A mother ocelot and her older juvenile at a high elevation survey sampling site in the Northern Range mountains on the island of Trinidad. Photo credit: Dr. Luke Rostant, University of the West Indies; © L. Rostant & the Trinidad Ocelot Project

The Trinidad Ocelot Project: Phase I (Year 1): Status, distribution, and activity of ocelots and other terrestrial mammals on the island of Trinidad

http://www.trinidadocelot.net

Report to Earthwatch: Activities from January 1, 2016 to May 31, 2017

Report Prepared by:

- Nigel Noriega, Ph.D.; Co-Principle Investigator & Media/Outreach Director, Trinidad Ocelot Project; Founder & Director, Sustainable Innovation Initiatives (SII), http://www.sii-inc.org
- Luke Rostant, Ph.D.; Co-Principle Investigator, Trinidad Ocelot Project; Coordinator, Diploma/MSc Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Development in the Caribbean, Department of Life Sciences, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus (TT), http://sta.uwi.edu/fst/lifesciences/edulink/
Dear Earthwatch Volunteers,

More quickly than I imagined, our first year of field work is behind us. And yet it feels like no more than a month ago that Nigel and I welcomed the first two groups of volunteers from Earthwatch at Hamgel Field Research Station. Those first expeditions were quite a whirlwind, as we worked hard to iron out last-minute challenges to our plans, our newly committed citizen scientists fast in tow. The vegetation transects for our planned habitat studies, and the placement and installation of camera-traps, were painstaking and deliberate activities for sure. But these activities were enormously helpful to our goals and objectives, none of which would have been possible without the help of our volunteers! Thanks to all that helped us begin collecting, sorting, and organizing this incredibly important and first-of-its-kind data!

In the months subsequent to our inaugural expeditions, the strengthening of our collaboration with the University of the West Indies allowed us to collect data relevant to ocelot distribution and activity in most key habitats across Trinidad, far more than the three discrete habitats we’d hoped to survey when 2016 began. We’ve identified ocelots in nearly all of these habitats, and have compiled an extensive dataset on the occupancy of ocelots, their potential prey species, and other mammals indigenous to Trinidad’s ecosystems. Much of this data is already being sorted and analyzed as part of no fewer than five different Master’s student thesis projects, with more such projects scheduled to begin this Fall (2017). This collaboration has also allowed us to accelerate our timetable, and will permit us to explore additional aspects of the ocelot’s ecology and natural history. More importantly, these achievements will allow us to broaden the type and kinds of activities that volunteers will be able to participate in as we move forward!

Thanks again to all of our previous volunteers!! We couldn’t have done it without you. To those reading this that have yet a volunteer, what are you waiting for?! We hope to see you soon!

Most Sincerely,

Anthony J. Giordano
Anthony J. Giordano, M.Sc. Ph.D.
Principal Investigator, Trinidad Ocelot Project (TOP)
Executive Director, S.P.E.C.I.E.S.
https://carnivores.org
SUMMARY

- Completed first study of terrestrial mammal fauna of Arena Forest Reserve
- Competed first long-term faunal survey of Asa Wright Nature Center
- Conducted initial pilot camera-trap surveys for Bush Bush Reserve in the Nariva Swamp
- Competed habitat transect surveys for >30 camera-trap locations
- Conducting (ongoing) first expansive, rapid assessment camera-trap surveys for Nariva Swamp, Matura National Park, and the seasonal dry forests of the Chaguaramus District Authority, as well as two additional locations in the forest of the Northern Range of Trinidad
- Organized and sorted data for Asa Wright Nature Center, the Arena Forest Reserve, and the Aripo Savannah Environmentally Sensitive Areas project
- TOP provided data for 5 graduate student projects, 2-3 of which will be complete this year

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND RESULTS

OBJECTIVE #1: Assess the relative population status and habitat suitability of ocelots on Trinidad

We conducted ocelot surveys at two distinct sites and habitats, including submontane tropical plantation (mixed secondary) forest (Asa Wright Nature Center) and a multi-use lowland seasonal forest reserve with a history of selective tree harvest (Arena Forest Reserve). We repeatedly detected ocelots at both sites, and survey efforts at Asa Wright are still ongoing and now encompass more than 15 months of data collection. Moreover, through our larger collaboration with UWI, we are now collecting data on ocelots at no fewer than 4-5 additional sites and habitats. Next year we plan to begin more extensive capture-recapture camera-trap surveys to estimate the density of ocelot populations across multiple habitats and sites.

