



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE

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APRIL 2012

Sun Comes Out For April Nuptials



Germaine Hospedales exchanged marriage vows with Joseph Hopkins.

Although it has been a rainy dry season up at Spring Hill, the sun shone through on Wednesday 4th as Germaine Hospedales exchanged marriage vows with Joseph Hopkins. This happy couple had their morning Wedding Ceremony conducted on the beautiful Asa Wright Verandah, with about thirty-five family members and close friends present. Blessed with sunshine and the beautiful panoramic view down the Arima Valley, the formal ceremony then moved out to the beautiful Jade Vine Arbor for the reception.

In a setting decorated with the naturally beautiful hanging Jade Vine flowers, and exquisite cut wild flowers from the Spring Hill gardens, the happy couple entertained their guests at a luncheon prepared and served by the Asa Wright Staff.

We believe that weddings celebrated at Spring Hill will result in long and happy marriages! We wish Joseph and Germaine every blessing, and hope that they will return to enjoy our setting and hospitality on their future Anniversaries!



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TROPICAL MOCKINGBIRD

(*Mimus gilvus*)

The Tropical Mockingbird is a member of the Mimidae family, Mockingbirds and Thrashers, which are restricted to the New World. Although it is indeed a mockingbird it is not known to do what you would expect: mimic the calls of other species, but it shares other features of the same family.

The talented singer has quite a musical repertoire, which is unique to its species. The enthusiastic and oft repeated melodic phrases are sometimes likened to certain human phrases. The interpretations of these songs are as varied as the places in which the bird is found: southern Mexico to northern South America to the Lesser Antilles. Apart from whistling a tune, the Mockingbird can cluck and wheeze.

This graceful bird, just about ten inches, yellow eyes, black bill, white eyestripes and ashen plumage (grey



Photo: Ken Fournillier

upperparts and whitish underparts), will aggressively defend its territory, having the impudence to chase off larger birds and lizards. It forages near or on the ground,

runs swiftly, and stops suddenly with its tail pointed up.

The Tropical Mockingbird eats insects, small vertebrates and likes fruits as much as you and I do. It makes a bowl-shaped nest out of twigs and normally lays two to three pale blue green eggs with brown spots. In Trinidad, breeding has been recorded in all months except August and December.

If you live in the suburbs, its delightful song will make you look up to a telephone line or fruit tree where you'll see the Mockingbird perched.

– J.L. Ryan

References:

Hilty, Steven L. *Birds of Venezuela*. 2003.
French, Richard. *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*. 1991

AWNC WELCOMES OUR NEW LODGE MANAGER



Janine Aquí, Lodge Manager
Photo: Gabby Woodham

Janine Aquí joined the Asa Wright Nature Centre in mid March as our new Lodge Manager. She came in to fill the void left by the retirement of Ann Sealey in January. While Ann had “grown into” the position by dint of her service here for thirty-two years, Janine joins us as a full professional, with twenty years of hotel management and consultancy in her résumé.

Prior to coming to Spring Hill, Janine had managed hotels in Tobago, Cayman Islands and Dominica.

Janine is proud of the fact that she has a record of turning some of her previous assignments to profitability. She comes with a keen eye for new ideas and opportunities, which she hopes to

incorporate into our setting. Although relatively new to our Environmental and Birding themes, Janine has already been training herself, with the help of our Nature Guides, in spotting and identifying all of the birds on the Estate. She has also been touring to Matura, Caroni and Wallerfield to experience the tours which we offer to our visitors.

We all welcome Janine to Spring Hill and look forward to Asa Wright's continuing development and progress, as we now have both our Lodge Manager, and our CEO, Veronica Simon-Wallace, on board. The Bellbird asks everyone to work with Veronica and Janine to keep Asa Wright as the premier Nature resort in the Caribbean.



BEAT Develops Sustainable Sea Moss Supply

The Blanchisseuse Environmental Art Trust (BEAT) is an organisation closely aligned with the Asa Wright Nature Centre. Our Education and Outreach Officer, Kenneth Fournillier, is also the President of BEAT, and is involved with Community Outreach and Project Development among the Blanchisseuse community. The village sits on the coast at the end of the Arima Blanchisseuse Road, and is one of the better known birding areas for our visitors. The community also supplies us with our fresh fish, and soon might be providing us with Sea Moss.

“Sea Moss” is a popular health and restorative drink in the Caribbean. In Trinidad and Tobago it is made from special seaweed which grows along the underwater and tidal rock faces in the Blanchisseuse area of the North Coast. Sea Moss cultivation and marketing at the community and small entrepreneurial level provides a living for many persons who harvest and dry the seaweed before selling it to small shopkeepers who blend it with milk to sell as “Sea Moss Punch”. The particular moss for this drink is *Gelidium serrulatum* which only grows on a stretch of coast between Las Cuevas and Toco. As demand created over-harvesting of the moss along this stretch of coast, BEAT, along with others, approached CANARI (Caribbean Natural Resources Institute) for help in developing a more sustainable



This mural entitled ‘The Washerwoman’ which was illustrated by Kenneth Fournillier, was done to commemorate the Blanchisseuse Sea Moss Project. It represents the culture of the Blanchisseuse community.



The BEAT group with members of the UNDP smile at the launching ceremony of the mural.

Making Sea Moss Punch

Ingredients: 1 lb dried Sea Moss
2 limes
250 ml packet evaporated milk
1 tin condensed milk
2 tsp. Angostura Bitters
1 stick cinnamon bark
Water and sugar to consistency and taste

Method: Clean the dried moss, then soak in lime juice for 12 hours (to remove the “fresh” taste), wash and boil with the cinnamon until the mixture becomes gelatinous. Remove the cinnamon and blend and strain. When cool, add the evaporated and the condensed milk, blend again with bitters, and add sugar to taste. Leave to cool and serve with ice.

“crop” of the moss. Working along with the Institute of Marine Affairs and others, BEAT began recording and assessing data on harvesting times and techniques in

order to develop a more sustainable and constantly available “crop” of Sea Moss.

One of the important findings was that Sea Moss cut at its base grew back faster than sea moss pulled by its roots from the rock surfaces. Other practices were developed to enhance the regrowth of the moss, and the word was spread to other coastal communities, so that they could benefit from the knowledge gained. Sea Moss production is expected to increase through the North Coast, and parlours and restaurants expect a continuing supply to make and market the popular Sea Moss Punch islandwide.

A copy of the GEF Small Grants Programme’s Biodiversity Catalogue can be seen at [http://sgp.undp.org/img/file/Biodiversity%20Products%20From%20Latin%20America%20and%20the%20Caribbean\(1\).pdf](http://sgp.undp.org/img/file/Biodiversity%20Products%20From%20Latin%20America%20and%20the%20Caribbean(1).pdf)