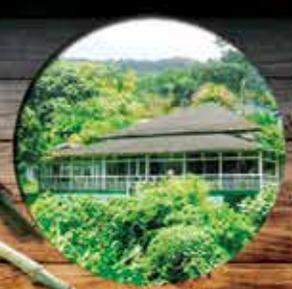




# The Bellbird Newsletter

THE ASA WRIGHT NATURE CENTRE



reservations@asawright.org Tel: (868) 667-4655

APRIL 2016

## Widener University at AWNC

By Johanne Ryan

In Trinidad and Tobago today, we can go hiking and enjoy the shade of the trees and bathe in clear river water, all in harmony with the forest animals. But what if 100 years from now, that hiking trail no longer existed, all the animals had disappeared and there were only remnants of trees left?

This is where sustainability comes in. Sustainability is not just the latest buzzword, it is a concept that must urgently be applied to everyday life. While we make use of our natural resources like oil, natural gas, plants and water, we must be careful to conserve them. For oil and natural gas are finite resources. And though water is renewable, human activity is causing our waters to be polluted at an alarming rate. In general, our natural resources are threatened by man.

It is especially important for young people to lead sustainable lifestyles. Faculty of Widener University recognise this and have collaborated with Asa Wright on a service learning project that focused on the theme of sustainability. In March, Widener University students and professors Dr. Nadine McHenry and Dr. Brett Alvare met with various educators and representatives of environmental organisations from all over the island, at the Asa Wright Nature Centre.

Anthropology students presented their findings on research about changing mindsets towards sustainability. They discussed the effectiveness of strategies that have been used around the world to encourage sustainable behaviour. For example, using the private sector to mobilise change, has led to success. So has training teachers, as was illustrated by a study on teaching green chemistry. They discussed the schemes that could apply to locally.

Presentations of lesson plans created by Education students, followed. These lessons all related to sustainability and were aligned to T&T's syllabus, specially made to be used here. The topics, which were chosen based on the



*Dr. Alvare and Ms. Rea Raghunanan of the the Wildlife Orphanage and Rehabilitation Centre, discuss the lesson plans*

*Photo by Anjelica Nina Nicolas*



*Nadine speaks to the participants*

*Photo by June DeGale-Rampersad*

Anthropology students' research, were food webs, waste management, bush fires, the 3 R's and natural resources. In a lively discussion, local stakeholders gave their feedback on the lessons, as was planned, so that Widener students could adapt them later on.

We, at Asa Wright, would like to thank the members of Widener University for coming to AWNC and we are delighted to be a part of this budding network. Cheers to what the future brings!



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## Unusual Sightings

By Martyn Kenefick

Whilst at Asa Wright we always try to give visitors a really happy and fulfilling wildlife experience, it is not too often that we are able to provide literally a "once in a lifetime event". Even more unusual would be for such a sighting to happen in the middle of the day. Nevertheless, on March 30th, Mukesh, was driving two customers close to Brasso Seco Village when a full-sized adult Ocelot chose that moment to leap onto the road and scamper across to the forest cover on the other side. For good measure, they also found a Blackpoll Warbler later that day.

Back at Springhill, the major rare bird event was on the afternoon of April 14th when Jessie found an adult male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Of the 13 records in the last 20 years, seven have been from Asa Wright and all but four have occurred during March-April. Two Mottled Owls and a Spectacled Owl have been heard calling from the driveway mid-evening during the last few weeks. We had a real surprise on April 6th, when an approachable, confident, even nonchalant, Bright-rumped Attila appeared literally on the balcony. This large resident flycatcher is normally shy and wary, calling deep from within the middle canopy. Attilas come in a range of colour morphs, two of which have been documented in Trinidad; the common olive morph and the much rarer rufous – to our surprise, balcony bird was rufous. The only sightings of Swallow Tanager during the month was a male on April 18th and two males and a female, the following day. Our Green Hermit mummy in front of the Reception Office has hatched twins, as have a pair of Barred Antshrikes in front of Chalet 14 whilst a pair of Green-backed Trogons were nesting in an old termites nest on the Discovery trail.

On one of our external tours with Dave in mid-March, the highlight was a photogenic juvenile Rufescent Tiger-Heron in Nariva Swamp. A rare Trinidad resident, we know of just three locations on the island where they are known to breed.

Elsewhere in Trinidad, an adult Snail Kite was seen hunting on farmland to the east of Caroni Rice Project on March 22nd; joined by another the following day. Of the eight birds recorded in



Bright-Rumped Attila Photo by Roger Neckles



American Flamingo Photo by Nigel Lallsingh

Trinidad over the last 20 years, all but two were found in this general area. Amazingly, a female was photographed hunting the same ditches alongside her male associates on the 27th. However, perhaps even more unusual, was a Neotropical River Otter seen casually swimming along one of the irrigation

Continues on next page



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## Unusual Sightings (continued)

From previous page

canals.

