

equipment! But in spite of the fascination people felt for this bird, it was not enough to prevent them from hunting it. F. W. Urich tells of how one of his men obtained two young birds from a nest with a long pole, but sadly they were “too young for the table”. In his Report, Devenish even reveals that he had himself with his own hands taken 175 young Oilbirds from the caves, but claims that “had I not done so, they would in all probability have been taken next day by a party of greedy Spaniards”, whom he had met at the foot of the mountains! Clearly, even by those charged with legislative input, Oilbirds were considered to be not much different from chickens when it came to food.

Whenever naturalists of that time, such as Carr, Devenish and Mole, went out into the bush, they expected to take with them their guns. Constant reference is made in their accounts to the danger of snakes, but it seems that the main reason for the guns was that they expected and hoped for some sport. The descriptions of the expeditions include many references to the beauty of the forests and the exhilaration of the chase. If they came across any likely bird quarries, the gunners were not slow to react, and the maxim seems to have been “Shoot first and identify later”. In fact, one could say that for many early naturalists the “bird in the hand” rather than “in the bush” was truly the rule. Ornithology would have to develop for another fifty years or more before anyone thought seriously about how birds lived.

The collections made by Leotaud and Chapman were the

cornerstone of early ornithology in Trinidad, and these were followed very soon by Andre and others in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (ffrench 1991). There were further collections right up to the early 1950s, ending with those by Mees (1958), with very few attempts at work on the ecology, behaviour or nesting of birds, other than those of Williams (1922) and Belcher & Smooker (1934 – 1937), which dealt with nesting, but were concerned principally with making further collections of material. Ironically, such collections are supposed to produce tangible proof of biological facts, but, as I hope to show in a future publication, even such tangible proof can sometimes turn out to be faulty.

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## NATURE NOTE

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### Temporary Beaching of a Pilot Whale *Globicephala macrorhynchus*, at Waterloo, Trinidad and Tobago.

A pilot whale, *Globicephala macrorhynchus*, was observed at Waterloo on the western coast of Trinidad on 20 January 2003. The shoreline at Waterloo is characterized by shallow water and coastal mudflats. The whale was first sighted at 1330 hours and was watched by several observers. By 1630 the whale was approximately 200 m from shore and four persons waded out to assist it into deeper water. They managed to shift the whale to face out to sea and encouraged it to slowly swim off, however it swam in an arc and headed back to shore, eventually coming within 50 m of the shoreline. Several further attempts were made to encourage the whale to leave but with the same effect. The tide was rising and eventually the whale reached 2 m from the shoreline. Several villagers then walked up to touch and even climb on the whale.

At about 1745 the spout of a second whale was observed about 200 m out to sea. Very shortly afterwards the beached whale became animated and launched out to sea, splattering mud several meters into the air, as it swam in the shallow, muddy water. The shoreline at Waterloo has extensive mudflats.

The following morning, GW scanned the coastline from Barracones Bay to Orange Valley, but there was no sign of the whale. In addition, there was no indication in the media of any whales stranded on subsequent days and we assumed that the whale survived.

The whale was about 7 m (tip to tail), and the dorsal fin was comparatively short (about 30 cm). The tail flukes were estimated

to be six times the height of the dorsal fin. The head was blunt, and square with the mouth ventral in position. These observations fit the description of a short-finned pilot whale, albeit a large one (Eisenberg 1989). The dorsal fin was too short and the wrong shape for a pygmy sperm whale and the body was too large for a Risso's dolphin.

Whale sightings are rare around Trinidad and beachings should be recorded. What makes this observation different is the sudden change in the disposition of the whale and the ease with which it returned of its own volition to the sea.

Previously on 14-15 April, 1999 two whales were sighted close to the shore, one at Orange Valley and the other at Brickfield. The one at Orange Valley was slaughtered but efforts were made to save the one at Brickfield (Trinidad Express Newspaper April 28, 1999).

Other recent whale beachings in Trinidad include three separate incidents in the Galeota area, during the second half of April 1999 (Trinidad Express Newspaper April 28, 1999), and one incident on Manzanilla beach on 13 October, 1999 when 25 pilot whales were stranded. Of these 14 were saved (Trinidad Express Newspaper 15 October, 1999).

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