OBJECTIVE #2: conduct the first thorough survey of Trinidad terrestrial mammal fauna and diversity

In collaboration with UWI, the TTNHC, and now the TTEMA, the Trinidad Ocelot Project is currently involved in the broadest camera-trapping surveys and activities of Trinidad and Tobago’s terrestrial faunal diversity. Originally we believed this objective would take significant investment in time, resources, and survey effort across a limited number of sites before we could achieve this scale. Thanks to our collaboration with UWI and their support from the GEF and EMA, we have significant data on the occurrence and diversity of Trinidad and Tobago’s mammals from most of the nation’s important protected areas and habitats. This data is currently awaiting organization and analysis.

Nine-banded armadillo  Tamandua  Crab-eating raccoon  Red brocket deer
OBJECTIVE #3: evaluate ocelot use/ co-occurrence (interactions) with potential prey, and potential conflict between ocelot and people

We have so far been unable to begin small mammal trapping, which was intended to provide covariate data in the differential occurrence of ocelots across various habitats. However we have collected co-occurrence data between ocelots and numerous small-medium sized potential prey species through our camera traps, including opossums, agoutis, paca, brocket deer- even some smaller rodents serving as ocelot prey. Moreover, we tasked a graduate student with conducting the first survey of human-ocelot conflict among Trinidad’s poultry farmers, which we hope provides us with spatial data for broader-scale analyses of potential ecological and anthropogenic covariates of conflict.

Ocelot with rodent prey.

OBJECTIVE #4: Evaluate potential for ocelot presence/activity to serve as an indicator of anthropogenic impact

As this objective requires sampling and data collection over a broad spatial scale, we did not anticipate being able to achieve this end until after many years of research across numerous habitats and study areas. We have thus only just begun to look at ocelot presence as a potential indicator of the sustainability of land use type or anthropogenic activity. Given our new collaborations however, and our involvement in sampling over much of the island, we are hoping to be able to estimate this toward the end of next year.
PROJECT IMPACTS

1. Increasing Scientific Knowledge

a) Total citizen science research hours
Each Earthwatch volunteer contributed approximately 10-12 hours per day in training, traveling to and from field/ study sites, collecting data in the field, and organizing and sorting data, over the duration of each of their expeditions. This amounts to approximately 2,970 hours for the five teams that joined us in the field this year. Beyond Earthwatch volunteers, there are likely > 100 hours of citizen scientist investment from local collaborators and students, and members of collaborating institutions such as the Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalists Club.

b) Peer-reviewed publications: N/A

c) Non-peer reviewed publications:

d) Presentations:
Ganpat, Sharmila. 2017. Relative abundance of the red-rumped agouti in the Arena Forest Reserve and Spring Hill Estate (Asa Wright Nature Center), Trinidad. Paper presented at the Faculty of Science and Technology Annual Research Symposium (2017), The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad.

Lezama, C. 2017. Human-wildlife conflict Among Trinidad’s Poultry Farmers. Paper presented at the Faculty of Science and Technology Annual Research Symposium (2017), The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad.

Sorillo, R. 2016. Terrestrial Mammal Communities and Activity Patterns of the Arima Valley. Paper presented at the Faculty of Science and Technology Annual Research Symposium (2016), The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad.


Noriega, N. June 8, 2017. “Update on the Trinidad Ocelot Project”. Monthly meeting of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists’ Club.

