



The Buzz

Newsletter of the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network
Trinidad and Tobago (BES-Net TT) project

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Inside this issue

- [The BIOSCAN initiative](#) 1
- [2023 World Bee Day activities](#) 2
- [Launch of pollinator gardens](#) 4
- [Networking for stingless bee management](#) 5
- [Bee survey update](#) 6

Busy Buzzing

It has been a busy quarter on the BES-Net TT project, with many activities having taken place in Tobago over the three month period. In this issue of **The Buzz**, we bring you updates on activities held with the Tobago Apicultural Society and the Scarborough Children’s Library to observe World Bee Day 2023, the launch of pollinator gardens in Trinidad and Tobago, actions to develop a Stingless Beekeepers Network, a short update teaser on the bee survey and we start with news of the BIOSCAN Initiative...quite a lot in this issue of **The Buzz!** Enjoy reading and sharing!

The Buzz is the quarterly produced newsletter of the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network Trinidad and Tobago project (BES-Net TT).

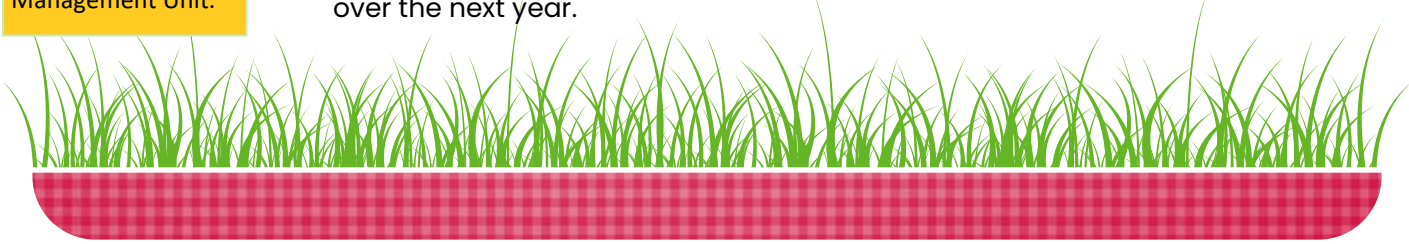
This newsletter reports on progress made in the implementation of the BES-Net TT project over the period, 2021-2023.

The Buzz is produced by the BES-Net TT Project Management Unit.

The BIOSCAN Initiative

The BIOSCAN initiative being managed by the Environmental Policy and Planning Division of the Ministry of Planning and Development got an extra boost with the formal handover of equipment for the research activity in four areas of Trinidad and Tobago (TT). The BES-Net TT project’s connection with this new initiative originated in its training of staff of one of the BIOSCAN partners, the Trinidad Cement Limited (TCL) in the use of malaise traps to survey pollinator species in the field. Subsequent to this, two more BIOSCAN partners—Brazil Secondary School’s Globe Club and the Department of Natural Resources and Forestry in Tobago—were also trained to use the sampling nets. The Asa Wright Nature Centre is the fourth BIOSCAN partner and personnel will be trained in due course.

Under the BIOSCAN initiative, TT’s biodiversity documentation will be assisted with DNA barcoding of all flying insects captured in these traps over the next year.



2023 World Bee Day Activities

In 2022, the BES-Net TT team observed World Bee Day (20 May annually) by facilitating hands-on activities with students and teachers of the [Tabaquite RC Primary School](#). This year, the observance was marked with a suite of activities in partnership with the Tobago Apicultural Society (TAS) and the Scarborough Children's Library. Activities took place at the Scarborough Children's Library over the period 17-18 May 2023.

As part of the BES-Net TT's public education efforts, the team uses the platform of relevant international/national observances to build knowledge and awareness of pollinators and pollination management. World Bee Day calls attention to the important role of bees as pollinators, and as key organisms for conserving biodiversity and in food production. The observance is also useful in issuing a call to action for bee conservation and management.

Together with the President of TAS, the BES-Net TT team brainstormed on materials and content for local World Bee Day observance targeting school students in Tobago, notably preschool level children and agricultural science students at the secondary school level. Support was provided by the Scarborough Children's Library in promotion and hosting of the activities.

On Wednesday 17th May, the first activity undertaken was "Storytime at the Library". This event catered to preschoolers (and their parents) and took the form of a storytelling session, using a newly-minted story on pollinators entitled "The Flower Says Thank You". The story introduced the audience to a

range of pollinator species, the flower types they frequently visit and the method by which pollen is transferred between flowers.

BES-Net TT contributed the new story and visual aids and TAS provided the storyteller, Ms Antonelle McPherson-Syrus, who was dressed in her beekeeping outfit while reading the story. Ms Celeste Chariandy of BES-Net TT led a question and answer session afterwards which highlighted good retention by the preschoolers of the information that was shared in the story.



