

June 2010

Dear Scott -

Greetings from the West Indies - the island of NEVIS! I've taken your advice & have tried to spend AT LEAST as much time out exploring the island as I have spent making watercolors & drawing. But really, for me, the one goes along with the other; I can't think of a better way to process a new place than to make drawings of it - for me, that is the best way to study something new...and, of course, read as much as I can about what I am discovering. The first part of this adventure has been to learn to drive on the left side of the road! Fortunately, there aren't too many cars on the island; the first thing about the driving is to watch out for pedestrians...and dogs and goats and chickens and even monkeys!...that ALL share the roads.

The island - called the "Jewel of the Caribbean" - is beautiful and despite a bit of development, still fairly pristine. In a lot of ways it is very idyllic although you don't have to look far to see that the people who inhabit the island (mostly descendants of slaves that worked the sugar plantations) are poor but they are very friendly, and helpful & rich in spirit.

There's a market day twice a week (well 3 times, actually) - Wednesdays, Fridays & Saturdays - and it's been fun to see all the vendors and learn about vegetables & fruits that I have never seen & then try to figure out how to cook with them! There are quite a few good restaurants on the island but they are expensive & we figured out right away that we would have to buy groceries, go to the market & cook our own meals if our money was to hold out.

The bird life on the island has been less exotic than I expected - the most common birds we've seen are pigeons and doves.

The pigeons look pretty much like the plain old pigeons you see in any American city and the doves - two kinds - the Zensida Dove, which looks a lot like our white-winged dove - and the Common Ground Dove, which reminds me of an Inca Dove only smaller -

for all practical purposes look very familiar. I have seen one hummingbird - a GREEN-THROATED CARIB

(a beautiful dark bluish-greenish hummingbird) that looks more exotic...



and a small - black on top & yellowish on the belly - bird called a BANANAQUIT that I believe is a relative of the honeycreepers.

I thought there might be parrots on the island but if there are, they are way up in the rain forests. I read that parrots, throughout the

Caribbean, are endangered - it makes me sad. It's the same story everywhere in the world.

One thing I have found rather fascinating is the amazing assortment of outrageously colored & patterned insects. I was drawing this flower the other day - a flower I have not yet identified (its probably one of those weeds so ubiquitous to the island that no one has thought

to put it in a book) and out walks this beetle with this perfect geometric pattern in bold black & red & yellow





The monkeys on the island are AFRICAN GREEN VERVET Monkeys, originally from Africa (as the name implies) were presumably introduced on the island by French Settlers in the 17th century who brought them over, it is thought, as pets (a familiar story) and they adapted well and now occupy not only NEVIS but a number of other Caribbean Islands.

At last count they outnumbered The human population on St. Kitts!

They're fun to watch & they are everywhere - we've seen them right outside our windows. They are very curious & look like they're full of mischief & lend the most exotic look to the island of any of its inhabitants.

So, I'm beginning to think my work may begin to look like a cross between Paul Gauguin & Henri Rousseau. I've never painted monkeys before but they are creeping in (as may goats & chickens!)

It was great visiting with you & Suzanne the week before I left town. As always, the conversation was stimulating and thought provoking and seemed like it could have gone on endlessly. I especially enjoyed seeing what you are working on and seeing all the progress you have made at the studio; it is, indeed, a kind of 'living' museum. There are some people I would like to bring over and introduce to you and show them your studio... maybe later this summer...

After we (my girl friend, Emily & I) get back from here on the 25th, we'll be leaving again, 2 days later, for Colorado where I am going for another forage to collect material for a painting. Life should ALWAYS be this good! Hope to see you again soon!

Billy Harrell
June 2010



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