The video linked to below was presented by the Los Angeles Zoo teen team at their commemorative dinner with sponsor Linda Duttenhaver, where many of the students talked about how the trip to Trinidad influenced their concept of “paying forward”:  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_TF_cOpibg
2. Mentoring

a) Graduate students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Graduate Degree</th>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Anticipated Year of Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Sorillo</td>
<td>M.Sc.</td>
<td>Terrestrial Mammal Communities and Activity Patterns of the Arima Valley</td>
<td>Spring 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharmila Ganpat</td>
<td>M.Sc.</td>
<td>Relative Abundance of Red-Rumped Agouti (<em>Dasyprocta leporina</em>) in the Arena Forest Reserve and Spring Hill Estate (Asa Wright Nature Center), Trinidad</td>
<td>Fall 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie Lezama</td>
<td>M.Sc.</td>
<td>Human-Wildlife Conflict Among Trinidad’s Poultry Farmers</td>
<td>Fall 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soeraya Mangalsingh</td>
<td>M.Sc.</td>
<td>Relative Abundance, Activity Patterns, and Density of Felids in an Oil Exploitation Area in the North Saramacca Multiple Use Management Area, Suriname</td>
<td>Spring 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Peters</td>
<td>Joint M.Sc.</td>
<td>Density, activity, and habitat use of the ocelot (<em>Leopardus pardalis</em>) in Trinidad</td>
<td>Summer 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise Hakim</td>
<td>M.Sc.</td>
<td>Impact of Trails and Hunting Season on the Occurrence and Activity of Mammals in the Arena Forest Reserve</td>
<td>Fall 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBD (Candidates Applying)</td>
<td>M.Sc.</td>
<td>Occupancy of the red brocket deer (<em>Mazama “americana”</em>) in high and low elevation forest habitats of Trinidad</td>
<td>Fall 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBD (Candidates Applying)</td>
<td>M.Sc.</td>
<td>Activity patterns, co-occupancy, and composition of terrestrial mammal fauna in the seasonal dry forests of the Chaguaramas Land Authority, Trinidad</td>
<td>Fall 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>M.Sc.</td>
<td>Predicting the Distribution and Habitat Associations of the Ocelot (<em>Leopardus pardalis</em>) on Trinidad</td>
<td>Fall 2018 - Spring 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>M.Sc.</td>
<td>Impact of ecotourism traffic frequency and intensity on mammal diversity and activity at the Asa Wright Nature Center</td>
<td>Fall 2018 - Spring 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b) Community outreach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of school, organization, or group</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Participants local or non-local</th>
<th>Details on contributions/activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7th day Adventist youth program; SunDew Community group; Lere Outdoors</td>
<td>High School, Technical (engineering)</td>
<td>Richard Smith (local)</td>
<td>Camera-trap installation, study design, data collection, vegetation transects, data management, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asa Wright Nature Center</td>
<td>High school, Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Johanne Ryan (local)</td>
<td>Project goals/ objectives, camera-trap station installation, vegetation transects. Educational and promotional outreach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.P.E.C.I.E.S.</td>
<td>High School, B.S. in Biology</td>
<td>Aanu Maharaj (local)</td>
<td>New Volunteer Program Associate for TOP: has helped with numerous promotional/PR and education/outreach activities, and building partnerships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Support Type(s)¹</th>
<th>Years of Association (e.g. 2006-present)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago Field Naturalists Club</td>
<td>Collaboration, public relations/ promotion, volunteers, logistics</td>
<td>2016-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of the West Indies (St. Augustine Campus), Dept of Life Sciences</td>
<td>Research collaboration, student participation and management, coordinating/ implementing field activities, data organization and analysis, logistics</td>
<td>2016-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asa Wright Nature Center</td>
<td>Research collaboration, public relations/ promotion, technical support</td>
<td>2016-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Socorro Center for Wildlife Conservation</td>
<td>Public Relations, technical support</td>
<td>2016-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOW Expeditions</td>
<td>Cultural education and outreach</td>
<td>2016-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinibats</td>
<td>Scientific education, cultural education and outreach</td>
<td>2016-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago Environmental Management Authority (EMA)</td>
<td>Collaboration, permits</td>
<td>2016-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago Ministry of Land &amp; Fisheries, Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division</td>
<td>Collaboration, permits</td>
<td>2016-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
<td>Technical support, public relations/ promotional, social media/ internet and website media</td>
<td>2017-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Contributions to management plans or policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan/Policy Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Level of Impact</th>
<th>New or Existing?</th>
<th>Primary goal of plan/policy</th>
<th>Stage of plan/policy</th>
<th>Description of Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aripo Savannah Environmentally Sensitive Area Assessment</td>
<td>Management plan</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Existing</td>
<td>Cultural, Species &amp; Natural Resource Conservation</td>
<td>Pre-existing</td>
<td>Transect and habitat assessment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Conserving natural and sociocultural capital

