



Environment TOBAGO NEWSLETTER

Volume 3 Issue 3

September 2009

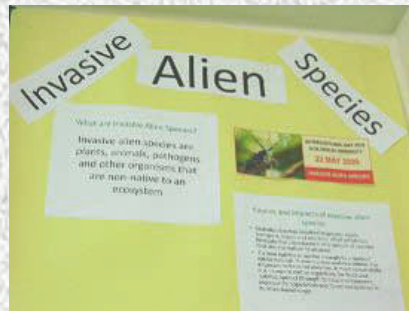
Environment TOBAGO (ET) is a non-government, non-profit, volunteer organisation, not subsidized by any one group, corporation or government body.

Founded in 1995, ET is a proactive, advocacy group that campaigns against negative environmental activities throughout Tobago. We achieve this through a variety of community and environmental outreach programmes.

Environment TOBAGO is funded mainly through grants and membership fees. These funds go back into implementing our projects. We are grateful to all our sponsors over the years and thank them for their continued support

International Day for Biological Diversity and Green Wave Environment TOBAGO

On May 22nd Environment Tobago held an Open House event at their offices in Tobago to commemorate International Day for Biological Diversity. The event was attended by more than 60 children and adults from the community schools and corporate entities. The offices were transformed into film and movie rooms, Rainforest, Coral Reefs and Wetlands areas. The participants were invited to learn all about the overwhelmingly beautiful biodiversity of Trinidad and Tobago. Also highlighted were the various threats which our biodiversity are currently facing. The main theme this year "Invasive Alien Species" was prominently displayed and participants were given short lectures and presentations on this topic and its relevance in the local context.



The theme of this year's International Day for Biological diversity

Though our activities were largely confined to the indoors and we were unable to participate in the prescribed way, we were not deterred from getting involved in the global Greenwave campaign. Over 18 indigenous trees were donated by the Forestry Division. We were able to distribute the trees to the schools which attended the event as well as to the representatives of local commercial entities. Participating was the Unit Trust Corporation's Business Development Manager, Mrs. Desiree Hackett-Murray and Mrs. Sheila Williams from the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC). This was an ideal forum to engage the community's awareness and participation in this global initiative. The representatives from the local media, Radio Tambrin and Channel 5, as well as covering the event, also participated in the Greenwave campaign. A true testimony to the success of the event.

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The President of ET, Patricia Turpin with the Salvation Army Kindergarten



Mrs. Patricia Turpin (left), President of Environment TOBAGO, presents the students of St. Andrews Anglican Primary School with the first tree for the school grounds.

Business Development Manager, Mrs. Desiree Hackett-Murray and Mrs. Sheila Williams from the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC). This was an ideal forum to engage the community's awareness and participation in this global initiative. The representatives from the local media, Radio Tambrin and Channel 5, as well as covering the event, also participated in the Greenwave campaign. A true testimony to the success of the event.

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Some of the persons presented with trees

September 2009

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Mrs. Patricia Turpin (right) presents Ms. Eulalie Hills (left) teacher at the Pentecostal Light and Life Foundation with a tree for the school grounds.



Ms. Ayanna Carter (left), reporter for Channel 5 receives her tree from Mr. Robert de Mateaus of the Forest Division of the Tobago House of Assembly.



Mrs. Sheila Williams, of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission and also a student of the University of the West Indies collects her trees for planting.



Mrs. Desiree Hackett-Murray (left), Business Development Manager from the Unit Trust corporation, is presented with her tree by Mrs. Patricia Turpin (right), President of Environment TOBAGO.

**Marine Awareness March at Speyside
Environment TOBAGO**

On June 19th Environment Tobago together with the Buccoo Reef Trust, the Speyside Anglican School and Speyside High School and the Coral Cay Conservation group came together to raise awareness of the need to keep the reefs at Speyside beautiful. The March began on the Speyside Lookout and went through the village up to Doctor's River then back to the playing field. Many villagers were roused from their homes and crowded their porches to see what the commotion was all about.





Participants and their banners

**Science Week
Environment TOBAGO**

The Division of Education, Sport and Youth Affairs hosted its “Science For All” Fair at the Gulf City Lowlands Mall between June 22nd to 26th 2009. Environment Tobago participated with the support of a volunteer Asalma Abdullah and members of Coral Cay Conservation.

Our theme focused on raising awareness on Global Warming and Climate Change. It was very interesting to engage school children and adults alike in this burning global issue. We showed a power point presentation and distributed games and activities to aid learning.

