



The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



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September 2015

The Art of Interpretation

Certified Interpretive Guide Training

By Kimberly Chu Foon

Have you ever been to a presentation that was so dull you almost fell asleep? Have you been to one that was amazing, challenged your way of thinking and had you talking about it for days later? The difference between a great presenter and a not so good one can often be attributed to their skills in interpretation. Interpretation in its simplest form, is the action of explaining the meaning of something and can be seen as an approach to communication. Interpreters come in different forms and many people will find themselves interpreting information in their everyday lives. Some people have even made a career out of it and use the art of interpretation to get their messages across in sites such as museums, parks and zoos.

Within the field of nature and the environment, a successful interpreter is able to effectively communicate environmental messages whether it be to adults or children, birders or general naturalists. Their programmes are also able to provoke their audience into developing meaningful connections between themselves and the environment. This in turn may help shape them into environmentally responsible citizens, i.e. people who don't litter on the streets, people who recycle and people who do

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Participants of the Certified Interpretive Guide Training programme proudly display their certificates.

Photographer: Corky McReynolds



Race against time. Participants race against each other to win for their team.

Photographer: Fran McReynolds



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what they can to conserve the environment. It is with this in mind that the Asa Wright Nature Centre thought it a useful asset to host a course in interpretation under the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) with trainers Fran McReynolds and Karin Hostetter.

The four-day workshop known as the Certified Interpretive Guide Training (CIG) programme, was held in early September and had a total of 27 participants. All of our Centre's guides were able to successfully complete this programme and in an effort to continue our partnerships with surrounding communities, several external tour guides were also invited



Cookie baking – just another fun activity during the workshop

Photo by Kimberly Chu Foon

to attend. They came from different areas throughout the country including Brasso Seco, Lopinot, Nature Seekers, Caroni, PAX Guest House, Verdant Vale and Tobago.

The completion of the CIG results in an internationally recognised certificate and greatly enhances participants' skill sets in interpretation. The interactive nature of the course provided participants with a fun learning experience and lasting memories. This programme was made possible by a grant provided by the U.S. Embassy in their initiative to fund creative and sustainable projects. Their funding is geared towards our education outreach programmes which can be substantially enhanced by this training. Financial assistance was also provided by the U.S. based Friends of the Asa Wright Nature Centre made possible by a generous contribution from the family of Mrs. Arlene Buechert.

Certified Interpretive Host Training

By Kimberly Chu Foon

Subsequent to our guide training programme, the Centre also hosted a Certified Interpretive Host Training (CIH) programme under the National Association for Interpretation (NAI). Given that interpretation is not only limited to naturalist guides, we saw it as beneficial to also certify our staff who interact with guests on a daily basis. The CIH focuses on skills in customer service, hospitality, communication and informal interpretation. Our receptionists, security personnel, waitresses and chefs were all involved in the activity-filled two-day workshop. We believe that the combination of great customer service and successful interpretation will help the Centre to achieve its stewardship goals. A special



Above: The CIH team works together to create a map of Trinidad.

Photo by Kimberly Chu Foon



Left: Participants of the Certified Interpretive Host Training programme proudly display their certificates.

Photo by Corky McReynolds

thank you goes out to the U.S.-based Friends of the Asa Wright Nature Centre, which covered all costs for this training. As with the CIG, the contribution came directly from the family of Mrs. Arlene Buechert.



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Wake Up and Pick the Coffee!

By Peter O'Connor

It's coffee time again. But before you can "wake up and smell the coffee", it has to be harvested. The coffee trees at Asa Wright are full of ripening berries of our Robusta Coffee. We hope that we can begin picking the ripe berries from around the end of October, and this should continue through November and December.

So once again we are looking for teams of volunteers who would like to come up to Spring Hill Estate (The



Asa Wright Nature Centre) on Saturdays or Sundays and help us to harvest our coffee. This really is a fun way to spend a day in nature with friends and colleagues, helping

us to bring in our harvest.

You will need to be at Asa early in the morning, as we need to be "in the field" before 8.00 a.m. We work until about 11.00 a.m. and then return to the Mango Room where Asa Wright will provide lunch to the harvest team. After lunch you can join a guided trail tour, cool off in our Clearwater River Pool or just relax on the verandah.

So, if you can organise a team of 10 to 20 persons, can arrange transport, and be at Asa Wright by no later than 7.00 a.m. (we are a half-hour drive from Arima), you need to contact us at asawrightconsedu@gmail.com or 667-4655 and we will send you information on the day's activities, what to wear and how we go about picking the coffee.

