

Progress Report II

**THE CONSERVATION OF THE FERNS OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
AND THEIR FOREST HABITATS**



To

**Rufford Small Grants for Conservation
Environmental Awareness Group (EAG)**

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December 22, 2011

Cover photograph, the aquatic fern *Marsilea nashii*, Palmetto Point Road, Barbuda.

In the Lesser Antilles, the species is found only in Barbuda and is endemic to the West Indies.

Photo courtesy Kevel C. Lindsay, July 2011.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Rufford Small Grants for Conservation for its consideration of this project and for its financial support. The Environmental Awareness Group for being such a willing and great partner in this effort. Thanks also to Chris Pratt of the Antigua and Barbuda Plant Conservation Project (ACPB) for his continued support, assistance and guidance. Chris set up the new project site on the EAG's homepage.

To Lucia Mings for her continued support and guidance.

Also to the staff and my colleagues and friends at Island Resources Foundation for their continued support.

BACKGROUND

This project update report is part of *The Conservation of The Ferns of Antigua and Barbuda and their Forest Habitats* project funded by the Rufford Small Grants for Conservation, UK. The project seeks to:

- *To survey and determine the status of the ferns of the country and highlight species of critical concern;*
- *To increase the awareness of the value of native ferns and conserve and protect their habitats; and*
- *To produce a National Red List of ferns*

This report provides a detailed account of project activities since the last update report of July 20, 2011. It also provides an overview of upcoming activities and outputs.

The major activities and outputs for this period were the preparation of the draft IUCN Red List of ferns for Antigua and Barbuda, and the establishment of a project website.

The project also received a financial boost when October, it was awarded a US\$15,000.00 from the Mohammed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund.

A detailed report of the visit is provided below.

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

IUCN Red List of Pteridophytes

Kevel Lindsay prepared a draft IUCN Red List of pteridophytes (ferns and fern allies) for the islands of Antigua, Barbuda and Redonda. *The Red List of Pteridophytes of Antigua, Barbuda and Redonda*, dated October 30, 2011, is in draft and is being reviewed by a number of experts and key resource people throughout Antigua, Barbuda, the United States and the Caribbean region.

The purpose of this Red List is:

- To be the first comprehensive pteridophytes Red List of Antigua & Barbuda. The Red List includes;
- To be a basis for input to new environmental protection legislation in Antigua & Barbuda.
- To be one of the focal points for native plant and habitat protection in Antigua and Barbuda; and
- To be one of the first pteridophytes Regional Red Lists based on IUCN guidelines in the Caribbean.

The effort is one of, if not the first of its kind for the Caribbean region. The List provides conservation statuses for some 73 species of ferns and fern allies recorded for the islands.

After two and a half months of review and evaluations, the final draft will be prepared and ready for wide public dissemination.

Fern Project Website

With the assistance of Chris Pratt, the Antigua and Barbuda Plant Conservation Project team leader, a project website has been developed and is accessible on the EAG's homepage. The objectives of the site are: www.eagantigua.org

1. To create greater awareness about the project, its partners and supporters;
2. Build local and international support for its efforts;
3. Increase the appreciation, education and awareness for and about ferns, and
4. To keep the public and partners informed about ongoing efforts and activities.

The project site may be accessed at: and includes an overview of the project, it describes the importance of ferns and why they should be conserved and protected, highlights funding partners and also includes a brief slideshow.

The site is an ongoing effort and updates will be posted from time-to-time.

A screenshot of the site is provided below:



Mohammed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund Support

The project's PI and partner, the EAG, have continued to seek additional funding support for this project. To this end, the effort has been awarded partial funding to the tune of US\$15,000.00 from the Mohammed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, based in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Funding will go towards supporting project efforts and activities, including field research, and in addition, produce a fern atlas.

Articles in Local Press

Two fern articles describing the project's efforts and discussing ferns and plant conservation have been produced for local press in Antigua and Barbuda. The first was

published in the local newspaper, the Daily Observer, the most widely read and circulated in Antigua and Barbuda. The article was published on September 15, 2011.

