

Ministry of Housing, Lands, and the Environment

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Barbados, West Indies

Biodiversity Week Activities

May 17-21st 2004

International Biological Diversity Day

The 22nd of May 2004 was observed worldwide as International Biological Diversity Day. As has been customary in the past, the Ministry of Housing, Lands, and the Environment dedicated the entire week to the promotion of, and education about, the importance of biodiversity. This year a major component of this effort was to promote the idea of biodiversity among the primary and secondary schools. To this end, the Ministry organised a week of visits for primary school students to the Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary (GHNS), as well as a School/Public Lecture on the topic, “Biotechnology and its Implications for Health and Biodiversity”.

Graeme Hall Tours

As the largest expanse of inland water in Barbados, the Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary is one of the island’s most diverse ecosystems. The swamp’s abundance of Red and White Mangroves provide a natural habitat for many local species of birds. In addition the swamp is also a temporary home for a large number of migrant and wintering water and shore birds. The forty plus resident bird species in the swamp range from the small Sandpiper to the graceful white Cattle Egret. With its high biodiversity, Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary was the ideal candidate to illustrate the essence of International Biodiversity Day.

Bay Primary, People’s Cathedral Primary, West Terrace and Good Shepherd Primary, the Ministry’s four adopted schools, participated in the event.



The group reception area at the Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary, where the students had their first real glimpse of this natural ecosystem.

The tours were held throughout the week. The students were presented with activity workbooks and other educational information by GHNS and the Ministry. Accompanying teachers were also presented with several posters and other visual aids by the Ministry. As part of the outing, lunch was also organised in the unique environment of the GHNS.



A Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary guide, providing an in-depth explanation on the relationships in a marshland

The tours allowed the students to experience first hand an intact mangrove swamp, a fragile yet very important ecosystem, which has been severely threatened over the years. In addition, students also learnt about the vast range of biodiversity that the swamp hosts, and its relationship

and contribution to other island ecosystems and resources. The children were allowed to see much of Barbados' fauna in its natural habitat, as well as the migratory species that such a sanctuary encourages.



One of the most interesting features of mangroves, their aerial roots

The GHNS also goes further in its efforts to provide education about natural ecosystems outside of Barbados. It has two separate aviaries which allow visitors to see and experience a variety of interesting and colorful birds in a very interactive and realistic environment. These include macaws, scarlet ibises, flamingoes, night herons and many other birds.



Students and a teacher exploring the aviary



The scarlet ibis (upper left) were a big hit among the kids

Ms. Kim Downes, Mrs. Nicole Scholar-Best, Mr. Allan Franklin, and Student Interns from the Barbados Youth Service, Jason Headley and Nicholas Worrell were the Ministry of Environment Staff who were present.

Everyone involved, both children and accompanying adults, agreed that the trip far exceeded their expectations. Many of the principals were impressed to the extent that they indicated a ready interest in bringing the remainder of their schools to tour the facility.

Public Lecture

The public lecture held on May 18, was geared towards an older, more mature audience. Organised in association with the National Science and Technology Board and presented by Professor L. O'Garro the lecture entitled "Biotechnology and its Implications for Health and Biodiversity" attracted a diverse crowd. It was held at 7 p.m. to accommodate older secondary school children as well as members of the general public. The event was also well attended by the Ministry's staff, other Government agencies and the media as well.



Professor L. O'Garro responding to one of many questions posed by a keen audience

As one of the island's leading Biotechnology experts Professor O'Garro was well placed to field the variety of questions dealing with biotechnology and its implications. These ranged from simple queries which reflected the average person's concerns to more technical questions posed by professionals. His presentation was balanced and well rounded, explaining the basic issues to students, while at the same time addressing the questions of other stakeholders.