

Ministry of Housing, Lands, and the Environment

1st Floor
SP Musson Building
Hincks Street, Bridgetown
Barbados, West Indies

Biodiversity Week Activities

May 23st - 27st 2005

International Biological Diversity Day

Barbados along with the rest of the global community celebrates the 22nd of May 2005 as International Biological Diversity Day. This year's theme was; "Biodiversity: Life Insurance for a changing world". To this end, the Environmental Unit, the Ministry of Housing, Lands, and the Environment dedicated the entire week of May 23st - 27st to promoting the value of Biological Diversity to Barbados' school children.



The National Flower of Barbados, "The Pride of Barbados", one example of the biodiversity to which the children were exposed

This year our energies focussed on the children at the primary school level, a stage at which children are very enthusiastic about their conservation and are eager to learn about and explore their environment. Our objective was to impress upon these children the importance of this year's theme. This was done very simply ...by immersing them in nature and demonstrating how in the past we Barbadians once depended on nature and its products, and now still do `depend on them.

To accomplish this, the Ministry organised a week of visits for primary school students to the two of Barbados' best areas for experiencing the wealth of biodiversity on the island.

Welchman Hall Gully

The entire gully system in Barbados is approximately 430 km in length with 250 km of it forested. Gullies form a significant component of the natural landscape features of Barbados and contain much of its biodiversity. It is for this reason that every citizen needs to develop at least a basic understanding and appreciation of their formation, general characteristics, and their role in protecting flora and fauna. Welchman Hall Gully is one of the best preserved examples of a gully in Barbados, and due to its accessibility it offers visitors the chance to see first hand the enormous variety of flora and fauna present in these systems.

Welchman Hall Gully was named after a Welchman, General Williams who was one of the first settlers and was the original owner of the land. Welchman Hall Gully is north of Harrison's Cave, an extensive cave system located in the parish of St. Thomas. The gully was actually part of the Harrison's Cave network until that section of the roof collapsed, resulting in a natural gully of about 1 ¼ km in length.

In the 1860's it has been nurtured and protected by its owners, and although a few non-indigenous plants have been planted since that time the gully is representative of those which covered the island in the 17th century. The Barbados National Trust took responsibility for the gully in 1962, which resulted in it being Barbados' first natural site the beautiful natural tourist attraction that it is today.

As one of the best known gully systems in Barbados, Welchman Hall Gully is a name which is synonymous with preservation, variety and natural abundance . The Welchman Hall Gully, located in the heart of Barbados, with its many species of plants was the perfect choice for highlighting this year's theme of International Day for Biological Diversity.



Members of this day's tour attentive to their guides. For Environmental Officer, Mrs. Schorlar-Best (left in pink) it was a learning experience as well.



One of the staff from the Welchman Hall Gully pointing out another plant species in the system

Again this year we worked with Bay Primary, St. Albans, People's Cathedral Primary, West Terrace and Good Shepherd Primary, the Ministry's five adopted primary schools.

The tours were held during every day of the week which commenced with International Day for Biological Diversity. To maximise the students' experience local guides were recruited from the Environmental Special Projects Unit (ESPU). These guides were full of knowledge about the wealth of plant life in the gully and its place in the history and traditional life of Barbados. The background they provided truly did illustrate how natural resources such as gullies were crucial to survival to our forebearers and even parents. On behalf of their respective schools, we also presented the teachers with posters and other valuable information prepared by the Ministry. Copies of this year's poster, were also presented to the various schools



A local guide answering one of the many questions from this curious group



These children were very excited with their finds, Welchman Hall Gully is one of the few places in Barbados where nutmeg can still be found



A class teacher helping these children gather some information for their school project, this tour came at just the right time!



Everyone gathered together after the tour, and taking advantage of a last chance to quiz their guide before saying “thank you”

Highland Adventure Center

Located in scenic St Andrew, Highland Adventure Center was the second location to provide school tours. Relatively close to Welchman Hall Nature Sanctuary, but offering a completely different experience, the Highland Adventure tour allows much of the biodiversity of Barbados to be seen.

This hike started from the Highland Adventure base, situated on the second highest point on the island, the hike visited Mount Hillaby the highest point in Barbados.



Hiking through a rural Barbadian village enroute to Mount Hillaby



A stone laid to mark the highest spot on the island, and the real start of the hike

While a bit more arduous than the walk through Welchman Hall Gully, this was fact was all but forgotten once on the trail. Again, we had excellent guides, who had more than enough interesting information on the plants and animals in the area to hold everyone's attention.

Among some of the most practical demonstrations were: how to locate water in a palm and how to braid grasses to mark a bookmark. The school children were mesmerised by these simple but practical demonstrations.



Our guide illustrating an old and useful art to the children, weaving. The leaves of this plant were often woven to make many things. Today our guide bet that he could plait a bookmark for every one of the children in the group. Quite a challenge!



Here an illustration of how this palm is capable of providing water. Note the home grown cup as well!



However you need to be able to find the water first, this is where good ears were needed

Ms. Kim Downes, Mrs. Nicole Scholar-Best, Mr. Allan Franklin, and Ms. Shontelle Wellington of the Biodiversity Section, were the Ministry of Environment Staff who organised and participated in this year's events.



No lack of interesting sights, Nature's own glue!



It's always good to have a guide who isn't squeamish....and has good eyes to boot. Many of us had walked right past this insect perfectly camouflaged in the brush. And many of the teachers had never seen a green one either.



Following the trail..



A beautiful example of a “torch ginger” most of the group was much more familiar with the more common ginger lily

This year’s week of tours to celebrate International Day for Biological Diversity was a huge hit with the students. For many of them it was an opportunity to observe and connect to Barbados’ biodiversity. Everyone involved, children, accompanying adults, Ministry Staff and our guides had an excellent time, and more importantly much was learnt. While everyone learnt many more types of flora and fauna, the greater lesson was making that link between the survival of biodiversity and our own fate, how intricately our standard of living, and our very survival are dependent on biodiversity.