The second article, soon to be published in the EAG's quarterly newsletter of September to December 2011. The newsletter is expected out in January of 2012. A copy of the Daily Observer article as published on the day is provided in **Appendix I**. MS Word copies of both articles are provided under separate cover.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES AND NEXT STEPS

Follow-up activities over the next four months include:

- ⤴ Field Survey in Antigua and Barbuda, tentative for February 2012*
- ⤴ Preparing the final version of Red List of Pteridophytes – January 2012;
- ⤴ Updating project website (ongoing);
- ⤴ Prepare draft of conservation perspective - January 30, 2012**; and

*A field survey trip was tentatively planned for October of 2011, but this did not occur. This was due to several factors, including logistics, other conflicting travel commitments, and the incoming Mohammed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund award, which would increase opportunities for a more comprehensive field effort.

The trip is now planned for some time in February of 2012. Preparations are now ongoing.

**A draft of this document was expected to be ready by November 2011, but given the task of preparing the draft Red List, the dates of project draft document outputs had to be revised.



EAG TALK

Rediscovering the ferns of Antigua, Barbuda and Redonda

By Kevel C Lindsay

Since in 2007, when I began work on the Antigua & Barbuda Plant Conservation Project (ABPCT) with Chris Pratt, I have been on an urgent quest to reconnect myself with Antigua & Barbuda's native plants, and to rediscover many of our unique and wonderful species of ferns.

The plant team had such a hard time finding

and describing the native ferns that I resolved to not only solve the mysteries of the types of ferns that we have here, but also to increase local awareness about them.

For me, ferns are a fascinating group of plants to study. But having moved to New York in 1999, it meant that I was a world away. I needed funding for the expensive travel and work in Antigua, and so I struggled through years of trying to find willing supporters and sympathisers.

It was with great excitement that I was informed in January of 2011, that I was awarded a Rufford Small Grant for Nature Conservation to study the ferns of Antigua & Barbuda. The study seeks to determine the status of the ferns of the country, to highlight those of critical conservation concern and develop a conservation outlook for the species and their habitats.

In April 2011, I formally began my rediscovery of ferns, and to reassert my love and joy of some of Antigua's most interesting native plants.

The ferns of Antigua & Barbuda are one of the least studied and least understood groups of plants. Many are quite rare and several new species such as the Nettle Adder's Tongue (*Ophioglossum reticulatum*) have recently been added to the country plant record.

The current list stands at over 60 species. Most of the species are found in the wetter volcanic south — some restricted to the deep moist sheltered valleys.



The Nettle Adder's Tongue fern discovered in the southern volcanic hills of Antigua

Some are rarely seen, including *Thelypteris patesii*, a species common on other Lesser Antillean islands, but quite rare in Antigua, or *Thelypteris hispida*, a species that I nicknamed the "pepper fern" because of the stinging sensation that results when the leaves are pressed on to the tongue.

When I first discovered the Adder's Tongue fern in Antigua in October 2010, I fell to my knees in utter shock — my hands shaking, my heart racing and fighting back tears. I became so overwhelmed by this new discovery, even though this species is widespread across the tropics and sub-tropics of the world. It elicited such profound excitement from me because it was a personal triumph.

I was with my friend and colleague, Jean-Pierre Bacic, and we briefly became disoriented while searching for a trail in the dense Fever Grass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) patch bordering the forest. Sometimes, getting lost can

bring such great rewards.

Though ferns are recognised for their horticultural value, imparting great joy and wonder to gardeners and others, their role in the natural environment is less obvious or understood. They, like other plants, are important in their own right, and are a significant part of the country's biodiversity heritage.

In the Antigua forest ecosystems for example, ferns often make up the bulk of the ground cover on the forest floor, and therefore, are a significant part of the forest biomass, contributing significantly to the nutrient and water cycles of the upper layers of the soil.