Photo credit: Lena Dempewolf

Storytelling at the Library, 17 May 2023

Afterwards, TAS put on a display of hive products and mounted a (well-secured) demonstration hive which piqued the youngsters' curiosity and stimulated many questions that were ably responded to by the TAS representatives. (continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

On Thursday 18 May 2023, it was the turn of secondary school students who are pursuing studies in Agricultural Science, to participate in a Students Symposium at the Auditorium of the Library. Students benefitted from presentations from the BES-Net TT team and TAS, in a half-day session chaired by Ms Josanne Jackson, Librarian in charge of the Children's Library.

Dr. Lena Dempewolf introduced students to pollinators and stingless bees in Trinidad and Tobago and Mrs. Mia Persad-Douglas shared on the life habits of honeybees.



Dr. Dempewolf (top) and Mrs. Persad-Douglas (below) presenting at the Symposium.

Students asked questions pertaining to hive management and honey production and showed great interest in apiculture.

The Secretary for the Division of Education, Mrs. Zorisha Hackett also attended briefly and listened attentively to the presentations. She was happy to take photographs with the students and receive BES-Net TT tokens.



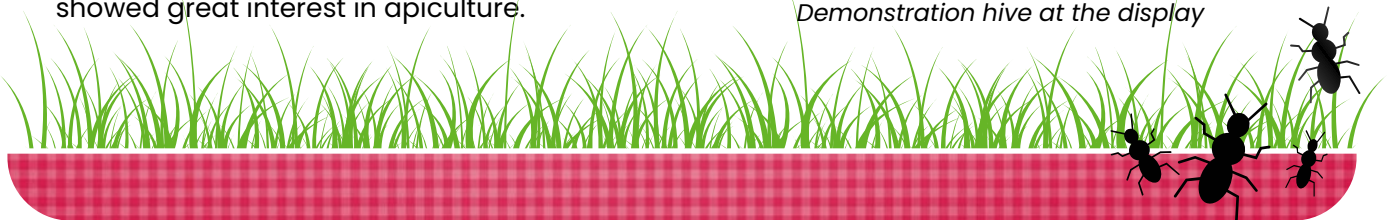
Secretary for Education receiving tokens

The students visited the displays at the end of the symposium and received information about the BES-Net TT project and TAS, and they collected some promotional items from the organisers.

The BES-Net TT team and TAS were satisfied with the level of participation by both teachers and students at the Symposium and agree that it was a useful forum for exchange of information with the agricultural science students.



Demonstration hive at the display



Launch of Pollinator Gardens

In June 2023, the BES-Net TT team worked with partners in both islands for the formal launch of pollinator gardens in Tobago and in Trinidad. These [pollinator gardens](#) are intended to serve as key demonstrations of simple, yet practical ways in which pollinator populations can be encouraged to grow by the provision of food plants and safe havens in small areas within the human landscape.

On Friday 2nd June 2023, the pollinator garden was launched at the [Scarborough Botanic Gardens](#). Joining the BES-Net TT team for a short planting activity were the Secretary for Natural Resources, Food Security, the Environment and Sustainable Development (NRFSESD), Mrs. Nathisha Charles-Pantin and Mrs Sharifa Ali-Abdullah, Officer in Charge at the United Nations Development Programme.

Also present were participants in the BES-Net TT pollinator management workshop who completed a session on design of pollinator gardens that very morning. Work on development of the garden is being coordinated by the Department of Natural Resources and Forestry, which currently manages the Botanic Gardens.



Officials at the pollinator garden launch in Tobago.

On Friday 23rd June 2023, a pollinator garden was launched at [the University of the West Indies \(UWI\)](#) St. Augustine campus. The garden is being developed by the Department of Life Sciences, and will complement an already established butterfly enclosure on the University's compound.

Present were the Hon. Minister of Planning and Development Mrs. Penelope Beckles and UWI Principal, Prof. Rose Marie Belle Antoine who both delivered remarks. They were joined by members of the Environmental Policy and Planning Division (EPPD), the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, and the Department of Life Sciences. Dr. Lena Dempewolf, Biodiversity Specialist, EPPD and member of the BES-Net TT project team shared some background on pollinator gardens in a short presentation.



Partners at the UWI pollinator garden launch.

Owing to inclement weather, the team did not plant on site but posed for photographs with plants that will be put into the garden. Mr. Rajindra Mahabir, technician in charge of the Zoology Unit's insect and specimen collections led a tour of the facilities and the butterfly enclosure which he personally designed and developed for the Department.



