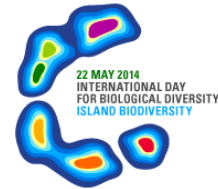


<http://www.newsday.co.tt/features/0,195463.html>



Celebrating our nation's biodiversity

Thursday, May 29 2014

The following statement was released by the Environmental Management Authority on the occasion of International Day for Biological Diversity, which was commemorated on May 22.

Have you ever wondered why plants and animals become extinct? There are many explanations, which include: anthropogenic (human based) factors, threats from other plants and animals and changes in climate or weather patterns.

Trinidad and Tobago is made up of a range of terrestrial ecosystems from rainforests and woodlands to swamps, marshes and savannas? These ecosystems support a number of flora and fauna species – some of which are endemic (confined to a particular place) and unique to our islands.

But how are these species protected?

Legislation and enforcement, and public awareness are two of the main avenues through which action can be undertaken to protect these species.

The Environmental Management Authority (EMA) has designated three valuable ecosystems as Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs). These are: the Aripo Savannas, the Matura National Park and the Nariva Swamp Managed Resource Protected Area. The Buccoo Reef, the Caroni Swamp and the Nariva Swamp are also designated as Ramsar Sites (in accordance with the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands).

The EMA has also designated ten unique animals as Environmentally Sensitive Species (ESS), these are: the White-tailed Sabrewing Hummingbird, the Ocelot, the Golden Tree Frog, the Pawi, the Manatee, and this year, five species of sea turtles were also designated; the Leatherback, Green, Olive Ridley, Loggerhead, and Hawksbill.

Five of the world's seven known species of sea turtle come to Trinidad and Tobago's shores to lay their eggs. For far too long these species have been victims of unfortunate demise, from gillnet fishing, poaching, taking of eggs, predation of eggs by dogs. Accidental by-catch in gill nets has become one of the major threats to these sea turtles. It is for these reasons that significant importance has been placed on improving legislation to protect these species and increasing dialogue among the major stakeholders involved.

Since its inception in 1995, one of the core functions of the EMA has been to create and enforce laws and regulations for environmental management as guided by the Environmental Management Act Chapter 35:05 (EM Act). The protection and preservation of threatened plants, ecosystems and animals fall under this tenet, whereby the EMA develops and enforces both the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Rules 2001 (ESA Rules) and the Environmentally Sensitive Species Rules 2001 (ESS Rules) which govern the treatment and protection of these areas and species.

According to the Section 70 (2) of the EM Act "Any person who knowingly or recklessly undertakes or conspires to allow any activity with respect to an "environmentally sensitive species" which may have an adverse impact on such species, commits an offence and is liable, on conviction on indictment, to a fine of one hundred thousand dollars and imprisonment for two years."

As the EMA commemorates the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) we thought it fitting to dub 2014 as the "Year of the Sea Turtles" following the recent designations of its five sea turtles. The EMA is making strides in liaising with key stakeholders such as fisher folk and reconvening the Biodiversity Advisory Committee (BAC) which

facilitates communication and data sharing between /organisations/agencies involved in work related to the various ESAs and ESS.

This committee was initially formed in 2000 by the EMA and includes: the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, Forestry Division, Fisheries Division, Institute of Marine Affairs, Tobago House of Assembly, Environment Tobago and the Council of Presidents of the Environment (COPE).

As part of an ongoing national sensitisation project, the EMA partnered with Turtle Village Trust to host a series of consultations with various fishing groups throughout Trinidad and Tobago to increase awareness on the sea turtle designations. The EMA also developed information packages for literature on its ESAs and ESSs, hosted ESA Tours, is in the process of planning to host a poster/art competition, and continues to publish articles related to our biodiversity.

As we progress as a nation let us work towards protecting and conserving our natural resources and report acts of illegal hunting, littering and destruction to our nationally protected areas. Let us encourage and foster sustainable development practices, responsible environmental practices within our homes, schools and communities and continuously improve on our corporate social responsibilities.

The United Nations has proclaimed May 22 as The International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) in an effort to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues. The theme "Island Biodiversity" was fittingly chosen as this year's theme to coincide with the designation by the United Nations General Assembly of 2014 as the International Year of Small Island Developing States.

As a small nation competing on a global scale to improve on our resources, let us not forget our rich bio diverse resources as we join the world in commemorating this day, the International Day for Biological Diversity, and continue to build awareness of the exquisite treasures in our land.

For further information on the designation of species visit the EMA's website at www.ema.co.tt.

(Courtesy the Environmental Management Authority)