Amongst the shorebirds' roost on the tidal mudflats at Brickfields, a Marbled Godwit was found on March 24th – the first for eight years. Also present were approximately 200 Western Sandpipers, many moulting into breeding dress, five basic plumaged Red Knots and a couple of Wilson's Plovers. Many of our coastal birds are deemed rather drab in appearance. Not so the three bright salmon-pink American Flamingos that flew north past the Temple by the Sea on 29th March, later reported from within Caroni swamp.

Gran Couva continues to attract migrating warblers. On 30th March, the Tennessee Warbler mentioned last issue was still in the same tree, this time accompanied by an alternate plumaged Blackpoll Warbler. The female Blackburnian Warbler was briefly seen close by, whilst a little further up the hill, two Bay-breasted Warblers were actively feeding up for their impending journey north.

On April 3rd, an impressive total of four Common Potoos were found in the Caroni swamp; the following day an unseasonal Apomado Falcon was photographed flying over Rochard Road, Penal. Continuing down



*The Rose-breasted Grosbeak seen at Asa Wright*

*Photo by Ann Sealey*

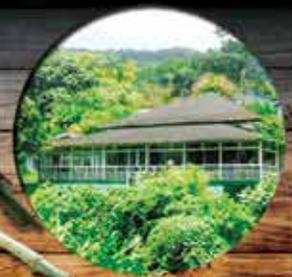
into deep south Trinidad, a Wood Stork was photographed circling Fullerton swamp on April 17th, only the fifth sighting of this wanderer from mainland South America since the start of the century

Tobago is the place to see our summer breeding seabirds. Most of the terns arrive mid-late April however, this year, Roseate Terns appeared right at the beginning of the month.

## YOUNG ENVIRONMENTALIST OF THE MONTH

If you think your child, aged 5-16, 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 [asawrightconsedu@gmail.com](mailto:asawrightconsedu@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.





# Red-rumped Agouti (*Dasyprocta leporina*)

By Johanne Ryan

Did you know how the agouti lost its tail? Well listen to this Trini Folklore. Long time ago in Trinidad, the forest animals decided to host a party on a boat. Only animals with horns were allowed. That left out dog and agouti. Dog sneaked onto the boat wearing fake horns. Agouti, jealous that he was missing the party, told on the sneaky dog. Later, in a spat, dog angrily bit off agouti's tail.

The agouti only appears to be a tailless mammal. It does have a tail actually, albeit a tiny, inconspicuous one. This is one of its distinctive features. As a member of the rodent family, it has two sharp incisors at the front of its mouth. These are tools to help them munch on seeds like those of the Crappo trees (*Carapa guianensis*) and fruits like avocado, hog plum and mango. The agouti commonly buries nuts in the ground so that it can retrieve them later, when food is scarce. This habit makes them vital dispersers of many forest seeds.

The agouti is native to T&T as well as Venezuela, the Guianas and central Brazil. It has been introduced to some of our Caribbean island neighbors – Dominica, Grenada, and the US Virgin Islands (Eisenberg and Redford 1999) and the species occurs in protected areas in every country in its range. Naturally, the agouti is found at Springhill. In fact, it is the most common mammalian species seen at Asa Wright. Look for it from the verandah and other areas in and around the property.

A mammalian camera trap survey of Springhill done at Springhill from 2013-2015, found the agouti to be the most commonly photographed species by far. They accounted for 59.8% of the total number of sightings. These agoutis were only photographed during the day. Generally, agoutis are most active in the early morning and late afternoon, as the study also supported (Rutherford & Chu Foon, 2016).

If you see an agouti nibbling on fruit or catch its careful glance before it dashes into the bushes, you too may be endeared to the agouti. With its reddish-brown fur and tiptoe-esque gait, what's not to like?



Photo by Johanne Ryan

## Reference:

Emmons, L. & Reid, F. 2008. *Dasyprocta leporina*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2008: e.T6284A12596441. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2008.RLTS.T6284A12596441.en>. Downloaded on 13 April 2016.

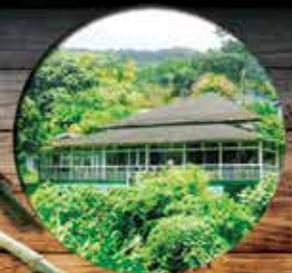
Emmons, L., H. 1990. *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide*. The University of Chicago Press.

Rutherford, M. and Chu Foon, K. *Activity Patterns of Terrestrial Mammals at Springhill, Arima Valley, Trinidad, Trinidad & Tobago*. Accepted by *The Living World Journal*, 2016.



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## Bat Surveys at AWNC

Story and photos Kimberly Chu Foon

It's that time of the year again! Last month, members of the Trinibats organisation visited the Asa Wright Nature Centre on two separate nights to conduct bat mist netting surveys. On the second night, a total of 21 species were recorded which is similar to numbers recorded in previous years. What was particularly noteworthy was the capture of a Bartica Bat, *Glyphonycteris dayiesi*. This is only the second record for this species on the island! The research done by Trinibats has proven once again, the high level of diversity in our area.

On both occasions, guests from a number of different countries including Canada, United Kingdom, India and the United States were treated to a wonderful night talk. The presentation showcased live bats and detailed their features and ecological niches. It was an excellent opportunity to learn more about the importance of bats in our ecosystems.