Mr. Rajindra Mahabir (at left) with Hon. Minister Beckles (centre) and UWI Principal Prof. Antoine.

Networking for Stingless Bee Management

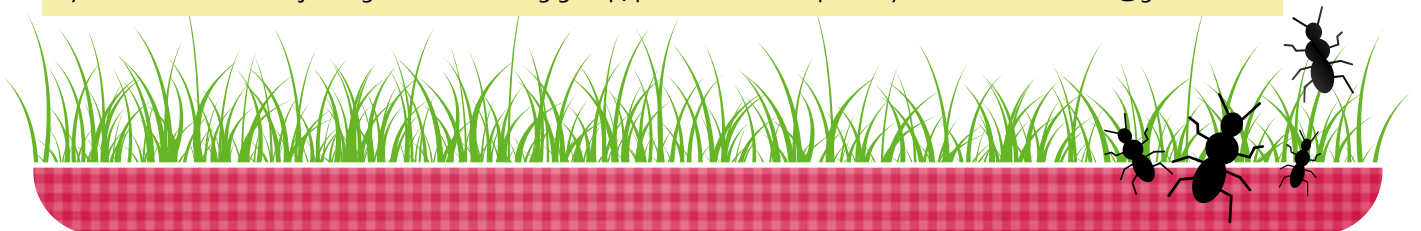
Under the Practice component of the BES-Net TT project, there is an activity listed for the networking of persons engaged in stingless bee management. The actual indicator is “Improvement of the Meliponini network to encourage conservation”. In the course of project implementation, the project team has issued invitations to stingless bee beekeepers to participate in various activities to share their experiences and stimulate interest in this type of beekeeping. This article shares some insight on the way in which the network has developed to this point in the project.

Stingless bee beekeepers are found scattered throughout the islands. Some of these persons are exclusively managing stingless bees, others are mainly keepers of honeybees, and have adopted stingless bee management as a hobby or to improve pollination services. Owing to the fact that stingless bees establish hives at a chosen location for life, the colonies established by these bees are vulnerable to habitat destruction from which they cannot recover. It is therefore imperative that the colonies of these bees can be identified, conserved or safely relocated in order to maintain them.

In the first year of the BES-Net TT project, an online survey was used to gather information from stingless bee keepers to determine their interest in development of a stingless beekeeping network. Following the survey, BES-Net TT hosted a virtual gathering of interested persons in September 2022. This brought together persons who are currently managing stingless bees, others who are interested in learning more about the bees, and those interested in starting to manage hives. At the time of this meeting, workshops were offered on stingless bees management, and several of the meeting’s participants attended the workshops between September and November 2022. The meeting yielded views on the idea of the network, with some seeing the value of engaging persons experienced in managing diseases of bees, those involved in managing of bee habitats, those who can supply tools for bee management as well as those engaged in tree felling and botany. Participants requested a networking event where face-to-face exchanges among interested persons could take place.

In June 2023, in collaboration with the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (which is overseeing a project that supports training in beekeeping in Trinidad and Tobago), a networking event was hosted; 45 persons attended, and many of them expressed interest in the network. A poll was taken among those present to determine whether there was interest in developing a formal group or an informal network as a first step. The majority showed interest in the latter and one week later, some 40+ persons were networked through a What’s App group. At the time of writing, the group has grown to 70 persons, including persons from outside of Trinidad and Tobago. Group members have been readily sharing tips on management of particular species, video of hives and photographs of native stingless bees. The BES-Net TT team is excited about the development of the group and the important value it will bring to stingless bee management in Trinidad and Tobago.

If you are interested in joining this networking group, please send a request by e-mail to besnet.tt@gmail.com



Bee Survey Update

The BES-Net TT team is growing excited at the prospect of very interesting results from our Bee Survey, which was conducted with the assistance of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club supported by a grant from the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP).

The survey's field aspect concluded in March, however some supplemental sampling was conducted in the months of May and June, to assist in the identification of some of the orchid bee species captured in the early samples. By the time the next issue of **The Buzz** is released, a more detailed update will be provided; in the meantime, enjoy this beautiful photograph of one of our very own native orchid bees, *Exaerete* sp. (Photo courtesy The Packer Lab)



The BES-Net TT project takes this opportunity to welcome new Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme, Mr. Ugo Blanco. We thank Former Resident Representative, Mr. Gerardo Noto for his support and wish him well in his new posting.

Upcoming activities this quarter!

August 2023 – Information Booth at Mangrove Festival, Caroni Swamp

September 2023: Theory of Change Workshop, Port of Spain | October: 2023 BES-Net Triologue, Vietnam

The Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net) TT project is jointly implemented by:



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We would love to hear from you and get your feedback on this issue of The Buzz!

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