



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE

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August 2015



Pan in Nature



*The Panorama of the Arima Valley from Asa Wright's verandah
Photo by Kenneth Fournillier*

By Peter O'Connor

Pan was a deity in Greek mythology. He was a god of the mountains and forests, where he usually wandered alone. On windy, moonlit nights at Asa Wright Nature Centre, one can almost hear his music in the sighing fronds of the Bamboo Valley Trail.

Pan is also the iconic percussion musical instrument created from steel drums in the hills of Laventille above Port of Spain.

Panorama is the amazing expansive view down the forested Arima Valley, as seen from the Verandah at the Asa Wright Nature Centre. The Valley is filled with the sights and songs of about 147 species of birds, rustling breezes and laughing streams.

Panorama is also the annual gathering in Port of Spain of the massed steel orchestras of Trinidad and Tobago as they vie to become the

champion steel orchestra of the country. And this year, for the first time ever, the International Panorama Competition was held in early August. Steel orchestras came from England, Europe, North America and as far away as Japan.

The Panorama Steel Orchestra of Japan was among those who came to perform. Thirty musicians paid their own way to come to the epicentre of steel pan music. They were assisted by Hideyo Morimoto of Island Buddy Limited, a tour company specialising in bringing Japanese visitors to our islands (check them at www.lovetrinidadandtobago.com). Three of their musicians, Mie Nakadai, her daughter Kairi and Mishio Nakazawa, told Hideyo that they wanted to experience 'attractive parts' of our island, and Hideo brought them to Spring Hill for two nights.

We of course were thrilled to share our versions of Pan and Panorama with these ladies, and we look forward to welcoming more of them in the future.



*Enjoying the rainforest
Photo courtesy Hideyo Morimoto*



*Mie Nakadai, her daughter Kairi and Mishio Nakazawa are led by our Guide Barry
Photo courtesy Hideyo Morimoto*





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At Asa Wright
Photo by Reema Persad-Clem

Frogtastic!

By Danielle Ortmann and Joshua Shrieves

We both believe that frogs are amazing creatures and that more people should appreciate their exceptional qualities. Frogs are extremely good bio-indicators because they are very susceptible to water pollution due to the fact that early development takes place in water, and because they help with controlling insect populations. We therefore developed a frog resource binder for Asa to share with future visitors to the Centre. In this folder, we expanded their set of live interpretation frog guides to include more of the species encountered in the Arima Valley. We also wanted to help young visitors to the Centre understand why frogs are so remarkable, so we even created a fun memory game to get them excited about frogs by using pictures and fun facts. What makes Trinidad and Tobago unique is that some of its frogs are endemic to the islands, such as the Trinidad Stream Frog and the Lesser Antilles Robber Frog, and if they disappear, they disappear forever. Our hope is that reading the data we compiled, looking at the images or playing the game will inspire an interest in frogs that will eventually lead to their protection.



Here we are at Asa Wright
Photo by Reema Persad-Clem

Plants for People

By Maura Sounders and
Alexandra Dawson

As we walked around the Asa property, we became fascinated by the different species of native plants. Not only were they visually pleasing and good for attracting different insects and animals, but we also learned they had various practical and medicinal uses. By going for walks led by guides who know a plethora of information on the numerous plant species, we were able to gain some insight into

the medicinal uses of some of the plants on the grounds. A guided walk by local herbalist, Francis Morean, helped to further shape our knowledge on the subject of Trinidad's native medicinal plants. We then used this information to construct an easy-to-follow guide to some of the more distinctive native medicinal plants found around the Centre grounds. We hope that future visitors may be able to use this guide in order to locate and appreciate these plants as much as we did!



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Children from Fun Time Vacation Camp with their new 'binoculars'
Photo by Johanne Ryan

by Johanne Ryan

When last have you seen the fruit of the Sandbox tree? The fruit splits open on its own and scatters the seeds on the forest floor. Campers who visited Asa Wright this year during the July-August vacation were delighted to pick up and examine the woody parts of the fruit which craftsmen transform into 'dolphin' earrings – a wooden jewel form the rainforest.

This year, our young explorers participated in various activities: walks on the Discovery Trail and admiring our wealth of birds – hummingbirds, tanagers and honeycreepers feeding voraciously at our feeders. They did a 'recycled craft' – making owls from toilet paper rolls or birds from plastic bottle caps. Even binoculars to view their birds were fabricated from toilet paper rolls. There was storytelling, our interactive poster board, guessing animal sounds and viewing insect



The Mount Hope Travellers group on our Discovery Trail
Photo by Tonya-Lee Phillip

specimens. The purpose of all these activities was to bring young ones in close touch with their environment. Campers did not leave empty-handed as children each got a free poster of local animals or plants. These posters were Asa Wright publications sponsored by the Global Environment Facility.



Savannah Hawk

(Buteogallus meridionalis)



Photo by Clive Bowley

By Johanne Ryan

The often silent, majestic Savannah Hawk, commonly roams Trinidad's open lowlands. Ranches, savannahs, swamp edges and palm plantations are a few areas they frequent. Savannah hawks are particularly prominent in east Trinidad. Capable of voicing a piercing scream, they often perch upright atop poles and the like from which they dive to the ground for a catch of the day.

The Savannah Hawk breeds early in the year. You will commonly find its nests, made of sticks and grass, sitting at the base of the leaves of the cocorite palm. Held in the nest is a clutch of one, white egg. This hawk preys on a variety of animals which are normally taken from the ground – insects, lizards, toads, snakes and small mammals.

This hawk inhabits a range that extends from Panama to Argentina and Uruguay. It is normally seen singly or in pairs. Would you like to spot it on your next birdwatching outing? Look for a mostly rufous hawk with yellow legs, about 53 cm tall. Use this photo as a guide.

References:

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

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 of 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 Centre, which includes viewing birds/animals on the Verandah, a nature tour and use of the clear water pool. Ages 5-16.

