
BOOK REVIEWS

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club Trail Guide

Second Edition

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The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club, Trinidad and Tobago, 2006. 364 p.

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“A second edition of anything should show improvements”. That is the opening sentence of the preface to the second edition of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club Trail Guide, so I propose to tell you about them. The book is substantially larger than the first edition with 364 pages instead of 276 pages. This increase results from the inclusion of six new trails and the provision of a map for each trail, old and new. This new feature is important because it gives an idea of the trail as a whole with some sense of the overall direction and the twists and turns involved. GPS readings are given for the start of every trail and many waypoints between there and the destination. If you have a working GPS instrument you should never be lost. It is important to check your instrument to make sure that the reading it gives for the start of the trail is the same as that given in the book. If it isn't, there may be a systematic error to correct for every waypoint as well.

The plan of the book is the same as the plan for the earlier edition. Two prefaces, three preliminary chapters, a table and two maps precede the main section which runs from p. 26 to p. 349, and this section is followed by references, a glossary and a list of emergency telephone numbers. Chapter 1 (Environment) gives information about the geology of our two islands and the forests that cover them. It is basically unchanged. However, I warn the reader that the section on geology is full of technical terms many of which do not appear in the glossary. Here is my list: andesite, argilline, argellite, calcareous, foraminiferal, marl, phyllites, pyroxene, quartz, quartzite, ultramafic and finally, porphyroblastic albite-epidote-sericite. How did that monstrosity slip past the editors without comment? Fortunately, one can enjoy the trails without knowing what any of them means.

Chapter 2 (again unchanged) tells the novice the do's and don'ts of hiking, how to dress, what equipment to take, what to do if he or she gets lost, what to do about bites and stings etc. Surprisingly, though snakes are mentioned and snakebite said to be rare, there is nothing on how to treat snakebite if it happens. To remedy this omission I suggest that every reader of this book should read as well the chapter on snakebite in “The Snakes of Trinidad and

Tobago” by Hans E. A. Boos.

Chapter 3 describes how to use the Trail Guide and it is followed by a table which lists their length, their degree of difficulty etc. This chapter advises “Be sure to read the whole description before you start hiking”. It is good advice; follow it.

I have not hiked all these trails myself for the purpose of this review, but I have hiked most of them at some time or another. The descriptions I have read for the ones I know well seem more than adequate and I know that they have been tested for accuracy by Club members other than the describers. So, with good descriptions and GPS waypoints, all those using this book should get to their destinations and find their way back quite easily. However, I am not fond of counting paces. I know perfectly well that there are few permanent landmarks in a forest so counting paces may be unavoidable, but doing this means that there is less time for biological studies or simply enjoying the forest scenery. If one member of a group is willing to do the counting, the others, of course, are free for other activities, but it seems to me fairer for the members of a group to share this chore.

I have left the best for last. All the photographs are new and all are good with some being truly impressive. The covers are beautiful and the painting of Tucuche from the north has caught the mood of majesty and serenity. How often have I passed this way and admired this unusual view of Tucuche where the little ‘tooth’ to the west seems higher than the summit itself! Maureen Ottier's painting has caught another phenomenon that has puzzled me, the ‘tooth’ wreathed with cloud while the summit itself is clear. This I have seen often enough to encourage the speculation that there must be some difference in the vegetation of the two sites.

Trail No. 8 in the Trail Guide describes a route from Maracas Valley over the ridge to Las Cuevas Bay. There is a photograph of the site of Sister Beatrice's tapia house at the ridge and the statement: “Reportedly, there is a steep route up Tucuche from this area...” The existence of such a route is (or was) fact, not fiction. On 17 March, 1996, with four other persons, I hiked to the ‘tooth’ and then to

the summit itself. I can confirm that the route was then passable and not particularly steep, though there were two dangerous spots. I can confirm, too, that there was a difference in vegetation. My notes record: "Vegetation at the tooth was indeed a little different from (that of) Tucuche itself. The ground cover was almost entirely young *Pre-stoea* with the trees *Clusia tucuchensis* and *Didymopanax glabratum* being the commonest".

We live in a beautiful country. May all who use this informative and beautiful book help to keep it so.

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Flowers of Trinidad and Tobago

Julian Kenny

Prospect Press, Maraval, Trinidad and Tobago. 2005. 140 p.
ISBN 976-95057-8-1

At first sight "Flowers of Trinidad and Tobago" by Professor Emeritus Julian Kenny looks like a coffee table book, full of pretty photographs for visitors to browse through while their hosts attend to a domestic emergency. However, those who read the text very soon realise that this is a serious, if succinct, scientific overview of a wide variety of both native and introduced flowering plants of Trinidad and Tobago, albeit for the amateur naturalist.

Touching briefly on the uses man has made of flowers in religious ceremonies, Professor Kenny begins by posing the question "What is a flower?" and proceeds to answer it himself by describing the evolution of flowering plants in a few short sentences and giving the reader an introduction into basic floral anatomy, stressing the reproductive function of every flower.

The second chapter gives the reader some idea of the wealth of flowering plants, from the tallest trees to the smallest herb, to be found in Trinidad and Tobago. Each of the next seven chapters highlights a particular habitat – or rather, habitats, since in the chapter headed "forests" habitats range from swamp to elfin forests, each with very different species demanding specialised ecosystems for survival.

Streams and rivers, wetlands, savannas and the dramatic variety of coastal habitats (from the sun, sea and sands of Tobago to the mangrove swamps of Trinidad) and flowering plants to be found in these locations are the subjects of the next four chapters. Apart from the flowering plants, these chapters include information on the geology and micro-climates preferred by the flora in each habitat.

Agriculture, the eighth chapter, has had the greatest impact on ecosystems and consequently, the flowering

plants growing in these disturbed areas, and secondary growth forest. Professor Kenny touches very briefly on the barren (where flowering plants are concerned) landscapes of sugar cane and rice-growing, contrasting them with plantations of citrus, cocoa and coffee that provide an ideal ecosystem for shade-loving plants.

Man-made habitats conclude the survey of ecosystems in this book. Perhaps the greatest surprise is the diversity of flowering plants to be found around landfills. Given some rain and allowed to settle without further disturbance, seeds of flowers transported with the material germinate, grow and flower on land filled for housing or industry.

As one would expect from any serious work on flora, the last four sections of the book are headed, respectively: bibliography, appendix – families, glossary, and index to species.

The illustrations are lavish; texts accompanying each photographed flower note the scientific name, common name, family, times of flowering and where it can be found.

Photographers will be interested in Professor Kenny's notes on digital photography in the Preface, in which he stresses that his book "is NOT a guide to identification." That "It simply seeks to illustrate the remarkable diversity and beauty of floral form in a tiny fraction of Trinidad and Tobago's plant life."

There's no doubt in the minds of those who have already read this book that he has succeeded in making the wider public aware of the wealth of beauty in the flowering plants – and where to find them.

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