a) Conservation of taxa

List any focal study species that you did not list in your most recent proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>IUCN Red List category</th>
<th>Local/regional conservation status</th>
<th>Local/regional conservation status source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dasyprocta leporina</td>
<td>Red-rumped agouti</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division of the Ministry of Land and Fisheries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuniculus paca</td>
<td>Paca</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division of the MLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamandua tetradactyla</td>
<td>Southern Tamandua</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division of the MLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dasypus novemcinctus</td>
<td>Nine-banded armadillo</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division of the MLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procyon cancrivorus</td>
<td>Crab eating raccoon</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division of the MLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tayassu tajacu</td>
<td>Collared Peccary</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division of the MLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazama “americana”</td>
<td>Red brocket deer</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division of the MLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lontra longicaudis</td>
<td>Neotropical river otter</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division of the MLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eira barbara</td>
<td>Tayra</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division of the MLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caluromys philander</td>
<td>Woolly opossum</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chironectes minimus</td>
<td>Water opossum</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didelphis marsupialis</td>
<td>Common opossum</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division of the MLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marmosa sp</td>
<td>Mouse opossum</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marmosops fuscatus</td>
<td>Dusky Slender opossum</td>
<td>Least concern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the past year, has your project helped conserve or restore populations of species of conservation significance? If so, please describe below.

N/A

b) Conservation of ecosystems

In the past year, has your project helped conserve or restore habitats? If so, please describe below.

N/A

c) Ecosystem services

Indicate which ecosystem service categories you are directly studying in your Earthwatch research and provide further details in the box below.

N/A

d) Conservation of cultural heritage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural heritage component</th>
<th>Description of contribution</th>
<th>Resulting effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional ecological knowledge and practices, oral traditions and history, traditional subsistence living, traditional agriculture</td>
<td>Ocelots are so rarely seen in Trinidad that many locals question whether they are real, or have little perception of what the animal is really like. The animal has significant impact on how locals value ocelot habitat at cultural heritage. Knowledge of ocelot whereabouts influences the perceived value of the locations in question. When ocelots are found, subsistence farmers typically kill them because oral history places ocelots in the realm of potential threats.</td>
<td>Proposed school and media outreach programs to test effects of increased public knowledge of ocelot activity in selected areas. Even just the knowledge of our activity in areas is changing perceptions of the threats and opportunities that ocelots and knowledge of ocelot presence encapsulates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESEARCH PLAN UPDATES

Report any changes in your research since your last proposal/annual report. For any ‘yes’ answers, provide details on the change in the ‘Details’ box.

1) Have you added a new research site or has your research site location changed? ☒Yes ☐No
2) Has the protected area status of your research site changed? ☐Yes ☒No
3) Has the conservation status of a species you study changed? ☐Yes ☒No
4) Have there been any changes in project scientists or field crew? ☒Yes ☐No

Details - provide more information for any ‘yes’ answers

Sites added since our initial 2016 site visits include the Aripo savannah and Bush bush wildlife sanctuary of the Nariva Swamp. Additional staff members, Richard Smith, Aanu Maharaj, and Alexis Marianes have been added to the roster.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to of course thank Earthwatch first and foremost, as well as the numerous collaborators, partners, and students that have supported us from the very beginning, or come aboard since the project’s inception.

ANYTHING ELSE?

