



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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JULY 2012

RAINY SEASON CHARMS

As weather patterns change everywhere, our little islands have also been affected. While we hear of the extreme-from droughts to floods, and heat waves to bitter cold- we are thankful that our changes have been benign...so far!

This year our dry season was sprinkled with almost daily showers. And so our hills stayed green, and the little streams that run through Spring Hill sparkled and sang happily all through the dry months. This meant there were no forest fires, so no birds' nests, or bee hives were destroyed, or ground dwelling animals were forced to flee for their lives.

All this has resulted in natural blessings for Asa Wright! The trees and plants are still in flower, and bird counts are up, and as regular BellBird readers will know, unusual animal sightings have occurred around the estate.

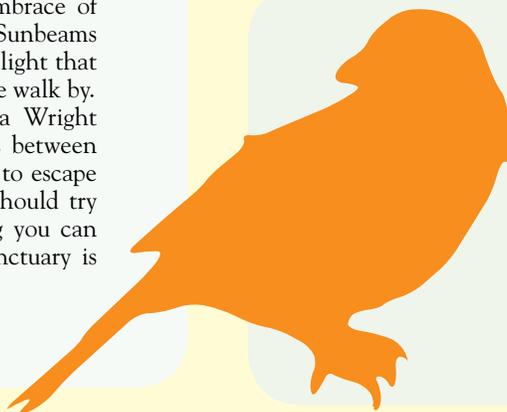
Those of us, who worried that we may have had torrents when the rainy season officially began, have been pleasantly surprised. The rains continue, but there is the beautiful mix of sunny days and intermittent showers when the sunshine and the rain create beautiful rainbows in the valley's mist. When we wander the forest trails, we walk in the embrace of these mists, eerie but poignant! Sunbeams pierce the canopy above to highlight that bird, butterfly or flower just as we walk by.

Most visitors come to Asa Wright in the northern winter months between December and March – mainly to escape the cold. But if you can, you should try Asa in the summer. Everything you can wish for in a rainforest bird sanctuary is there – with rainbows added!

Rainbow against a rain-washed sky



Sunbeams through the mist on Discovery Trail



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.



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SQUIRREL CUCKOO

(*Piaya cayana*)

The Squirrel Cuckoo mimics the sound of a human whistle- the 'woop, woop' that is sometimes made by males in the presence of an attractive female. It has a large repertoire of calls but the one mentioned above is the most common.

This member of the Cuculidae family is an inhabitant of forests and semi-open cultivated areas in Trinidad. Cuckoos stay mostly in the middle to the tops of trees, where they forage for preferred meals in insects and lizards. Our 'Coucou Manioc' as it is also called, likes large insects including caterpillars, cicadas, grasshoppers and beetles.

Characteristically, the cuckoo darts like a squirrel in trees, its long tail trailing behind it. When flying, it will glide for a short time. Stealthily, it stalks its prey and launches at them at the appropriate time or occasionally sallies for flying insects.

The Squirrel Cuckoo has a rufous head, back and long tail with white-tipped tail feathers, red eyes and a greenish-yellow eyering and bill. It resembles another one of our species in Trinidad, the Little Cuckoo, except for some distinguishing features. The 'Coucou Manioc' is larger (17 inches), has

a longer tail and has a pale pinkish upper throat and pale grey lower breast.

The Squirrel Cuckoo inhabits Southern Mexico to middle and south America and of course, Trinidad.

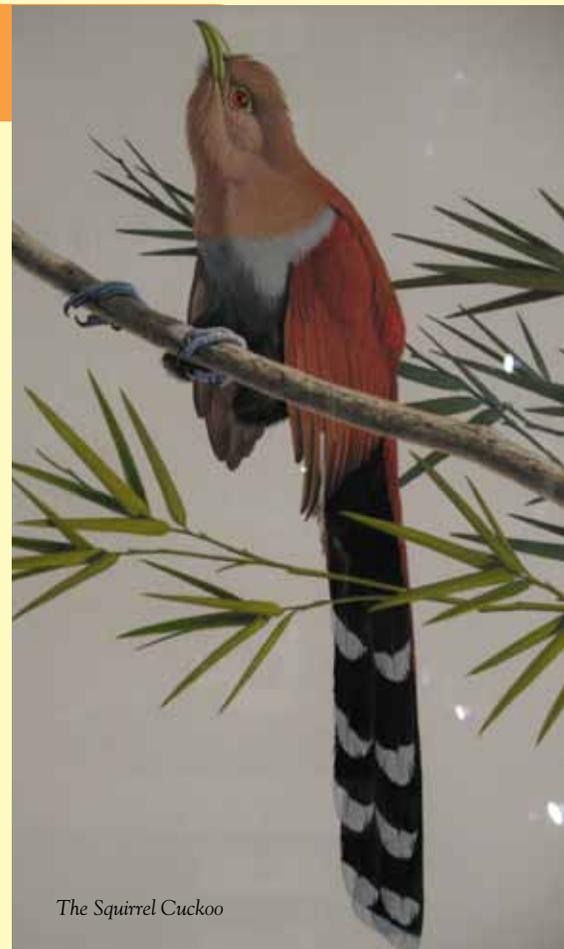
In Trinidad, breeding has been recorded in January, May, July and October. This cuckoo makes a nest out of twigs and lined with dead leaves, 15-40 feet above ground normally. It lays two pale yellow eggs which the male and female help incubate. Both parents also feed the young.

Come to Asa Wright Nature Centre in the right season and you may get a live viewing of the endearing Squirrel Cuckoo.

The painting to the right was done by Don Richard Eckelberry (1921-2001), a renowned wildlife artist who played a significant role in establishing the Asa Wright Nature Centre. – J.L. Ryan

References:

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



The Squirrel Cuckoo

SAY 'YES!' TO THE WILDERNESS



Edwin Pierre-Louis proposed to his long-time love Grychel at Asa Wright recently
Photo by Atkin Isaac

Edwin Pierre-Louis and his girlfriend Grychel had heard about the wonders of Asa Wright from their home in Brooklyn, NY. So they decided to visit this place which had enchanted them in their imaginations. Grychel thought the visit was a belated birthday gift for her recent birthday. But on arrival, Edwin realized that was no other place but here to propose to his long time love.

And so it was that visitors on the verandah heard a piercing scream from just beyond the feeders! What bird was that? Staff, rushing to check the source, found an ecstatic Grychel hugging her Edwin, and flashing a beautiful ruby engagement ring!

There is always something special in the air at Spring Hill! We wish Edwin and Grychel a beautiful life together, and hope that they will return to celebrate their wedding in the wilderness where she first said, "Yes!"