



# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



[www.asawright.org](http://www.asawright.org)

Tel: (868) 667-4655

Email: [asawright@tstt.net.tt](mailto:asawright@tstt.net.tt)

JANUARY 2013

## Volunteers on the move

By Denise Etienne

On Saturday 19th January, 2013, we welcomed a group of 22 student volunteers from Bishop Anstey and Trinity College East (BATCE) Environmental Club who came to work at Asa Wright Nature Centre. The task assigned was an upgrade to our Adventure Trail, which is the most challenging of our several Nature Trails.

Our Winston Rojas, who is an Honorary Game Warden, led the group along the trail through the forest. The mission ahead of us was to mark off certain areas on the trail, to ensure that it was easy to follow, and to construct supports where the trail was very steep. This was done with rope tied between trees along the trail, and by placing posts where the trees were at



some distance from the trail.

The young men in the group were responsible for carrying and putting down the posts at certain intervals along the way. The ladies were in charge of untangling and running the ropes and tying them to

the posts or trees. As we made our way through the trail, we ourselves utilised the rope-railings we had just installed.

While going along the path we took the opportunity to share information and point out interesting sightings. We saw the rear end of a Bellbird in flight, and markings on the trail left from a wild hog.

A Blue Morpho butterfly kept showing glimpses of itself from time to time; the students were very happy to see her. We were having so much fun along the way that we didn't even notice when we ran out of rope! To wrap things up on the trails, we decided to take the group to see the pool on Bamboo Valley trail. They absolutely enjoyed the ambience and then it was time for lunch.

Afterwards we had a sharing activity and each student was presented with a certificate of appreciation for their hard work and for enhancing the environment. We look forward to future collaborations with this group.

If you are interested in volunteering with us please do let us know!



*Photos courtesy: Ms. Hutton & BATCE Environmental Club*



# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE

JANUARY 2013 • PAGE 2



## Following-up on Community meeting...

On the 17th January, 2013 The Asa Wright Nature Centre hosted a follow-up Community meeting in the Mango room. This meeting was convened to further the discussion hosted in December when Ms. Sasha Jattansingh of GEF/UNDP outlined the potentials for funding certain community initiatives. The meeting was chaired by Steve Maximay, Agricultural Consultant and current Chair of the Board's Sustainable Management Committee. Mr. Maximay emphasised the desire of Asa Wright Nature Centre to partner with communities on various projects that would help stabilise their area and help keep the valleys pristine. From the meeting, we had a wide array of project ideas including:

- utilising the ever popular bamboo to make furniture and other crafts
- enhancing the trail to Advocat waterfalls
- developing an agro-tourism project
- constructing huge recyclable bins
- possible boat tours from Blanchisseuse



Photos: Johanne Ryan

fishing village to Paria Bay

Participants were encouraged to begin their project proposals by describing

the goals and the methodologies so that these could be fine-tuned for eventual presentation to GEF UNDP.

## Historic Day

Saturday 19th January, 2013 was an historic day for the Asa Wright Nature Centre, in that individual Trustees were appointed to manage the legal and corporate affairs of the Centre. In the past, we had always been served by a Corporate Trustee, but this was recently changed.

Three eminent citizens accepted the invitation of the Board to serve as the Trustees of the Centre. These are Ms. Akilah Jaramogi, Environmentalist, Forestry Project Manager; Senior Counsel Fyard Hosein, Attorney at Law; and Mr. Ruben McSween, Finance and Business Executive.

These people bring to our Trust the three most important skills needed to carry out the Mission of the Asa Wright nature Centre, and we welcome them as our new Trustees.



*Celebrating the signing—Ruben McSween, Dr. Judi Gobin, Fred Gilkes, Dr. Carol James, Akilah Jaramogi, Fyard Hosein.*

The preparation of the necessary documentation was done by Mr. Frederick Gilkes of Caribbean Commercial Law Chambers.

Following the signing, the Trustees met with Dr. Judi Gobin and Dr. Carol James, along with Frederick Gilkes, for lunch at the Buzo Restaurant in Port of Spain.



# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE

JANUARY 2013 • PAGE 2



## RED-BREASTED BLACKBIRD

(*Sturnella militaris*)

The Red-breasted Blackbird could not have had a more self-explanatory name. The males are exactly what you would picture: black with a brilliant red breast and throat. The females, on the other hand, may be a bit more difficult to identify. They are brown, streaked and have but a stain of light red on their underparts. The female's association with a nearby mate is probably the easiest way to confidently identify it by sight. Males like to be seen, often occupying a prominent perch, while the retiring females may perch on a post or tuft of grass, or linger in the grass.

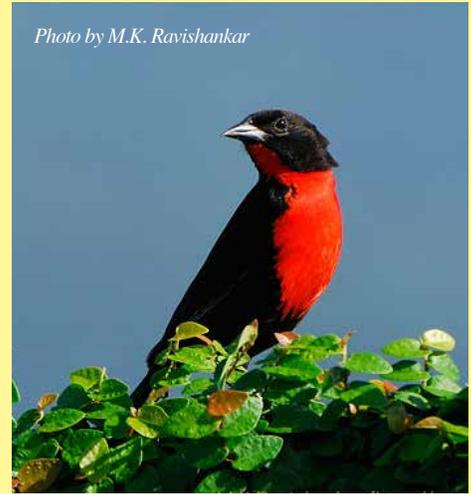
Recognising the call of the Red-breasted Blackbird can be an easier task. In a savannah, marsh or open grassland, listen for its song—a staccato chirp followed by a longer, somewhat metallic squeak. When on display, it gives a rattling call as it parachutes to the ground.

The Red-breasted Blackbird has only been occasionally seen in Tobago but is a permanent dweller of the aforementioned low-lying areas in Trinidad. Here, where it is also known as the Trinidad Robin, it breeds from March to December. This blackbird is also found in central and northern South America as far as Peru, Bolivia and Brazil.

The 18 cm long Trinidad Robin eats a variety of insects along with rice and grass seeds. It makes a cup-shaped nest of fine grass and at times, plant down. The average clutch has between two to four eggs.

This member of the *Icteridae* family (American orioles and blackbirds) species is often parasitised by the Shiny Cowbird. Look out for this blackbird and you can decide which common name suits it best—the Soldier Bird, Trinidad Robin or Red-breasted Blackbird. — J.L. Ryan

Photo by M.K. Ravishankar



### References:

- Hilty, Steven L. *Birds of Venezuela*. Princeton University Press. 2003.
- French, Richard. *A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*. Cornell University Press. 2012.
- [http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p\\_p\\_spp=468876](http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=468876)

## ROAD REPAIRS

Visitors to Spring Hill will notice that major road repairs are being done along our driveway. These works were urgently required, and we know they are causing a little inconvenience at times. However, when completed—hopefully at the end of February—we will have a newly paved driveway for everyone's comfort and enjoyment.

## DID YOU KNOW?

There are 17 species of hummingbirds in Trinidad and Tobago. A total of 13 have been recorded for Asa Wright Nature Centre, during the course of a year.



## WHAT'S THAT BIRD?

Have you seen a bird, or an animal, or a plant that you could not recognise, or were uncertain about? Well, send us your photograph, along with location, and your "guess", and we will try to identify the species for you, and publish your question and our response here!

Email your question and pic to:  
[asawrightconsedu@gmail.com](mailto:asawrightconsedu@gmail.com).

## 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](mailto:dinetienne44@gmail.com)

He/she may be selected as our Young Environmentalist for 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.**