We are excited at the positive attention the Trinidad Ocelot Project has attracted even during its short tenure. Shortly after the project’s initiation in 2016, we had the opportunity to train UWI staff in camera-trap survey and data analysis techniques and methods. This has had immediate consequences for students enrolled in the Master’s program in Biodiversity, but has also impacted Trinidad’s annual “Bioblitzes”, biological survey inventories coordinated by the UWI Life Sciences Department and Dr. Luke Rostant and Darshan Narang, as well as a new nationwide rapid camera-trapping assessment project sponsored by the GEF that even extends to the island of Tobago. This collaboration we believe has resulted in the first by buy-in of camera-trapping as an important survey tool by Trinidad’s Environmental Management Authority. Finally, our contributions extend to the Terrestrial Field Practicum (BIOL 6210) taught by Dr. Luke Rostant as part of the requisite coursework for the Master’s Program; many of our recommendations and methods for survey/analysis have been incorporated into this class.

We have also had the opportunity to support at least a half dozen Master’s students thesis projects, several of which are or will be focused partially or wholly on ocelot ecology and natural history. This includes a young man who is currently finishing up and is already now working for the Wildlife Section in the Division of Forestry for Trinidad’s Ministry of Land and Fisheries. Additional projects, which like previous and ongoing thesis projects in that they dovetail nicely with our data analysis needs, are currently being planned. Our contributions in terms of training, advising, mentoring thus far have also already contributed to several short scientific notes and peer-reviewed papers (one on ocelots, another on introduced capybara in Caroni Swamp), as well as resulted in an invitation to Dr. Anthony J. Giordano to serve as a peer-reviewer for the TTNHC’s scientific journal, The Living World.

The opportunities resulting from the project’s initiation in March of 2016 have been unforeseen, and pleasantly and surprisingly diverse. New partnerships for example with Asa Wright Nature Center, and the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalist’s Club, have been welcome and led to broader public relations and promotional efforts to reach the local public and school children. The Trinidad Ocelot Project was just featured in Asa Wright’s newsletter, Bellbird (May 2017), and with the help of Aanu Maharaj, the new program associate for SPECIES in charge of TOP activities, we have just launched a competitive logo design competition targeting local TT graphic designers and artists; this contest is currently underway and will conclude at the end of June 2017. Recent additional media efforts, including the production of a short documentary video and video brochure, are now underway, and we were recently visited by the Discovery Channel in Canada, which managed to feature our project in an upcoming nature piece to debut this Fall. We have also been able to support through contract Richard Smith, our key field coordinator and new staff we’ll be adding to the EW team for future expeditions and activities. Finally, last but not least our project website in nascent form, http://www.trinidadocelot.net, is now live. We expect it will be at a .com version of the site shortly, but this site has already attracted us a lot of attention and interest.
Appendix 1: The Bellbird Newsletter of the Asa Wright Nature Center (story on page 4)
A 40-Year Wait, Over at Last!

By Scott Weidensaul

Forty years is a long time to wait to stand on a porch. But that’s roughly how long I’d waited to experience the fabled verandah at Asa Wright Nature Centre – the time that elapsed since I first read about this extraordinary place (probably in an old issue of a nature magazine, though I can’t be certain) until I finally saw it for myself.

It wasn’t a lack of interest, certainly, but simply a case of too many other things getting in the way of what had long been a priority on my travel bucket list – reinforced by each story from a friend or colleague just back from Trinidad that made me ever more determined to see that legendary place for myself, someday.

That opportunity finally came in March, when my wife (National Audubon educator, Amy Weidensaul) and I were invited to share in AWNC’s fiftieth anniversary celebrations. We left our home in Pennsylvania, where more than two feet of snow had just fallen; my back still ached from hours of shovelling. Because of flight delays, we didn’t arrive at the Centre until nearly midnight, the forest cloaked in darkness.

