

Environment Tobago
World Wetlands Day
02 February 2011

Wetlands and Forests



Belle Garden Wetland, Tobago, W.I.

Partnerships

Environment Tobago celebrated World Wetlands Day 2011 with weeklong activities that centered on this year's theme, Wetlands and Forests. Environment Tobago collaborated with partners from different sectors including NGOs, private businesses and community-based organisations.

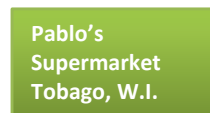
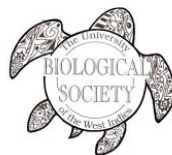
NGOs

Belle Garden Wetland Association
University of the West Indies
Biological Society
Coral Cay Conservation

Private Enterprises

Pablo's Supermarket
Eden Nurseries
Eco Project Ltd.

Activities were focused within the Belle Garden Wetland and supported an existing UNDP/GEF funded initiative to increase awareness of wetlands and proactively encourage sustainable use of the Belle Garden Wetland.



Reforestation



Planting nectar plants

Belle Garden Wetland faced an excessively harsh dry season and forest fires in 2010.

Environment Tobago and its collaborators undertook reforestation activities within this area using native plants sourced and propagated by the local landscaping company, Eden Nurseries.

Environment Tobago also sought to enhance an area within the wetland as designated habitat for butterflies and birds by planting a concentration of nectar and food plants for species previously identified in the wetland.

Ecological surveys

Butterflies and blue crabs (*Cardisoma guanhum*) were used as indicator species for ecological baseline surveys. Blue crabs were chosen as they are a keystone species within the wetland ecosystem. Butterflies were surveyed because they are a bio-indicator species of environmental health.

In Tobago, the blue crab is highly valued as a national dish. Over the years, crab populations have faced overexploitation and significant environmental pressure including habitat loss.

Local hunters have indicated that that crab numbers and sizes are declining. This decline has also been seen elsewhere in the Caribbean.

Capacity building



Performing crab surveys

Tertiary students and other interested parties were educated in the importance of the wetlands and trained in field surveying techniques for indicator species. Students were given hands-on experience in field surveying techniques, data collection and analysis.

Education outreach



Eager students at the Belle Garden Anglican Primary School

Children at the local primary school neighbouring the wetland participated in interactive learning stations that covered topics such as the importance of wetlands and forests, wetland bio-indicators and threats to wetlands.

Using print media, articles were published in the local paper highlighting wetland issues.

Experiences

"My experience in Tobago cannot be described only as enjoyable and unforgettable, but also learning and informative. From counting crab holes at the beach to teaching primary school children about butterflies, the essential part of my Tobago experience was enjoying what I did, in the process of learning about human impact on our fragile ecosystem."- Zachary Charran , Year II University student



Environment Tobago is doing a great job with awareness of the issues to the communities. I learnt about the blue crab situation and butterflies which I had no clue about. I gained a lot of new experiences, I have never worked with primary school children before and it was very interesting and fun. I am grateful for these experiences and memories and I look forward to working with the group again.- Sophia Dhanraj, Final Year University student