



# Nature's *jottings*

Newsletter of the Natural History Society of Jamaica

April 1999

## **AGM RESULTS**

The NHSJ AGM was held at the Tropical Learning Centre, Hope Zoo on Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup>. March 1999. After lengthy discussion on matters arising from the reports of the past year, the following members were elected for the coming year 1999/2000:

*President:* Trevor Yee  
*Vice-president:* Jill Byles  
*Secretary:* Elaine Thompson  
*Treasurer:* Paul Byles  
Andrea Geoghagen  
Grace Smith  
Lloyd Gardner  
Carol Miller  
Thomas Williams

The NHSJ wishes to thank the employees of the Hope Zoo for their continuing support and would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Assistant Curator, Nadine Thompson on the birth of an 8lb. son and give our very best wishes to Curator, Rhema Kerr for her marriage on 10<sup>th</sup>. April.

## **Science teacher honoured**

Mrs Sylvia Barber was honoured by the NHSJ at the AGM, for her remarkable contribution as a Science teacher; not only at Kingston College, where she taught for many years and contributed her invaluable knowledge and time as Head of the Science Department but also as a voluntary teacher and advisor within the NHSJ and the Science Teachers' Association of Jamaica. She presently lectures at UTECH.

## **THANKS DR. GARRAWAY**

The NHSJ Past President, Eric Garraway, has stepped down from the Executive Committee after serving for six consecutive years; four of them as President. He had also served on the Executive before that.

For many years it has been his wish to see the Old Natural History Notes, accumulated since the 1940s, published in such a way that they can reach every

**Time::** 10.00a.m.

**Refreshments:** Drinks will be provided but please

Jamaican. Through the grant from the EFJ, that is now possible. However, the editing alone, is a mammoth task requiring considerable attention and Eric will, therefore, still be very much involved with the work of the NHSJ by fulfilling one of its mandates, the dissemination of information.

We thank him most sincerely for the many years he has devoted to NHSJ business and wish him every success in the challenging projects he has undertaken, both personally and on behalf of the NHSJ.

## **WHAT'S HAPPENING**

### **Earth Day Seminar 1999**

**Date:** Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup>. April 1999

**Venue:** Medallion Hall Hotel, Corner of Lady Musgrave Road and Hope Road.

**Time:** 5.30p.m.

**Topic:** Nutrients in our Coastal Waters

**Guest speaker:** Dr. Anthony Greenaway  
There have been some 50 years of observations made on the nutrients in Jamaica's coastal waters. Dr. Greenaway will attempt to interpret that 50 years of data to see if there is increased pollution and he will apply it to several areas around the coast, including Hellshire, Negril, Montego Bay, Discovery Bay and Ocho Rios.

**Refreshments will be served**

## **VIDEO PRESENTATION**

Kai Meng Lui has been capturing our field trips on video for several years. He would like them to be used to enhance the NHSJ's education programme and he has offered to show them to members.

**Date:** Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup>. April 1999.

**Venue:** Paraiso, Guava Ridge, St. Andrew

bring nibbles to share.

Interested in a Nature Walk too? Then, come

prepared.

It would be appreciated if you would call before hand, so that we have some idea of numbers, can give you directions or arrange transport. The number to call is 977 8007.

### *Your jottings*

#### Caterpillar Story continued

Audrey Wiles thought that she had once drawn a caterpillar, which fitted the description of the one disguised as a rose stalk. It is the *Laphygma frugiperda*, which is greyish with an orange stripe. However the one on the rose had no stripe.

A few days after seeing the caterpillar on the rose bush, I found another one resembling a rose stalk, on a rose some distance from the first one. This one did not escape but was collected into a jar along with rose cuttings, in anticipation of it pupating. For a couple of days it did nothing and seemed to be shrinking. Then it started to devour the rose leaves quite rapidly and soon there was not a leaf left. They were replenished with leaves from a red flowering *Salvia* (Mint family) growing among the roses and the caterpillar ate heartily, though never returning to the robust creature it had been before its captivity. For two weeks there was no sign of it pupating. Then, one morning, I noticed that it seemed to be sweating and very agitated. On closer inspection, I saw a number of dark dots irregularly placed on its surface. Then I saw that it seemed to be trying to rid itself of an oval, white egg. More of these egg like objects were resting on leaves near the bottom of the jar. While I watched the writhing caterpillar, a tiny larva appeared, wriggling its way out through the caterpillar's skin and almost immediately donning a white cocoon, to become just like the other egg shaped objects. Dr. Garraway confirmed that these were the cocoons of parasitic wasps, which in due course would take advantage of another unsuspecting caterpillar who would eat the eggs, that they had deposited on a leaf and then itself be devoured, as the eggs, inside it turned to hungry larvae.

By the next morning the caterpillar was a rotting carcass at the bottom of the jar.

**DO YOU KNOW?** A distinguishing feature of the mint family (*Labiatae*) is a 4 sided stem and that most varieties are found around the Mediterranean.

#### **BOTANICAL NOTES ON THE JAMAICAN DOGWOOD**

*contributed by Trevor Yee*

The Jamaican Dogwood, a lovely specimen of which can be seen at Manor Park in St. Andrew, flowers and fruits at

this time of the year (April). It has the very poetic name of *Piscidia piscipula*, syn, *P. erythrina*, (*Papilionaceae*).

The genus consists of approximately 8 species, occurring in Central America, Florida and the West Indies. The plant was one of several used by native Americans to capture fishes by stunning. The genus means, "Fish Killer", from the Latin, *Piscis*, which means, fish and *Caedere*, to kill.

The species name is apparently, the derived diminutive of *piscis*, suggesting that it was used for smaller fish and was not the most potent of the fish stunners. *Piscidia* is closely related to resembles another genus, *Lonchocarpus*, which is a more known fish stunner.

It was necessary that the fishes were stunned but still edible and untainted. The active principles in both *Piscidia* and *Lonchocarpus* are the rotenoids, one of which, rotenone, is obtained commercially from the related East Indian, *Derris elliptica*.

Rotenone, similar to another plant derived insecticide, pyrethrum, has the desirable property of being a powerful insecticide but with low mammalian toxicity.

*Piscidia piscipula* was introduced to Europe in the seventeenth century but is not common today.

Despite its name, it is not related to the Dogwoods, *Cornus* spp., (*Cornaceae*), and one of which is the provincial flower of British Columbia, in Canada.

#### *References:*

1. Deni Brown, *The Royal Horticultural Society Encyclopedia of Herbs and Their Uses*, Dorling Kindersley, London, 1995, pg. 330
2. For the meaning of the species name, my thanks to Mr. Delano Harrison.

#### **Membership**

A Membership Form is included with this newsletter. If your dues, to the Society, are up to date i.e. paid until April 1, 2000 or beyond, then why not use the Form to introduce a new member to the NHSJ.

**Remember if your dues are not paid up your name will be removed from the mailing list.**

*Prepared by Jill Byles 1/4/99*