MISSION STATEMENT

Environment
TOBAGO

conserves Tobago's natural and living resources and advances the knowledge and understanding of such resources, their wise and sustainable use and their essential relationship to human health and the quality of life



Visitors to our booth

Environment Tobago Summer Camp 2009

Environment Tobago is pleased to have hosted this year's Summer Eco Camp 2009. The project was implemented between 20th-31st July 2009. The Camp brought together, highlighted and addressed many environmental concerns in Tobago under two themes: My Rainforest; My Heritage and Caring For My Environment: My Community. Under the careful supervision of Ms. Thecla Harry, the Camp Coordinator and teacher at the Goodwood High School along with Four Camp Counsellors, Dillon George, Anton Murray, Kelsie Robley and Sonia Providence, all students of the Goodwood High School who forfeited their vacation to participate in the camp, the camp participants learned to plant a herb garden with exotic and local herbs, cleaned a beach in their community, planted an ornamental garden for the local community kindergarten, made handicraft and took an exciting field trip which explored the Main Ridge Forest Reserve and wrote the Secretary of the Division of Agriculture, Marine Affairs and Marketing of the Tobago House of Assembly sending him their thoughts on what they learned.

The Camp was indeed a success in grooming the future stewards of this beautiful tropical island environment."



Photos of some of the activities and participants learning and having fun

Environment TOBAGO's 14th AGM
Patricia Turpin
President of Environment TOBAGO



Patricia Turpin, ET's President delivers the Annual President's Report

This year's AGM on the 20th of August at the Botanics Conference Room in Scarborough.

Once again, we are assembled to discuss our achievements and failures over the last year. It is disheartening to start off a discourse with dire warnings and predictions of the state of Tobago's environment. However, as stewards, we must admit that the difficulties in addressing related issues are increasing. Daily, we are bombarded with complaints from the public and we ourselves are confronted visually by a multitude of different and challenging issues. There is always the problem of WHO will address the problem? Which agency?

It has been disturbing to witness the lack of law enforcement in dealing with eco-system and biodiversity degradation. Our wetlands are being leveled and filled in for development. The concept of the CEC process is largely ignored, breeches in this process are commonplace and monitoring is lacking. Who will address this?

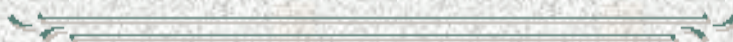
Pollution of all kinds is proliferating. Enriched waterways are producing an increase in alien invasive plants e.g. Thompson's river with the water lilies. Caterpillar infestations at Crown Point. Coral reef diseases from e-coli and Sahara dust storms are on the increase. Littering has reached epidemic proportions. Turtle massacres and illegal hunting have increased due to lack of staffing capacity at DNRE.

Has anything positive happened this year? Well yes, in certain spheres, the Education program for Primary and Secondary Schools has been extremely successful; recycling, wetlands and Forest Education programs have shown that there is a growing awareness and appreciation among our young people and their teachers for their environment. The use of the media, television and our website for educating, discussing and disseminating information on a variety of current topics has allowed us to research, monitor, report and interact with our partners in the THA and general public.



Shirley Mc Kenna, ET's Treasurer, delivers

ET's image has been raised in the domestic arena while Directors and members have been seriously involved in monitoring environmental problems throughout the year. We have been instrumental in the formation of new policy on Forests and Protected Areas and MEA's-Multilateral Environmental agreements. In the international arena- the successful implementation of the Belle Garden wetlands project has proved invaluable. The Green Fund Unit has expressed an interest in partnering with ET in Tobago-we are to have a unit funded by the Green Fund, to advise and help local NGO's and CBO's prepare project proposals for the Green Fund. This is a very positive development for ET.



ARTICLES

What are Sky Islands?

Jo-Anne Nina Sewlal

Dept of Life Sciences, University of the West Indies

The term “sky islands” is used to describe areas of mountains in mountain ranges that are isolated by desert valleys. Therefore the flora and fauna on these mountains develops as it would on oceanic islands.

The varied topography of these mountains means there are a wide variety of microclimates available, which in turn leads to the presence of different vegetation habitats, other features like rivers and caves. Like oceanic islands, their isolated state makes them perfect candidates for the development of endemic species.

Examples of these habitats are found in the United States as the Dragoon Mountains in Arizona, Mt San Jacinto in California, Fan Si Pan in Vietnam, the Mountains of central Taiwan and closer to home the Tepuis or table top mountains of Venezuela.