So our first taste of Asa Wright – and our first real taste of Trinidad itself – came at daybreak the next morning, when we at last found ourselves on the storied verandah. I’d imagined the scene many times over the years, visualizing it from the descriptions of friends, and their photos and videos. But nothing had prepared us for the reality – the hurly-burly of hundreds of birds of dozens of species jostling for position at the nectar feeders and fruit trays, passing through the gardens or flying across the mist-draped valley below.

Bellbirds -- I’d wanted to hear them for decades – tonked in the distance, as flocks of orange-winged parrots flew by. Purple honeycreepers by the score elbowed each other for a drink of sugar water, as white-necked jacobins, black-throated mangos and half a dozen other kinds of hummingbirds buzzed around. Forty years suddenly didn’t seem too long to have waited for such a spectacle.

And the verandah, of course, was just the beginning. Over the course of the subsequent week, we sampled some of the best that Trinidad has to offer, from the stunning sight...
Continued from page 1

of legions of scarlet ibises in Caroni Swamp (where we also watched a huge female peregrine falcon strafe a young flamingo repeatedly, finally forcing it into the water), to an ornate hawk-eagle soaring over the Northern Range, to dozens of yellow-throated frogs around the edges of the swimming hole, carrying their tadpoles piggyback along, to the delightfully weird oilbirds in Dunston Cave -- another bucket-list experience for me, given my lifelong fascination with nocturnal birds. We watched endemic piping-guans in Grande Riviere in the morning, and stood spellbound as immense leatherback sea turtles dug their nests in the beach at night.

Amy and I were impressed at every turn -- by the diversity of the birds and other tropical wildlife, by the friendliness of the Centre's personnel, and by the high caliber of the educator and guide staff (including the independent guides AWNC uses for off-site field trips). We ate like royalty, and at the end of each long, full day, we found ourselves back on the verandah after dark, watching long-tongued bats swirled out of the night to drink at the hummingbird feeders, and geckos scurrying around the walls snatching up insects. One evening at dinner, someone noticed that an enormous silkmoth, larger than my outstretched hand, was hanging motionless from one of the dining room lamps -- which compensated for our having just missed a green hermit hummingbird nest on a lamp cord in the sitting room, whose chicks had fledged not long before our arrival.

And each morning started with sunrise on the verandah -- the memory I will carry most vividly from our first (but certainly not last) visit to Asa Wright. Is 40 years too long to wait to stand on a porch? No, but I hope no one else makes my mistake, and waits that long to enjoy this exceptional birding experience.

Photos by Scott Weidensaul

T&T Birding Scene: Hummingbird Puzzles

This is the time of year when most northbound migration has passed through but there has still been a lot of activity both at Springhill and elsewhere in Trinidad to keep birders fully entertained.

The rarest two sightings of the period are, to date, not conclusively identified and both involve Asa Wright. Two “Woodstar hummingbirds” have been photographed at fairly close range. The first, from our Chairman’s garden on April 29th and the second, seen from our own balcony on May 2nd; the choice being between Rufous-shafted and Amethyst Woodstars. The separation of these two species in anything other than breeding male plumage is fraught with difficulty with much resting on comparative bill length and the shape and colour of the tail feathers. Both are wanderers from mainland South America and both are extremely rare here. Indeed, Amethyst Woodstar was
Continued from page 2

only documented for the first time in Trinidad as recently as 2015. The Rare Birds Committee will have to study these photos at length.

It is at the tail end of the migration season when the more unusual species tend to occur. Our tour guide Mahase and his customers photographed a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak from the Blanchisseuse Road just south of Spring Hill on April 23rd and Centre guides, Randell and Elizabeth, reported a Baltimore Oriole from the Centre on May 13th.

Elsewhere on the island, the agricultural fields at Orange Grove have received much attention of late with the star bird being an adult male Yellow-bellied Seedeater on May 5th. Sightings in recent times have been restricted to the Bocas Islands and the southbound slopes of the Northern Range – indeed a pair bred in the Lopinot Valley during 2013. Also found at Orange Grove have been the last reported Northern Waterthrush of the season on May 5th, whilst an adult male Snail Kite (perhaps one of the Caroni Rice Project birds of previous months) together with the first reported White-faced Whistling-Ducks of the season and a Little Egret, were all photographed on May 13th. The same date produced an incredible total of 32 Yellow-headed Caracaras feeding on the pastures.

