



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE

www.asawright.org

Tel: (868) 667-4655

Email: asaright@tstt.net.tt



NOVEMBER 2012

THE RETURN OF RICHARD FFRENCH



The ffrench family in the Jade Vine Arbor

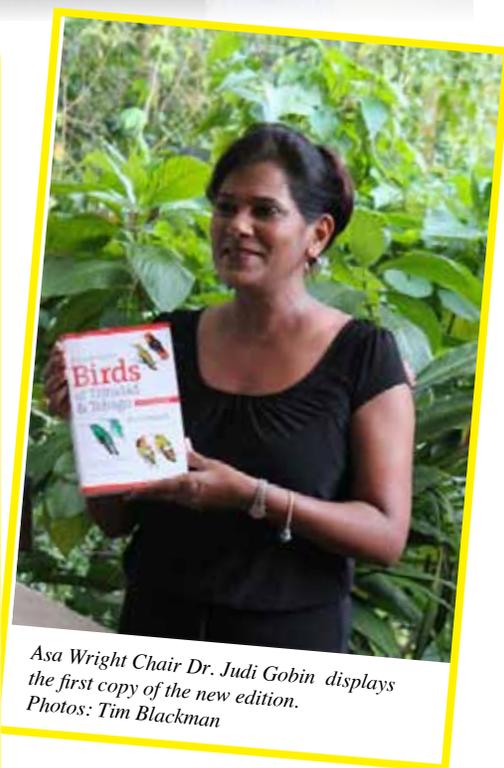
Richard ffrench's *A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago* is the principal reference guide for all birders visiting our islands. The first edition was published under the auspices of the Asa Wright Nature Centre, in 1972. The second edition was presented in 1991, and the third edition, after Richard's passing in May 2010.

This recent and updated edition was launched at the Centre's Jade Vine Arbor on Friday 9th November, in the presence of the author's widow, the gracious Margaret ffrench, daughter Julie, son Jonny, and their spouses Tim and Juliet who stayed with us for over a week. Some of Richard's surviving colleagues who had helped to found the Asa Wright Nature Centre in 1967, like Professor Julian Duncan and Ian Lambie, were also present.

The ffrench family and other guests were welcomed by Chairperson Dr. Judi Gobin. Then former Chair Dr. Carol

James gave a brief history of Richard ffrench's association with the Centre and the efforts to have his work published. His daughter Julie Baker described the life of the children of Richard ffrench, growing up literally in their father's footsteps in T&T, exploring forests and swamps and savannahs. As Julie concluded her tales, and told us that they had brought Richard's ashes with them to be scattered in the forest on the hills above Blanchisseuse, a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (*G.b.phaloenoides*) began calling through the dusk. Was this "Jumbie bird" speaking for Richard?

Richard's ashes are scattered at Las Lapas, along the main ridge of the Northern Range where he used temporarily to capture birds for study and description before releasing them. We are pleased to note that Richard has returned to the forests he loved, and which we preserve for him.



*Asa Wright Chair Dr. Judi Gobin displays the first copy of the new edition.
Photos: Tim Blackman*



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OPENING OF THE RICHARD FFRENCH NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM



Opening the new museum
Photo: Tim Blackman

Over the past year, the Asa Wright Nature Centre has been quietly establishing its Natural History Museum. This is located under the western side of the main house, and much of the work has been coordinated by Conservation Officer Atkin Isaac.

This museum has been named The Richard Ffrench Natural History Museum, in honour of one of our founding members and noted birding author, Richard Ffrench. With members of the Ffrench family present at Spring Hill for the launch of the third edition of Richard's *Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, the opportunity was taken formally to open and name the museum after Richard Ffrench. Most of our exhibits to date are botanical or zoological. But with the Opening we received our first Historical inputs.

The Ffrench family had brought from England all of Richard's original hand-written notes of the birds he had examined over the years and this trove was presented by Mrs. Margaret Ffrench to Asa Wright Chairperson Dr. Judi Gobin for safekeeping in the new museum. We are deeply touched that the Ffrench family has decided to place these papers in the custody of the Asa Wright Nature Centre.

RUFIOUS-TAILED JACAMAR

(*Galbula ruficauda*)

Earlier this month at Springhill, a high-pitched call of pee-pee-pee alerted us to the presence of a Rufous-tailed Jacamar nearby. Turning out to be just in front of Springhill's Main House, employees and guests alike were delighted to spot Trinidad and Tobago's only representative of the Galbulidae (Jacamar) family. Jacamars are Neotropical birds which are similar to Old World Bee-eaters. They look like oversized hummingbirds and share a few characteristics with 'hummers'. They have iridescent feathers, long, thin bills and a fullness of energy.

Locally called the 'King Hummingbird', the Rufous-tailed Jacamar is common in humid lowlands - on forest edges, in clearings and in secondary forest. It often perches a few metres above ground alongside a road, narrow stream or other type of clearing. There, it waits for prey, mostly flying insects, for which it hawks then thrashes against a branch in order to de-wing. These lively birds



Photo: Pierre-Yves Bilat

are regularly seen dust bathing on gravel roads. They measure 26 cm in length and usually nest in short tunnels on earth banks or even in termite nests.

Rufous-tailed Jacamars breed, in Trinidad, from February to June and in Tobago, from February to August, where I might add, they are quite common. Both sexes share nesting duties and interestingly, during courtship males remove the insects'

wings to feed them to females. Clutches of two to four white eggs with cinnamon spots, are laid.

The Rufous-tailed Jacamar inhabits a range from Central America to South America as far as Brazil and Northern Argentina. The beauty of its shimmering green upperparts and rufous underparts cannot be overlooked. While the male's throat is white, the female's is rufous.

These colours fit right in with Christmastime, so we presume that the bird's unusual appearance at Asa Wright was a fitting start to the holiday season.

– J.L. Ryan

References:

Hilty, Steven L. *Birds of Venezuela*. 2003.
Ffrench, Richard. *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*. 1991
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THE AGM, AND THE 'OUTING' TO LOPINOT



*Villa Mariposa's lunch spread
Photo: Mark Hedden/Caligo*

The Annual General Meeting of the Asa Wright Nature Centre was held on Saturday 10th of November, at Spring Hill.

On the day following the AGM, the Board went on their annual outing to places of environmental and historical interest, and this year visited our neighbours in the Lopinot Valley.

The first stop was at the top end of the Valley, at Las Lapas, the estate of our colleague in sustainability Cyril Cooper, who showed us the cocoa and



Asa Wright Paranderos Photo: Mark Hedden/Caligo

coffee he was growing, and explained the differences of the varieties of cocoa and coffee grown. Upon departure, each visitor was presented with a small bag of ground coffee and a piece of concentrated "Sabor Criolo" chocolate.

We then pulled into one of the most charming little hotels imaginable—Café Mariposa in the village of Lopinot, just opposite the historical original estate house of the Compté de Lopinot. Café Mariposa is operated by the seven Guerrero Sisters and their brother Arthur. They served the Asa Wright Team a magnificent lunch, to the lilting accompaniment of music and song from Arthur and four of the sisters.

After lunch, we toured the historic Lopinot Estate House, which has been beautifully restored, and is set in a lovely, well-maintained park, through which the Lopinot River meanders. Our host in the restored house was the irrepressible Martin Gomez, parandero and raconteur, who presented the history of the estate and the village in the true style of old-time storytelling.

He described each of the musical instruments hanging on the wall—all made by hand in Lopinot—and then shared some among the amazed group. The session ended with a medley of parang and old standards. We didn't realise how talented we were!



*Cyril Cooper explains the art of forest agriculture
Photo: Phil Schaeffer*