Getting to the truth of stereotypes in the sciences

Jo-Anne Nina Sewlal

Dept of Life Sciences, University of the West Indies

The word science drums up images of people in white lab coats conducting various experiments. But the “sciences” cover many different academic disciplines, such as the social sciences, medical sciences, life sciences and physical sciences. When it comes to the environment we are more concerned with the last two categories. Of course each of them comes with their own stereotypes which can mask their importance and function.

First of all what are these two “sciences”? The “life sciences”, as its name suggests, comprises those fields of sciences that strive to examine, analyse and show how living things such as plants and animals function, such fields include botany, zoology and microbiology. Physical sciences on the other hand also strive to show how things function. But is concerned more with isolated processes, for example, how carbon reacts with heat to burn and give off carbon dioxide and water as well as heat. Such fields of this type of science include chemistry and physics. Now that these sciences have been identified, they can now be compared and contrasted with fair accuracy.

One of these contrasts can be elaborated from the example given above with the combustion of carbon to produce carbon dioxide, water and heat as a by-product. To a chemist who belongs to the physical science – chemistry, this reaction

falls in the area of organic chemistry since all living or organic things are carbon-based. It is a way to get heat which in turn can be used to fuel other chemical processes, which are used to manufacture products we need like building materials, processed foods, and cloth among others, in our everyday life.

However, to a zoologists for example, the burning of carbon, which can be in the form of fossil fuels releases which are formed from the decomposed bodies of plants and animals that have decomposed under pressure for millions of years. So that burning these fuels releases trapped energy that was in the form of intact tissues or fat when the organism was alive as it was originally used to making these structures. This released energy is now available for other living things to use. Therefore, one can gather that the life sciences aim to show how these perceived isolated processes can actually be the cause or result of a biological process. Hence it is able to in most cases link the biological with the non-biological.

Also when one hears of such fields of science as zoology or botany one instantly pictures people dressed in shorts and t-shirts with floppy hats on, down on their hands and knees in the dirt collecting specimens of insects and other animals or digging up a plant specimen. However, when the words chemistry and physics are mentioned the images of people in white lab coats surrounded by various bubbling coloured liquids and complicated pieces of equipment spring to mind. These images are partly correct in that many life sciences fields involve a great deal of time being spent in field or study sites collecting data. But to stereotype these images with these particular fields of science is wrong, since the physical sciences also require those involved to spend a majority of their time in a laboratory.

This is so because such areas of life sciences like microbiology involves a majority of time being allocated to the laboratory since the organisms under study are so minute that they have to be viewed and experimented with under special conditions using special equipment in a laboratory.

That is not to say the physical sciences do not have their share of fieldwork to do. In a field such as geology, one has to go out into the study site to get specimens in order to carry out chemical tests on them. Unlike microbiology the specimens geologists work with are much larger, such as, rocks and soil samples. These require special equipment to collect and also a lot of time as well.

Another stereotype attached to these fields of science is that those involved in the life sciences are only destined to teach in whatever field they have specialised in. however, for those involved in the physical sciences there are more job opportunities available. But there could be some truth attached to this stereotype since the physical sciences have numerous sub-divisions of each field, for example, in chemistry, one can become an analytical, environmental or medical chemist just to name a few. So that some persons use both types of sciences as a “stepping stone” or a preparatory stage in order to pursue their final career goal, for example, one can enter into the field of zoology in preparation for entering the medical field later on.

Therefore it is safe to say that both aspects of science involve both laboratory and fieldwork with some placing more emphasis on one or the other. So rather than focusing on the stereotypes of these sciences it is best to concentrate on the data and research they obtain and carry out for the well-being of the environment and all the organisms that call our planet home.

“ when one hears of such fields of science as zoology or botany one instantly pictures people dressed in shorts and t-shirts with floppy hats on, down on their hands and knees in the dirt collecting specimens of insects and other animals or digging up a plant specimen. “



A STRANGE, FAMILIAR PLACE

Review of: Archie F. Carr 1994. *A Naturalist in Florida*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press
264 pp.
[Sixteenth in a series on "naturalist-in" books.]

Christopher K. Starr
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“An alligator in a pond is not just an eater of other animals in the pond, not merely the top predator of the southeastern wet country. He is an extraordinary member of the pond community.”

English-speaking West Indians are perhaps the least imaginative travelers in the world. When I hear that someone has gone abroad on vacation I ask "Did you go to Miami, New York, Toronto or London?" The invariable response is amazement that I guessed so accurately. Actually, there is no trick to it. Who ever goes anywhere else? So, Miami is well known to us, which is not to say that most West Indians have any acquaintance with wild Florida. Carr's book, then, comes from someplace very strange.

