

## Learning more about our Environmentally Sensitive Species-

### The Golden Tree Frog, Ocelot and Pawi

In earlier articles, we would have featured Environmentally Sensitive Species (ESS) such as the five sea turtle species designated as ESS this year: Green, Hawksbill, Leatherback, Loggerhead, and Olive Ridley, as well as the Manatee and White-Tailed Sabrewing Hummingbird. In this article we will delve into the characteristics and habitats of the remaining ESS: the Golden Tree frog, Ocelot and Pawi species. These species exist in dwindling numbers and the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) identified the critical need to protect these species and ensure their continued existence through its ESS designation.

#### Golden Tree Frog



The Golden Tree Frog (*Phyllodytes auratus*) is a rather tiny creature and is indeed a rare find for the environmental research community. At an astonishing 35 mm, (approximately the length of a paper clip), the rare species is endemic to Trinidad and is locally referred to as the El Tucuche Golden Frog, owing to its occupancy of Trinidad's highest peaks at El Cerro Del Aripo and El Tucuche. It can also be found in Aripo and Morne Bleu Ridge. The Golden Tree frog is regarded as Critically Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) due to its severely restricted habitat. The EMA also designated this species as an ESS in 2013.

The frog has a unique appearance in comparison to its species counterparts, with two golden-yellow stripes running along the head to the rear. They generally reside and lay single eggs or a small clutch of eggs in pools at the centre of large bromeliads. The specific diet of the frog is unknown; however, it is thought to eat both plant and animal matter.

Spotting this creature is a rare occurrence, so you will be very lucky if you happen to come across one if you ever visit its habitat.

## Ocelot



Regarded as one of the masters of the forest, the ocelot (*Leopardus Pardalis*) is one of the more popular ESS, designated in 2013. The name ocelot is derived from the Mexican name for jaguar “ocelotl”. It is a medium-sized cat, which weighs up to 15 kg (35 lbs). The ocelot’s coat is marked with blackish spots, small rings, and blotches.

Ocelots occupy a variety of habitats such as, tropical and subtropical forests, swampy savannas, estuarine mangroves and rocky terrain. Little is known about their specific home range or territory, but they have been observed in forested areas of Trinidad like the Matura National Park for example, an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA). They feed on different sizes of mammals, birds, amphibians and fishes. Their prey includes young peccaries, snakes, agoutis and porcupines.

These wild cats are excellent swimmers and climbers. They are mainly nocturnal and have been noticed resting in trees during the day. Can you think of other nocturnal mammals popular in Trinidad? Here’s a hint- they can be found in our caves!

## Pawi



Do you recall driving along the Eastern Main Road near Cumuto and encountering a sign “Save the Pawi”? That’s because you are en route to the Matura National Park, home to this ESS. The Trinidad Piping-guan or Pawi (*Pipile pipile*) is a large, black turkey-like bird endemic to Trinidad.

The species was designated an ESS in 2005 and is in danger of extinction. Furthermore, it is believed that there are only 70-200 pawi in Trinidad!

The pawi's wing coverts may have spots of white, with slender black feathers edged with white on their crown. They have white faces, black beaks, and brilliant blue wattles extending from their necks and red feet. This species can be primarily found at elevations of 400–900m, but can also be found around heights of 50 m. Pawi are reported to be sociable birds, and inhabit remote primary forests or cultivated areas bordering primary forests where there is minimal human disturbance. They feed principally on fruit and seeds, and they will occasionally feed on cultivated crops. Pawis are also known to favour coffee and nutmeg!

The Pawi, Ocelot and Golden tree frog are all part of our country's rich biodiversity and we should make every effort to protect these threatened species! If you observe any illegal activities such as hunting or killing of ESS, or destruction of the ESAs where some of these species reside, be sure to report these to the Wildlife Hotline at 800-HALT (4258) and the Forestry Division at 622-3217.

For more information visit [www.ema.co.tt](http://www.ema.co.tt). If you have any comments or would like to contribute to this column please respond to [emacorner@ema.co.tt](mailto:emacorner@ema.co.tt).