

FEATURES

Bioblitz goes to deep south

ALEXIS
MARIANES AND
MIKE G
RUTHERFORD



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB
across the Columbus Channel, Icacos has often been an entry point for all sorts of interesting animals and plants, which raft across on mats of vegetation.

TT Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC), along with the University of the West Indies Zoology Museum, will once again run their annual BioBlitz this weekend. This year marks the sixth bioblitz (an intense survey of biodiversity in a particular area). Previous years have taken the event to Tucker Valley, Arima Valley, Nariva Swamp, Charlotteville and Port of Spain.

It is a common complaint that southern Trinidad, especially the "deep south," is overlooked by event organisers, so a decision was made to go as far south as possible, all the way down to Trinidad's "big toe" - Icacos. The southwest peninsula is the home of mangroves, forests, coconut plantations, mud volcanoes, gas seeps, beaches, rivers, and swamp habitats that support a myriad network of organisms. The area has been heavily affected by humans over the years, with much of the original forest replaced by cocal (extensive coconut plantations). The coastline has also been affected by more natural forces, with erosion in some areas and accretion in others. Despite this, there is still much to be discovered. Owing to its close proximity to Venezuela, only seven kilometres away

The bioblitz brings together scientists, naturalists, nature lovers and the public in an exciting recreational setting, ideal for learning, exploring and liming. Around 100 specialists will gather at the base camp at the Icacos Government Primary School not only to survey for wildlife but also to share those findings with the public.

The 24 hours of surveying will begin at noon on Saturday, when teams of scientists and volunteers will begin collecting data on all the plants, insects, fish, algae, fungi, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and birds they can find. For some, like the plant and fungi teams, it will be a case of walking through the forests and photographing or identifying what they see right in front of them; some specimens may be collected and taken back to base camp for a closer look.

For other teams, more specialised equipment is used. The mammal group

has set up trail cameras to see what can be found walking through the forests at night and mist nets to temporarily catch bats so they can be identified and then released. The aquatic team will use a variety of nets, grabs and traps to find fish, crustaceans and molluscs, as well as some of the small-

er marine creatures like plankton. Other groups, like those looking for snakes, frogs and scorpions, will get their best results at night by walking the forests to look for these nocturnal creatures by torchlight.

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The beautiful Icacos coastline has been affected by natural forces, with erosion in some areas and accretion in others.




Blessing of the Creche

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