



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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SEPTEMBER 2014



Dressed Up Again



New roof cover being placed



East side of the Old House

By Peter O'Connor

This Old House at Spring Hill has survived 106 years in a rainforest environment. There are not too many such buildings standing strong and proud in Trinidad and Tobago. And none which have had to do so standing alone high in the clouds of the Northern Range. While some of our Heritage Buildings set in friendlier environments like the city have been crumbling before our eyes, the Old House of Spring Hill stands strong and proud.

And this is testimony to the care and attention we have given the house over the years. This year, Maintenance Supervisor Francis Lewis and his men put in extra effort to place a new roof

over the building, and painted all of the internal and external walls. We also sanded and revarnished the old timber floor which is now lighter and brighter than it was before.

Our work was made so much easier because of the help from NH International Contractors Ltd., who kindly provided the scaffolding system we needed for the work, and our paint and coatings provider Ansa Coatings Limited, who continue to supply us with Penta paints and varnishes to beautify and protect our buildings. We deeply appreciate the assistance given by these good Friends of the Asa Wright Nature Centre, and we hope everyone enjoys how bright and beautiful we are looking now!



The newly sanded and varnished floor



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*A Bushmaster found by Graham White and Peter O'Connor
Photo by Bob Thomas*



In Grande Riviere

What I Am Still Trying To Find Part II

Continued from the August issue

By Bob Thomas

Every naturalist has what is called a "target list" when he/she travels. This is a list of plants, animals, whatever that the naturalist is eager to see in the wild. Over the last 24 years, my target list has shortened. I've seen an ocelot at the Centre, velvet worms (*Peripatus*, every biologist's dream to find), various tarantulas, leatherback turtles in Grande Riviere, manatees at Nariva, red howler monkeys at Bush Bush, and much, much more. What I have not yet found in the wild is a bushmaster. How odd is that? The animal that captured my imagination in Ditmars' book has eluded me.

Bushmasters are not uncommon in Trinidad, and I frequent their habitat. I've had visitors on the trail ask me about a snake they saw 50 metres ahead of me, and they showed me a nice photo

of a bushmaster. In June, Graham White and Peter O'Connor visited one of the Centre's properties and found a beautiful bushmaster freshly killed on the road – and I could have been with them.

I have a standing cash offer for the grounds/education staff at the Centre if they can take me to a wild, resting bushmaster. The day will come when they take me to see a wild snake, or I will find one in the wild? No doubt, but I do wonder, when?

And if I don't find the animal, I'll know that at some point in time a bushmaster watched me walk by in its special habitat!

For me, the thrill of Trinidad includes the people I meet and know, the communities we visit, the marvelous animals that are lurking along the trails, the knowledge I gain from learned citizens, the dedicated board and staff of the Asa Wright Nature Centre, and the quest for the spectacular flora and fauna for which Trinidad is internationally known.



Red-tailed Squirrel

(Sciurus granatensis)

By Johanne Ryan

Squirrels have inspired many animated characters. One of the more modern but vastly entertaining stars was 'Scrat' of the Ice Age movies. Scrat always lit up the screen much in the way his real-life counterparts can attract the observer with their cheery antics.

Trinidad and Tobago is fortunate to have one species of squirrel; the red-tailed squirrel. 'Our' squirrel, which also inhabits parts of Central and South America, comes complete with bushy orange-brown tail. It also has a red-orange chest and belly. Otherwise, this squirrel is generally brown. These members of the rodent order, produce average litters of one or two young ones and may breed up to three times a year.

Red-tailed squirrels are common in humid forests, secondary growth and parks. In their spaces they may be seen scurrying up tree trunks or even doing playful acrobatics in the trees. By habit, they are solitary as well as territorial. Even on the occasion that they are seen in groups, each one always maintains a fair distance from the other. A scratchy sound that is sometimes when made when feeding on hard seeds or palm nuts may guide one to the squirrel's location. Apart from palm nuts, red-tailed squirrels favour fruits, seeds, other nuts and less often, bark and fungi. Fruit is sometimes hidden in the connections of tree branches so that they can be returned to later. These squirrels also feed on cocoa and are considered pests of these plantations.



Photo by Pierre Yves Bilat

But red-tailed squirrels also have special ecological roles. By feeding on fruit they in turn disperse the seeds. They also serve as food for predators like the boa constrictor, for example. Not to mention, they are quite entertaining to watch – a trait which may encourage young ones to appreciate these animals and by extension, nature. So whether it's at Asa Wright, in your own backyard or anywhere in between, we hope you will enjoy observing the lively red-tailed squirrel!

References:

Reid, Fiona. *A Field Guide to the mammals of Central America and Southeast Mexico*. Oxford University Press. 1997.

http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Sciurus_granatensis/



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Calling Coffee Pickers



*Some of our volunteers picking coffee last year
Photo by Johanne Ryan*

Prepare your team for the coffee harvest in November and December! We are calling for corporate, school or other groups of volunteers to come and help us bring in the coffee beans. The trees are laden and the berries are starting to ripen.

We hope to start harvesting in early or mid November, and continue through December and into January 2015. We are looking for teams of between 10 to 20 persons (adults or young adults) to spend mornings picking and bagging coffee beans from our trees at Asa Wright.

Last year we harvested, with the help of volunteer groups over 4,000 pounds of coffee beans, which when dried, roasted and ground, became the delicious Mountain Ebony Coffee which you drink or can purchase at Asa Wright.

Interested persons or groups who would like to help bring in the beans should contact us at 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 dinettiene44@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.