Continuing the numbers theme, in southwest Trinidad a minimum of 50 Ospreys have been gathering around the Pitch Lake and cumulatively at three different sites close to La Brea up to 20 Scaled Doves have been recorded.

A little further up the west coast, we are delighted to confirm that the pair of Crested Caracaras at Point Lisas successfully reared two youngsters, both of which have been seen subsequently feeding in the area. Once again, careful watching from Brickfields produced two Gull-billed Terns on April 25th and, better yet, an adult Franklin’s Gull on May 5th.

However, the highlight for many birders in the country has been the regular showing of American Flamingoes in Caroni swamp which, at their peak have numbered 75 birds in recent days.

Earth Day
Tree Planting

To celebrate Earth Day, some staff members planted trees around the Centre. Take a look!

Landscape Gardener, Richard Alibocas
Photo by Elizabeth Naipaul

Naturalist Guide, Elizabeth Naipaul
Photo by Johanne Ryan

Deputy General Manager, June De Gale-Rampersad
Photo by Johanne Ryan

Conservation Officer, Johanne Ryan
Photo by Elizabeth Naipaul

Design and Layout courtesy Lonsdale Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising Ltd, a friend of the Asa Wright Nature Centre
Ocelots: 1, 2, 3?

By Johanne Ryan and Nigel Noriega

‘Good things come in threes’ they say. We at Asa Wright can attest to that truth. Recently, camera traps have ‘sighted’ three ocelots on our property.

In March 2016, volunteers for the Trinidad Ocelot Project (TOP) ventured into our forests to place cameras in accordance with established camera survey methods. Our own Springhill Estate was a selected area. TOP was established with the aim to study the ocelot population in Trinidad - the only country where ocelots occur without larger predators. As a partner of the TOP, we at Asa Wright were keen to survey the feline predator along our trails.

Now, let’s learn more about our Tiger Cats, as ocelots are called in T&T. Similar to fingerprints in humans, every ocelot has a unique coat pattern. This characteristic was used to identify the ocelots sighted on Asa Wright’s lands within the last year. Here, it seems that the same female ocelot was recorded over several months on the Motmot, Oilbird and Adventure Trails. On the Adventure Trail, we even caught this individual with rodent prey in its mouth. This ocelot was distinguished by a white ‘axe’ behind the left shoulder, a white ‘arrow’ behind the right shoulder, and long neck stripes.

Throughout the years, staff members and visitors anticipated the day when the elusive ocelot would be seen. In the past, there hasn’t been evidence of an ocelot’s presence – a sighting and on another occasion, paw prints were left behind. Camera trap photos through Mike Rutherford and now, the TOP, have confirmed that the ocelot is here; walking our trails, hunting for prey. We hope to continue collaborating with the TOP to collect more data on the ocelot population at Asa Wright. Our organisation would especially like to thank all partners of this project; Sustainable Innovation Initiatives (S.I.I.), The Society for the Protection of Endangered Carnivores and their International Ecological Study (S.P.E.C.I.E.S), Earthwatch Institute and The University of the West Indies (U.W.I.). The collaborative nature of this project is key in its success.

Visit http://www.trinidadocelot.net/ for more information and stay tuned as the project progresses.

Photos courtesy the Trinidad Ocelot Project
U.S. Wrestler lands at AWNC

By Johanne Ryan

Nikki Bella, World Wrestling Entertainment star, visited Asa Wright. Nikki described her visit to our Centre as an “incredible experience”. “I have seen animals that I never thought I’d see up close and personal,” she said. To see some snapshots of her visit to our Centre, go to her YouTube page and Instagram account. On YouTube, you can see footage of our guide, Jessie, leading her on a tour. Nikki was in Trinidad for Republic Bank’s Decibel Entertainment Festival which took place from May 5th – 7th.

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 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. Ages 5-16.