Friends of Asa Wright Luncheon

By Johanne Ryan

On Sunday 20th September, we were happy to host some of our Trinidad and Tobago 'Friends' at Asa Wright. They were treated to a hearty Asa Wright Sunday lunch and had the opportunity to meet and interact with other fellow members. Our local Friends of Asa Wright initiative, launched in 2014, provides support to the Centre's activities, especially its work in education and conservation. Chairman of the Board, Graham White addressed the group, telling them how the 'Friends' contributes to The Asa Wright Nature Centre. It was great for us to meet a group of persons with similar goals to



Our 'Friends' on the verandah
Photo by Barry Ramdass

help preserve and protect the environment. Some members enjoyed the ambience of the forest as they walked along trails looking for interesting species. And it was nice to see people exchanging numbers: strangers

having turned into 'Friends' at the end of the afternoon. We thank everyone for coming out to enjoy a relaxing Sunday afternoon in the Arima Valley.



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*Hummingbird Lesson Plan
Scheibner and Molina
Photo by Reema Persad-Clem*

This One is for the Birds

By Mike Molina and Reva Scheibner

Prior to visiting Asa, we had never spent much time looking at birds but once we sat on the verandah, we were hooked! We wanted to design a short activity that anyone who visits Asa could do either from the verandah or up on the blind or even both locations. We therefore developed a hummingbird lesson plan for educators and guides. It contains an ethogram exercise that Asa could use to not only engage visitors of any age, but also to collect long-term behavioral data to keep track of hummingbird activity. We think that Asa is an ideal place to conduct such Citizen Science projects. We also included directions and materials for younger Centre visitors to construct their very own Trinidad and Tobago Hummingbird Medal and included tips such as avoiding red dye and brown sugar in home hummingbird feeders.

Where there is a Map, there is a Way

By Annabelle Harvey,
Suzanne Ketcham, Michelle Marinaccio

Asa offers an array of nature trails for visitors to enjoy the spectacular flora and fauna. These trails weave through the forest, down to caves, through waterfalls and other hidden treasures of the grounds, but following these trails was a bit of a challenge to us at first so we thought having a more accurate trail map would be helpful for future Centre visitors. Using a handheld Global Positioning System (GPS), we hiked every Asa trail while tracking our location, as well as marking some of the cool features of the grounds. These GPS points were then taken back to the SU campus, uploaded to Arc GIS mapping software and made into a digital map. We tried to make it as user-friendly as possible, clearly defining the trails and including trail length. We updated the



*Our team with Asa Wright's Peter O'Connor
Photo by Reema Persad-Clem*

pre-existing descriptions to outline the difficulty level, cool features and wildlife a visitor may encounter. We hope that future visitors will be able to use this digitised map on their electronic devices or use a print version while on the trails. In addition to the trails, we mapped the cottages and main house so visitors can easily locate their rooms. We even got to help name each cottage based on neighbouring birdlife!

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 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.





Can You Spot the Nesting Boxes?

By Kimberly Chu Foon

Nesting boxes have long proven to be useful at creating habitat for cavity nesters. For many bird species, a lack of suitable nesting sites can limit their opportunities for breeding and their population growth. At the Centre, we've encountered several birds nesting in holes but we thought it might be useful to install a few boxes to create some more spaces.

The boxes were built earlier this year by the hard work of our maintenance staff, as well as a volunteer group from North Carolina State University. The dimensions of a standard model was used to design and create the boxes



One of the boxes near the Don Eckelberry Roadway.
Photo by Kimberly Chu Foon

which have been known to attract some species of owls, parrots and hawks. They may also attract other wildlife such as squirrels.

A total of nine nesting boxes have been placed on trees along the driveway. We varied the height at which they were installed (between 15 and 30 feet), as well as the distance of the trees from the driveway in order to get an idea of which conditions were more successful. Although some boxes may be quite easy to find, others will require a lot more effort. The boxes will be monitored on a weekly basis to determine if there are any birds that have taken up residence.

Fork-tailed Flycatcher

(*Tyrannus savana*)

By Johanne Ryan

The Fork-tailed Flycatcher is hard to ignore. Adults sport a majestic, black, forked tail that shapes with the wind. The long length of the tail is what makes it stand out. The tail can be longer than the body. Males have the longer tail, and females, a slightly shorter one.

The 'scissors tail' has white upperparts, a greyish back and a yellow crown patch hidden beneath black feathers. Like other flycatchers, it sallies for insects and will snatch jumping, flying or crawling insects. Froghoppers,



Photo by Pierre Yves Bilat

flying ants, caterpillars, beetles and mole crickets are a few of its favourites. And it also takes in berries and seeds. The 'scissors tail' makes a sharp 'tchit' but is normally silent. Despite their common silence, they are aggressive. They can harass species even larger than themselves. An Osprey, Striated Heron or Scarlet Ibis is no match for the feisty fork-tailed bird.

Their common haunts are savannahs, the foothills of the Northern Range and the freshwater marshes of South-West Trinidad. They roost in large numbers, often in mangrove and other forest. They have been known to roost in the Caroni Swamp and Arena and Caura Valley.

Fork-tailed Flycatchers are visitors to our islands, making the journey from South America. Look out for them from April to October, when the species is most commonly seen in T&T. Some visitors even remain here throughout the year. Just on August 27th, we sighted nine Fork-tailed Flycatchers at Asa Wright from the verandah. There may still be time for you to spot a few around Trinidad and Tobago, who knows.

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