Archie Carr (1909-1987) taught at the University of Florida and lived on a 10-acre, mostly wild farm in the Suwanee Valley. His travels gave rise to very readable books on Central America (Carr 1953), the West Indies (1956) and Africa (1964). His most lasting legacy is probably in the conservation of sea turtles. At a time when populations seemed steady and inexhaustible, he showed that they were, in fact, in serious decline and so set the stage for the protection of nesting beaches and other organized international efforts (Carr 1967, Davis 2007).

Florida is a long peninsula of the North American Continent, extending deep into subtropical latitudes. The land is low-lying throughout, porous, and rich in wetlands. The peninsula has at various times been submerged and lifted anew from the sea, a major theme in its geological history. Even without sea-level fluctuations, the constant accretions and collapsing of limestone formations makes Florida very dynamic. There are more artesian springs here than anywhere else in the world. Especially toward its southern end, it has many caribbean elements found nowhere else in the continent.

The area around the Suwanee River, which drains the vast Okefenokee Swamp, is a zone of separation between the Florida-endemic and caribbean faunal elements to the south and the more broadly continental elements to the north. Most of this book, a collection of writings over 50 years, derives from this area. Appropriately, there is much attention to geologic and climatic history as it affects the present biota.

The 25 chapters cover a range of topics, such as the maintenance of feeding stations for buzzards, the introduced nine-banded armadillo (*Dasyus novemcinctus*), carnivorous plants, and the association between spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) and the live oak (*Quercus virginiana*). Still, Carr's main interests are in the cold-blooded vertebrates. There are chapters on the gulf sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus*) and the box turtle *Terrapene carolina*, another unsuitedly titled "In Praise of Snakes", and two chapters are dedicated to the american alligator, with frequent mention of alligators elsewhere in the book.

Alligator mississippiensis is one of two living species of alligators. The other, *A. sinensis*, is found in China. These are very large, amphibious, generalist carnivores. They probably eat few fish or birds, just because they can rarely catch them, and subsist mainly on turtles, frogs, mammals and carrion. Like crocodiles, they are well adapted to ambush that come to water to drink. When young they probably eat mostly crabs and insects. When mature, an alligator is so large, armoured and fierce as to be virtually immune to natural predators.

Let me offer some practical advice at this point. Charles Waterton reported physically subduing a large crocodile in Guyana, but he was so intent on treating it off-handedly that he didn't actually say how he did it. Successfully wrestling any large crocodilian requires attention to two basic facts: a) the very powerful tail has great side-to-side speed and must be avoided, and b) the jaws close very powerfully but open only weakly. The first trick, then, is to jump on top and immediately wrap your legs around the body, so that the tail cannot reach you. Then close the jaws with your hands and hold them closed (which you can usually do with just one hand at the end). After that, the beast can thrash and roll all it likes, probably scratching you somewhat with its feet, but it cannot do you any real harm. I'm afraid I have no idea how to get off and away to safety.

The status of the alligator underwent considerable change in Carr's lifetime. For a long time it was intensively hunted, resulting in a sharp decline in its range and numbers. It was listed as endangered in 1967, and just 20 years of protection brought it back to abundance. In my experience, alligators are not at all rare in Florida today, perhaps roughly as common as the spectacled caiman in Trinidad. Attacks on humans are virtually unknown -- while some crocodiles are known to delectate humans, alligators, for no evident reason, do not -- but in some parts of Florida they usefully keep the dog population in check.

Unlike most reptiles, alligators and some other crocodilians make rather elaborate nests on the shores of rivers and ponds. The female heaps together a large mound of soil and vegetation -- so big that they can be censused from an airplane -- which serves to keep the eggs above the changing water level. She helps hatching young to escape upon hearing their audible croaking, and there is reason to believe that her mothering skills improve with experience. In addition, both females and males make dens under the banks of waterways and engage in other kinds of digging that alter the landscape. As Carr emphasizes, "An alligator in a pond is not just an eater of other animals in the pond, not merely the top predator of the southeastern wet country. He is an extraordinary member of the pond community. His excavations and dredging influence the relation between land and water. His droppings fertilize the water and contribute to its productivity. His comings and goings open channels and modify the succession process by which ponds give way to marsh."

