



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



www.asawright.org

Tel: (868) 667-4655 Email: asaright@tstt.net.tt

SEPTEMBER 2012



A SPECIAL PHOTOGRAPHERS' CORNER



Honeycreeper discovers new food source. Photos by Kenneth Fournillier

In June this year, in their ongoing efforts to introduce new visitors to the Asa Wright Nature Centre, Caligo Adventure Tours brought some special people to Spring Hill.

This was a group of professional nature photographers who came to Trinidad and Tobago to assess the potential for serious nature photography in our islands, and especially at Spring Hill. They were very impressed with what we had to offer on the islands and particularly at Spring Hill.

One suggestion was made for a sheltered location where serious photography could be pursued. While on the Asa Wright verandah the observer can view the birds intimately, photographers had to share the space with others, including, sometimes, casual visitors.

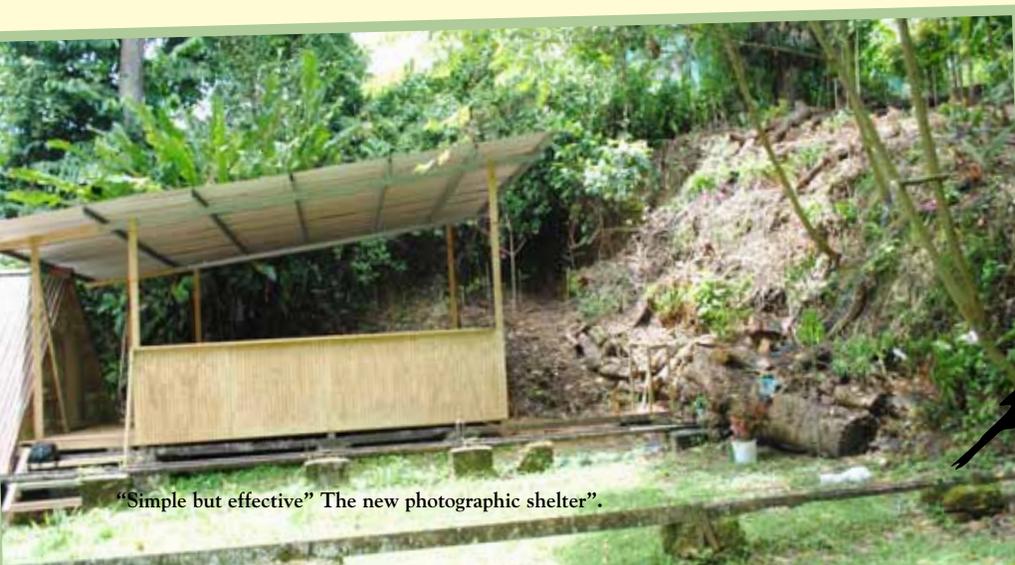
So, responding to this concern, and to create a very special place for the professional nature photographers to work protected from the sun or rain, we searched the surroundings for an ideal site to build a

covered Photographers' Blind. Along with Larry and Mark of Caligo, and with help from Board Member Raymond Mendes, a location was selected at the back of our two cocoa-drying houses.

This site, while within the main estate compound, is secluded enough not to attract the average or casual visitor, and thus gives considerable privacy to photographers using the shelter. It was also a place with a great diversity of bird and small animal life – even before we enhanced the surrounding foliage

with plants and trees to bring in more birds and animals.

The plywood shelter, built by our maintenance staff, and kindly funded by Board Member Courtney Buechert, measures 16 feet by 20 feet, and is set about 2 feet off the ground on the railings of one of the cocoa houses. It offers three views: to an adjacent flower-covered earth bank where two Mot Mots are nesting; across an open grassed area and into a mix of foliage which has been enhanced to attract more birds. Head Guide Mukesh Ramdass and Gardener Bharath Rambaran selected and transplanted the foliage, and built new feeding stations. These are already attracting a wide selection of birds and small animals. We look forward to seeing the photographs which will be shot from our new and dedicated Photographers' Blind.



"Simple but effective" The new photographic shelter".