The full results of the Trinibats survey will be posted in an upcoming *Bellbird Newsletter* so stay tuned for more details on some of the interesting finds at the Centre.



Live bat being shown at the night talk Photo by Kimberly Chu Foon



Guests listen in as the bat talk begins Photo by Kimberly Chu Foon

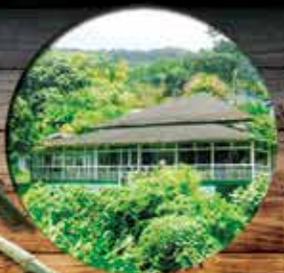


A full house for the bat talk!  
Photo by Kimberly Chu Foon



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## Earthwatch and AWNC Partnership

By Kimberly Chu Foon

The Earthwatch Institute has been operating for 45 years and has been integral in connecting citizens with lead scientists to conduct hands-on research in a wide range of areas throughout the world. The studies conducted are geared towards improving the health of the planet and the benefits of the Institute's current and previous projects have been seen worldwide.

When the AWNC was approached with the idea of conducting an Earthwatch project at the site, we saw it as an amazing opportunity for partnership and collaborative research. This particular project, referred to as the "Trinidad Ocelot Project", is aiming to evaluate the conservation status of ocelots on the island of Trinidad. Ocelots, are the only species of wild cat found in Trinidad and are quite unique in terms of their ecological context. Over the years, it has been suspected that ocelot populations have been on the decline in Trinidad due to habitat loss. It is therefore in good timing that research is done on this species to greater understand their population.

The Earthwatch leaders along with a group of enthusiastic volunteers worked for several days on our site, placing camera traps in strategic positions along our trails. These camera traps are meant to capture photos of any ocelot or smaller mammalian species that may be passing by, which would then give researchers a better idea of the importance of various habitats and geographical locations to this species. Vegetation transect surveys were also conducted in order to gain a better understanding of the habitats in which the camera traps were deployed.

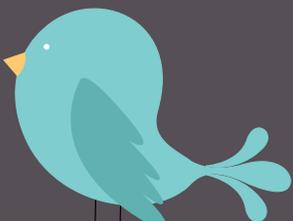
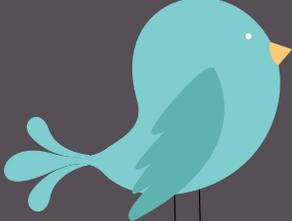
Camera trapping can often take several months or years in order to gain sufficient data to complete a study. Over the next few months, students and researchers will be collecting data from the camera traps on our site to work toward the completion of this important research project. Stay tuned for more details!



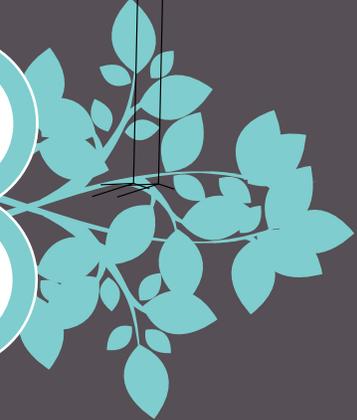
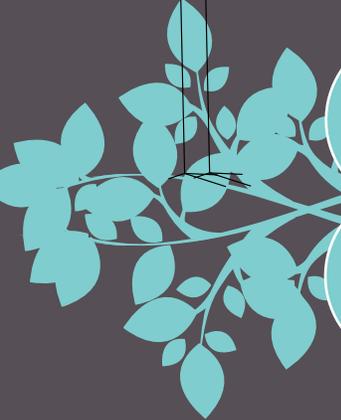
*Hammond (left) and Project Leader, Anthony (right), set up a camera trap*  
Photo by Johanne Ryan



*The team makes sure that the camera is at the right height*  
Photo by Johanne Ryan



♥ HAPPY ♥  
MOTHER'S  
♥ DAY ♥



**Mother's Day  
Accommodation Special Rate  
6 – 8 May, 2016**

**\$1,200.00** double occupancy  
for residents of Trinidad and Tobago  
per night.

Check-in at 2.00pm.  
Afternoon tea, a complimentary  
rum punch, dinner, a night activity,  
breakfast and a complimentary glass  
of wine for all moms.

All taxes and charges are inclusive.



# Sunday Brunch at the Asa Wright Nature Centre

3rd July, 2016  
10am – 2.00pm

Scrambled eggs, eggplant choka, saltfish buljol and assorted breads: coconut bakes, sada roti and muffins.

Smoked red beans, roasted leg of lamb in mint sauce, buttered fish fillet with vegetables, Herb and garlic roasted potatoes, cheese-glazed macaroni pie and a tossed salad medley.

Frosted carrot cake and chocolate mousse

Coffee/tea/ juice inclusive

**TT\$160.00 per person**

**TT\$80.00 children 11 years and under**

Reservations are required and can be prepaid.

Please contact us at **667-4655** or **667-4961** or **reservations@asawright.org**

No entrance fee for brunch reservations