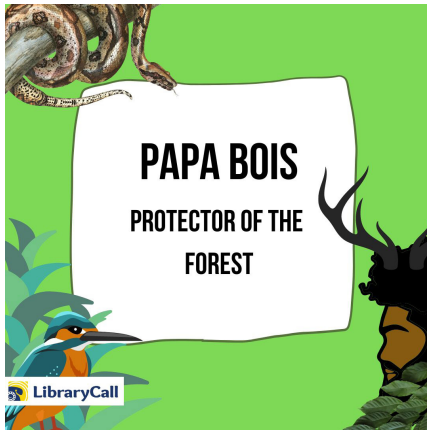


# Papa Bois Protector of the Forest



*By Lauren Kratz Prushko*

To listen call:

(Caribbean music) Papa Bois is the most widely known folklore character of Trinidad & Tobago, the southernmost island country in the Caribbean. He is the guardian of the animals and the trees in the forest.

Papa Bois was traveling through the forests of Trinidad in the Caribbean islands. Papa Bois' beard of leaves rustled against his face as he walked amongst the trees with his goat-like feet.

He is known as the Ancient One and never met anyone like himself, but that was okay because he felt no difference between himself and all the living things in the world. Papa Bois was very old and had seen many things in the past, but he was also large, strong, and muscular. Sometimes he would change in different forms when needed. Papa Bois would change into a deer or wear ripped and torn clothes, but the animals in the forest loved when he was his true self. Ancient, with a very hairy body, leaves in his hair and beard, but with a kind human face walking on his goat-like hind legs and feet—Guardian of the forest.

Papa Bois protects and loves all the animals and trees, both great and small, and he even made three trusted friends while keeping an eye on all the comings and goings in the forests.

That morning Papa Bois stopped and listened to see if he could hear the “whoop, whoop” “whoop-hoop” call (whoop, whoop) “whoop-hoop” motmot bird sound effect) of his dear friend the Trinidad motmot bird whose name was Myrna. Myrna was a shy bird and would stay low and hidden in the trees.

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“Hello, Myrna.” Papa Bois quietly whispered so he wouldn’t startle his timid companion.

“Whoop, Whoop” “Good morning Papa Bois,” whispered Myrna as she peeked out behind the leaves.

“Don’t worry, Myrna, there is no one else around. So please come out and enjoy the warm air,” said Papa Bois.

Myrna, the motmot bird, slowly came out into the open to see her huge friend. No other type of bird had her lovely blue, green, and orange color pattern with a black mask around her ruby eyes.

“I found a place that would make the perfect new home for you, Myrna. The trees are in a more open area but large enough for you to perch on their branches.”

“But Papa Bois, I am afraid for anyone to see me, and I don’t know what to say after someone says “hello.” I say “hello” back, and then I don’t have anything else to say or talk about.”

“Hmm,” Papa Bois said in his rumbling voice. He scratched the top of his head in between his two horns. The leaves in his hair and beard made a rustling sound as the leaves moved around, making Myrna the motmot bird laugh.

“Well, I don’t talk that much either, but I am always curious about what makes someone happy and why. So, if you can’t think of anything to say, ask, “what makes you happy?” They could tell you about their favorite food or game, or best of all; they may tell you a story of a happy memory.

“I think I could try that,” whispered Myrna. She flew next to Papa Bois as he showed her the trees where she could safely perch on the large trees in the warm air but still could hide when she wanted to be alone in her thoughts.

“Whoop, Whoop” “Whoo-hoop” (also sound effect) thank you, Papa Bois.” I will see you tomorrow,” said Myrna, the motmot bird.

Papa Bois couldn’t wait to see Myrna again and hear about how she felt about her new home and her new conversation skills. Even though Papa Bois was very old he still had trouble talking to new living beings, everyone does.

Papa Bois waved goodbye with both of his hands, and in one of his hands, he carried a cow’s horn which he used to blow and sound the alarm to warn the animals and trees of danger. Especially hunters that would hunt too many animals to extinction and damage the trees so then there would be no homes for the animals. This is why Papa Bois would sometimes change into his deer form and run through the forests to guide the humans away.

Papa Bois continued to lumber along to where the forest stopped and led into homes where humans lived. He suddenly stopped as he saw a snake slithering right next to one of the houses, and this was not just any snake; this was a macajuel, a boa constrictor named Gregory. (snake sound effect)

Gregory was not the friendliest fellow, and the other animals stayed out of sight when he was around. Still, Papa Bois is the guardian of all living creatures, small AND big, and he protected Gregory too, even though Gregory didn’t need too much protection and was 8 feet long and weighed 35 pounds.

Papa Bois blew his cow horn to get Gregory’s attention.

“Greetings and Salutations” hissed Gregory to Papa Bois. “There is no time for greetings and salutations, Gregory,” said Papa Bois. “You have to get out of that yard and come back into the forest before the humans see you and get scared, and then you or they get hurt!”

“Now Gregory, what are you doing out in the afternoon anyway?” continued Papa Bois. Gregory was a nocturnal animal and usually only came out at night to look for food but still enjoyed basking in the sun or slithering among the leaves on the ground during the day.

“I was just looking for food and a comfortable place to stay, Papa Bois,” explained Gregory as he slithered towards Papa Bois and back into the forest.

“I will help you find a new place to stay that is cozy for you,” said Papa Bois. “You need to remember that there are humans that may be afraid of you and then hurt you out of their fear, please stay in the forests.”

Gregory joined Papa Bois on his journey through the forests, and as they took a trail that climbed a little higher, they found a hollow log that was dry from the wet of the rainfall and perfect for Gregory to stay cozy and protected.

“Thank you, Papa Bois! Indeed we must part, but maybe I will see you later tonight during my hunt.” hissed Gregory. (snake sound effect)

“Goodbye, Gregory,” Papa Bois said as he smiled to himself.

The day soon turned into evening, and Papa Bois was still not tired. He was the guardian to all the living beings in the forest and had to keep watch, but he thought he could rest for a bit doing one of the things he loved to do, which was to lie on his back, stare up and see a shooting star blaze across the dark blue sky.

Happily, his last trusted friend, Hazel the lappe, cautiously left her burrow and looked around before she dragged her leaf bag filled with plants, herbs, nuts, fruits, seeds, and roots all for her to eat while she quietly sat with Papa Bois.

Hazel-the lappe was a large and sturdy rodent, the second largest ro-

dent in the world and also known as the paca in other countries. Hazel would come out at night with her pig-like body, and scratchy dark brown hair and deer-like markings with four or five rows of white spots on her sides. She did not like to be seen but looked forward to the evenings spent foraging for food and hoping the animals up in the trees would drop some food for her to collect and to sit next to Papa Bois and look up in the sky at the stars.

“Papa Bois, why do you like to spend your evenings looking up at the sky?” Hazel asked kindly.

“When I look up at the vast number of stars in the sky, it helps me remember that every living creature in the forest and beyond is important and here for a reason, and I will continue to protect and be a friend to all that live in the forests,” said Papa Bois.

“Well, I guess I could share some of my nuts and fruits with you this time,” said Hazel.

Papa Bois laughed his booming laugh while the leaves in his beard made a rustling sound and laid down on the forest floor looking up at the sky.

Crick Crack the wire bends,

And that’s the way my story ends.

(closing Caribbean music)