

## A Guide to Wild Flowers of Trinidad and Tobago

E. Julian Duncan

Photographic illustrations by Julian S. Kenny  
Asa Wright Nature Centre. 1993, 88 pp

Public awareness of environmental matters has increased enormously over the past ten to twenty years and with it the need for books dealing with different aspects of natural history. Slowly but surely this need is being met with books such as Caribbean Flora by Dennis Adams (1976), Butterflies and other Insects of the Eastern Caribbean by P.D. Stiling (1986), Native Orchids of the Eastern Caribbean by Julian Kenny (1988), a new addition of The Birds of Trinidad and Tobago by Richard French (1991), and the smaller Birds of Trinidad and Tobago by the same author (1988). Now we have this Guide to the Wild Flowers of Trinidad and Tobago by Julian Duncan. It is a well-produced and attractive little book with descriptions and illustrations of 65 wild flowers, adequately covering the wide range of types.

Most of the plants are common weeds that can be seen just about anywhere and so are truly wild, but some, such as Corallita, are escapees from cultivation that have spread and become common. There are some surprises in the list. For instance, in my experience, Dutchman's pipe (*Aristolochia grandiflora*) is a rare plant, and so is *Matalea viridiflora* for which there is no common name. Yet these are both included, and perhaps with good reason. The first is unusual in both shape and colour, and

in its method of pollination. The second is one of only a very few green flowers, and not just a pale green or greenish-white, but a really intense green.

On the other hand, there are some unexpected omissions, such as St John's Bush (*Justicia secunda*), black sage (*Cordia curassavica*), wild tobacco (*Acnistus arborescens*) and Christmas Bush (*Eupatorium odorata*). These are all so common, at least where I live, that I imagine many people will see them and perhaps wish to know their names. But, we must allow the author the freedom to choose; he must have good reasons for his choice though he has not revealed them.

The flowers are grouped by colour so that identifying an unknown one is easy - just find the right section and compare the specimen with the illustration..

In the text there is very little information about the plants apart from the description of the flowers. Usually we are told where the plant grows, e.g. on roadsides or in damp places, and foreign plants that are naturalized are identified as such. More information of this type, especially flowering behaviour, would have made the book more useful with very little increase in size or cost. Reference to plants that are similar to the plants illustrated might also have been useful. Besides the main section where the flowers are described, there is

a preface, an introduction which describes the different structures of flowers and inflorescences, a glossary of technical terms and an index.

Julian Kenny is a well known photographer through his exhibitions and the illustrations for his own book Native Orchids of the Eastern Caribbean. The illustrations for this book are up to his usual high standard. There is, however, an unfortunate error; the illustration for the basket liane (*Phryganocydia corymbosa*) is not *Phryganocydia* but *Cydista aequinoctialis*. The two are similar, but *Phryganocydia* is bluer than *Cydista* and with much less distinct dark lines in the throat of the corolla, and with a spathe-like calyx instead of the cup-shaped calyx of *Cydista*. The two species also differ in habitat and flowering behaviour.

This book deserves a warm welcome. It should appeal to all persons who already have an interest in plants. It should attract even those outdoor types who in their hikes into the hills and valleys rush past the plants with scarcely a look, and, certainly every member of this club should feel the need to own a copy.

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