



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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October 2013

HARVEST TIME!

Volunteer call update...



Our September BellBird called for teams of volunteers to come up to Spring Hill in November to join us in harvesting our crop of Robusta "Mountain Ebony" Coffee.

Two teams have responded with confirmations for Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th November. The other harvesting days planned are Saturday 30th November and Sunday 1st December, and we are waiting to confirm your teams!

We are looking for groups of between 15 to 20 persons to join us in picking the coffee beans on each day. You will need to be at Asa Wright before 7.30 a.m. on the day; we will describe the process and give you a short safety briefing before we go out in the field. We will have people in the field to show you how the coffee beans are harvested, and to assist you.

Your "work day" will be from 8.00 a.m. to noon, and Asa Wright will provide you with a sandwich lunch and tell you how many kilos of coffee your team brought in. You will then be invited to cool off in our chilling Clearwater River Pool, right next to the harvesting area.

Do you have a team, from your office, school, NGO or lime that can do this? Contact asawrightconsedu@gmail.com for details on how to get involved in a fun day supporting the Asa Wright Nature Centre.



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Mustard Anyone?

And I don't mean the condiment!

Some of you may be familiar with Mustard, the popular twelve-foot-long albino Burmese Python that resides at the Zoo. Recently Asa Wright Nature Centre hosted a Snake Handling Workshop which was facilitated by members from the Emperor Valley Zoo along with Sharleen Khan, Preunath Harry and Delbert Charleau. They brought along Mustard with them, plus two Boa Constrictors and a Rainbow Boa. Mr. Charleau gave the featured

in our natural environment. They help to keep down the rodent population, and also play an important part of food chains. He reiterated the fact that you are not allowed to kill any snakes on state land. Neither are you allowed killing non-venomous snakes on your property; you are only permitted to kill the venomous ones.

In Trinidad there are four venomous snakes which belong to two groups, the

in Trinidad are the Large and Common. Their venom is neurotoxic which means it affects the nervous system. The two species of Pit vipers found on island are the Mapepire Balsain also known as the Fer-de-lance, and the Mapepire Zanana known as the Bush Master. Pit vipers venom is hemotoxic which means it affects the blood system, by breaking down red blood cells and is also known to cause tissue damage. These snakes use their venom for self defense, also



presentation to a group of enthusiastic patrons. This workshop was done in collaboration with GEF small grants. The purpose of the workshop was to educate staff and community members about the venomous and non-venomous snakes on the island, and how to go about handling them.

Mr. Charleau started off by explaining that all snakes can bite if they feel threatened or in danger, but generally they are not interested in humans. Like all creatures, snakes have a role to play

Corals and the Mapepires or Pit vipers. There are also a group of snakes which are considered mildly venomous, and they are known as the Rear- or Back-fanged snakes. Their venom is not life-threatening, but it is capable of causing severe allergic reactions. These Rear- or Back-fanged snakes are recorded on both islands, including species like the Black Cribo (which is known to eat venomous snakes) and the common vine snake called Horse Whip.

The two species of Coral snakes found

to kill and break down prey. Sometimes they are occasionally known to give a "dry bite" where no venom is injected. It is recommended that if you are bitten by any species of snake you should seek immediate medical attention.

Antivenom is not produced locally, it is imported from either Brazil or Mexico. It is made by milking venom from a specific snake. This venom is then diluted and injected into a horse or sheep. The animal will undergo an immune response to the venom, which



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produces antibodies to counteract the foreign substance in its system, which can then be harvested from the animal's blood. One vial costs several thousand US dollars and has limited shelf life. Sangre Grande, and more recently Port of Spain General Hospital, carries this antivenom, which must be administered by a medical doctor.

Winston Rojas, the "snake handler" of Asa Wright Nature Centre displayed a

Mapepire Balsain which he caught the day before. The group was very excited to see this species up close with its large, needle-like fangs. Simultaneously Mr. Charleau showed a Boa Constrictor explaining the differences between both snakes i.e. the markings on the body and the shape of the head.

It was stated that if someone was bitten by a venomous snake the first thing to do is try to keep them calm

and reassure them that it is going to be alright, because the fear of death can kill a person much faster. Try to remove rings, bracelets or anything constricting. Then you need to clean the area or wound. You can attempt to tie the area but not too tightly; you do not want to stop the flow of blood, just slow it down. Do not attempt to suck out the venom, as by doing so you can actually infect yourself if you have any tooth or mouth issues. Do not put ice or mud on the area. Transport the person to a hospital as fast as possible.

This art of snake handling is not for the faint of heart. If you have little or no experience in this field, it is recommended that you leave them for the experts to handle. However, we need to respect these animals and not fear them, like any other creature they just want to live. Therefore, we must learn to let live and let live.

Denise Etienne

Delving Into Cocoa Part 2

If you're a frequent reader of our monthly Bellbird Newsletter, you may recall an article entitled "Delving into Cocoa". At the time, we had successfully completed two of the four cocoa rehabilitation workshops facilitated by the Cocoa Research Centre. The final two were held in August and October and were focused on "Diseases" and "Post-harvest practices" respectively. There are several diseases that can pose a threat to cocoa



with black pod being one of the more common. Good maintenance practices can help to keep these diseases at bay. In terms of post-harvest practices, these methods are what determine the quality of your cocoa products. Under/over fermentation and incomplete drying are just a few of the things that can make your cocoa tea or even your home made chocolate taste less chocolatey! Hopefully at the Asa Wright Nature Centre, we can make use of these two workshops in addition to the others before to create some great-tasting cocoa products.

By Kimberly Chu Foon



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Photo by Pierre-Yves Bilat

Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*)

By J.L. Ryan

The evening sky bleeds with flocks of Scarlet Ibis returning from their evening forage. These, the largest flocks of Trinidad's National Bird, the Scarlet Ibis, can be seen at the Caroni Swamp. Although this habitat is far from the rainforest hills of Asa Wright, a trip, led by one of our expert guides, to this swampy destination can easily be arranged by the operators at our Front Desk.

Besides Trinidad, Scarlet Ibises are mostly found in northern South America. They inhabit wetlands, where they obtain their preferred food: crabs.

In fact, it is the carotenoids found in the crabs, which give the Scarlet Ibis its rich, red colour.

The Scarlet Ibis, which features prominently on Trinidad and Tobago's Coat of Arms, is easy to spot in the field. The wing tips, eyes and bill are actually black. The juvenile Scarlet Ibis is gray-brown with white underparts but later becomes pink and finally red, when it reaches maturity. An adult Scarlet Ibis may be about 23 inches long. The bird is seldom heard, only making light squeaks when disturbed or at the nest or roost.

The Scarlet Ibis is a gregarious bird and often congregates with Herons at roosts. This can be observed at the Caroni Swamp where both white Herons and Scarlet Ibises can be seen

flocking to stands of mangrove. Will you be visiting Trinidad soon? A stay at Asa Wright can be the first step to securing your spot on an unforgettable trip to the Caroni Swamp to see our Scarlet Ibis in action.

References:

French, Richard. A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago. Cornell University Press. 2012.

Hilty, Steven L. Birds of Venezuela. 2003.

2010. Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*), Neotropical Birds Online (T. S. Schulenberg, Editor). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; retrieved from Neotropical Birds Online: http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=115676

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

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.

