing destruction of forests in the Arima valley by quarrying interests, and housing and development in other valleys.

Quarrying in the Arima valley has encroached into Simla's lands, and the world famous William Beebe Tropical Research Station is now surrounded by noisy, dirty quarries. The spring which supplied water to the station for 60 years has dried up as a result of landslips caused by the quarrying.

Another, government-owned quarry has cut a huge scar into the hillside in the valley across from the Asa Wright verandah, clearly visible to all of our guests. Dynamite blasts are seen and heard from the verandah, and the destruction continues, as forests, water sources and wildlife habitats are destroyed.

The Board has noted that the country has not placed adequate value on its natural resources, and is moving forward with a campaign to sensitise the government and citizens generally about the tremendous value that should be assigned to our forests, water sources and wildlife. Indeed, the survival of the Asa Wright Nature Centre depends upon the successful pursuit of this campaign. The Centre is also enlisting assistance from our many international affiliates and friends.

110th Annual Christmas Bird Count

By far the longest running feature event on the Centre's calendar is the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) which is conducted during the month of December. It is a major feature on the calendar of all major bird-watching destinations throughout the Americas and has been formally overseen and coordinated by the Audubon Society in the United States for the past 109 years.

It is a programme which involves destinations, public and private institutions, and individuals all brought together by the interest of observing and protecting wild birds. Professional and amateur bird watchers start out early with binoculars, bird books and checklist to counts as many birds they can identify by sight or sound in an attempt

to gather a rough census of the birds within a specified area. While this process is not fully scientific, data collected is forwarded to and compiled by the Audubon Society from all participants. Statistical information is then filtered out which proves useful for bird monitoring and overall conservation efforts.

This year's Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for Sunday 27 December, 2009. Everyone is invited and encouraged to participate in this unique event.

For further details and registration, please contact the Centre's head guide and coordinator Mr. Mukesh Ramdass at pawbird@yahoo.com or Mr. Graham White at gwhitett@gmail.com or call 377-6668.

Happy Birding!