I very much appreciate Carr's writing for something he has in common with William Beebe and Wayne Brown: One often has no idea where he is going. Commenting on the arrival of a bird on a patch of mud, for example, he writes "He was a snowy heron, and his coming in the stand there ... was for me a last chink stopped in a long daydream. It was a dream of birds and behemoths and of the smallness of the world, and its essence is this: the snowy heron resembles mastodons." Now, admit it, you didn't see that coming. It is the lead-in to a disquisition on snowy egrets associating with cattle in the familiar manner of cattle egrets. And, like Beebe and Brown, Carr has a good sense of punchline.

He also has a fine eye for biological questions and no hesitation in setting forth a scientific problem to which he has no solution, effectively offering it to anyone who wants to take a crack at it. He seems especially fond of adaptive enigmas. If a species consistently does something that seems to make no biological sense, he wants to know why, and if he can't figure it out, well, he would very much like someone else to give it a try.

Edward O. Wilson said that "No writer exceeds Carr in his ambidextrous handling of human and natural history." This requires some comment. Many nature writers give considerable attention to persons and society, as something of interest in itself. This is not Carr's way, and one finds no character sketches or remarks on manners. Rather, he is very much interested in human beings as creatures in nature, with an impact on nature, not so very different from his interest in alligators. When Carr first came to Florida in the 1930s, it was largely unknown to naturalists. William Bartram and John Muir had been there and written interesting things about it, but they were just visiting. During his lifetime, Carr saw Florida's wildlands go from apparently secure to threatened preserves.

"Charles Waterton reported physically subduing a large crocodile in Guyana, but he was so intent on treating it off-handedly that he didn't actually say how he did it.. "

No chapter of *A Naturalist in Florida* is explicitly devoted to conservation concerns, but they are a theme throughout. He foresees an ongoing battle, but also finds "reason for optimism over the state of nature and man in Florida".

In reviewing Hans Boos's book on the snakes of Trinidad & Tobago some years ago, I took the view that ophidiophilia could serve as a strong force for conservation, the idea being that people who appreciate snakes can be counted on to stand up for wild nature as a whole. I thought this was terribly original, but now I find that Carr already made the same point, more elegantly: "A man who feels in his bones that snakes must be kept in the woods will be the proper stuff for the struggle coming."

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WHAT'S HAPPENING @ ET

ET is now on Facebook and Twitter

We invite everyone on **Facebook** to join. Here we will post upcoming events, links, photos and videos on ET matters and other environmental issues.

ET group link: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=53362888661&ref=ts>

And keep up to date on what we are up to by following us on **Twitter**: https://twitter.com/environ_tobago

Environment TOBAGO Environmental and Services Map of Tobago

They are excellent and will be published every two years. Published in January 2008. Requests for these maps can be made to ET office.

Volunteers needed!

Persons who are interested in helping with cataloguing and filing of ET's educational, research and operational material and archiving.

New Members

With a membership of 394 worldwide, ET welcomes the following members:

Allan Sandy
Tina & Devon Eastman

Environment TOBAGO t-shirts and caps now available



Type: Polos
Size: Small, Medium & Large
Price: TT\$150.00
Colours: Kelly green, royal blue, red, gold and ash grey
Description: ET logo embroidered on left breast, sponsor's logo printed on the back.



Type: Lady's tees
Size: Small & Medium
Price: TT\$100.00
Colours: Lime green, red and black
Description: ET logo printed on front and sponsor logo at the back centre



Type: Regular tees
Size: Small, Medium & Large
Price: TT\$100.00
Colours: Kelly green, red, black, navy blue, ash, purple, royal blue and black forest
Description: ET logo printed on front and sponsor logos on sleeves at the back centre



Price: TT\$120.00

Orders can be made through the office.

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We are on the web
<http://www.Environmenttobago.net>

READERS' FORUM

Dear **ET Newsletter Readers**,

We want to hear from YOU!
Comments may be edited for length and clarity.
Send your comments to: jo_anneowlal@yahoo.com
or envirtob@tstt.net.tt

GUIDELINES TO CONTRIBUTORS

Articles on the natural history and environment are welcome especially those on
Trinidad and Tobago.

Articles should not exceed approximately 1200 words (2 pages) and the editors
reserve the right to edit the length. Images should be submitted as separate files.

Submit material to any of the following: 1) jo_anneowlal@yahoo.com
2) envirtob@tstt.net.tt

**Deadline for submission of material for the 4th Quarter 2009 issue of
the Bulletin is December 10th, 2009.**

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP



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MEMBERSHIP TYPE (CHECK ONE)

STUDENT (TT\$25 US\$5) ADULT (TT\$50 US\$10) FAMILY (TT\$100 US\$20)

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