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.





The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE

SEPTEMBER 2012 • PAGE 2



NEW RESIDENT AT SPRING HILL?

We recently acknowledged what appears to be the permanent status of a new arrival at Spring Hill. A beautiful large Cooks Tree Boa, (“Cascabel” in local parlance) seems to have taken up residence in one of our cocoa drying houses.

We have not yet determined its gender, because we do not want to “capture” and possibly distress it, but this approximately 7 feet (2 meters) long, yellowish, non-venomous boa constrictor lives up under the apex of the rolling roof. It comes out on top of the roof ridge most mornings for a brief spell in the sun, before

returning inside. It has been seen striking at the bats which share the cocoa house, so we believe that it has no reason whatever to move on.

This cocoa house practically abuts the new photographers’ Blind which we have just opened, so both the Cascabel, and its chosen diet of bats are on hand to “pose” for the photographers who wish to capture them on film!

And for those of you who really do not like snakes—or bats!-, please do not be concerned. You will not see these creatures on your visits to Spring Hill unless you ask to be taken to the cocoa house!



Cascabel ready to strike at bats disturbed by our entry into the cocoa house.



The same snake enjoying the sun on top of the roof, note the head turned back into the picture.



A GIFT FROM OUR PAST

Joselynn Carr Sealey is a friend of the Asa Wright Nature, and with excellent credentials! She is the daughter of the late Andrew Carr, one of Trinidad and Tobago’s best known naturalists, and sister to Dr. Thomas Carr, who served as President of the Asa Wright Nature Centre from 1996 to 1998.

Andrew Carr is credited with saving the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalist Society in 1926, when it was losing membership

and interest locally. He went on to serve as the Society’s Secretary until 1976.

Andrew apparently loved the wilderness, and explored the forests of the Northern Range with like-minded persons. Recently, Joselynn discovered, among Andrew’s belongings, a photograph of a Common Potoo, locally called “poor-me-one” because of its soft wailing call, taken in the forests in 1937!

Joselynn called the Centre and offered us this historic photograph, which is pictured at left.

Taken by a Ray Johnson, who Joselynn believes was an expatriate surveyor working in Trinidad, this is indeed a special view of this unusual bird. The photograph now hangs in the main House at Spring Hill, and we ask visitors to check one of our earliest bird-life photographs.

Thank you Joselynn for kindly donating this to the Centre!

RED-CROWNED ANT Tanager

(*Habia rubica*)

The Red-crowned Ant Tanager, identified by the scarlet stripe on its crown, is found throughout central and northern South America. The male with red crown and brownish-red coat of feathers, can claim responsibility for inspiring the species name. Conversely, the female is yellow-brown with a sand-coloured coronal stripe.

Although timid, Red-crowned Ant Tanagers are inquisitive dwellers of the forest understory where they forage for insects. They occasionally follow bands of army ants, hence their name. Whenever excited, they display the red crown in the form of a raised crest. In Trinidad, the males can be confused with female Silver-beaked Tanagers, but their red crown and discordant, grating call give them away, although they are good at staying out of view. Those vocalisations are sometimes followed by a sweet “pee-pee-pee.”



Photo by Pierre Yves-Bilat

These birds commonly mix with other species and are known to build shallow cup nests, usually near streams. At a length of eighteen centimetres, the oft-hidden Red-crowned Ant Tanager is a true beauty.
– J.L. Ryan

References:

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



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE

SEPTEMBER 2012 • PAGE 3



HOW THE VISITORS RATE US

Trip Advisor is a social medium for travellers worldwide to rate their experiences. Contributors speak from their hearts, and never pull their punches on either good or bad experiences. Asa Wright has good reason to be proud of this Vote of Confidence coming from the people who visit us.

CONGRATULATIONS!
Asa Wright Nature Centre
is a winner



141 Needham Street, Newton, MA 02464 USA
www.tripadvisor.com

General Manager
Asa Wright Nature Centre
Spring Hill Estate
Trinidad
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Best wishes,

Christine Petersen
President, TripAdvisor for Business

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