Ferns are great indicators of the types of habitats, and because many are environment-specific, they can provide important clues as to the changes in the environment, including the quality of the habitat, the effects of deforestation and habitat fragmentation on the long-term ecological

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CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

We are looking for a friendly, self-motivated professional with a proven track record of quality customer service to join our team in the following position:

ASSISTANT RESTAURANT MANAGER

The Assistant Restaurant Manager is responsible for assisting the Restaurant Manager in controlling restaurant activities which includes financial management, product delivery, staff development, guest and customer services and brand marketing. He / She along with the Manager is charged with promoting the mission and values of the company and increasing profitability.

The successful candidate should have a degree in Hospitality Management (or similar) or in lieu at least 4 years relevant restaurant / food service / business management experience, supervisory skills and an ability to work a flexible schedule.

Please forward a detailed resume to: karen@bigbenoni-antigua.com. Only qualified applicants will be contacted.

Applications will close on Friday 23rd September, 2011.

Kevel C Lindsay

Gov't advised against transferring ownership of APUA

Government has been warned that massive layoffs could result from its plan to transform the state-owned Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA) into a publicly-traded company.

The caution came Tuesday from Chairman of the Antigua Labour Party Gaston Browne, who believes an alternative approach should be taken.

"If we allow it to happen, then you're talking about hundreds of people

who will eventually hit the headline. They will be retrenched," he predicted.

"Perhaps an alternative will be the corporatisation of APUA so that government will remain effectively the owner and will continue to control APUA. By so doing, you can increase the efficiencies and the savings, and the savings ... can be passed on to consumers in the form of lower prices. We do not accept the methodology in which they hope to privatise

APUA," Browne added.

Last Thursday, the prime minister said government is hoping that the transformation plan for APUA would enhance the company's ability to raise additional capital and increase its net worth.

"Dividends for the shareholders - the ordinary man and woman in Antigua & Barbuda will truly 'earn' while they burn' energy in a responsible manner, ensuring sustainability and

longevity of the enterprise," Spencer explained.

However, former minister of Public Utilities Robin Yearwood, also of the ALP, does not believe residents will benefit and he accused the country's leader of trying to "fool residents."

"If you put a conservative value on APUA of between \$400 to \$500 million, where would Antiguans and Barbudans get the money to buy shares in APUA?" he queried.

ALP To Draft from page 1

"Next week, when our technical support committee meets, we'll put together a draft code of ethics for consideration by the party's executive, or for ratification for that matter."

Several members of the ALP leadership have been taken to court in connection with misfeasance in public office, including its political leader and former prime minister Lester Bird, Gaston Browne, and Robin Yearwood. All have denied the claims.

Browne was accused of purchasing land at pepper-corn prices while serving as

a government minister, but has since been cleared by the court.

The eight points that he has recommended for the code state in part: No candidate should intentionally mislead the people, including making promises that a candidate knows cannot be kept; no candidate, upon becoming a member of the executive, should participate when in a conflict of interest and must recuse himself once there is a conflict.

The code also states that candidates should not conduct business with the government directly and are

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prevents and stability of an area, and even on the impacts of global climate change on the forests.

Discovering the islands' ferns also offers the opportunity to learn more about the native flora and

fauna, and for new surprises such as chancing upon previously unreported species such as a possible new orchid record, *Melic parula*, a beautiful species with large pink flowers, discovered in the Sbeckerley Mountains in July 2011.

precluded from being a director of any company or firm, including a law firm.

If the code is ratified by the ALP - the country's oldest political party - it will become the first to do so.

The ALP had rejected a code of conduct put forward by the Antigua Christian Council in the lead up to the 2004 general election.

However, in 2009, it agreed to a similar document put forward by the Antigua & Barbuda Council of Church Leaders.

The ALP's decision to introduce its own ethics guidelines preceded a major rally scheduled for 7 pm

today, that seeks to pressure government into holding an independent commission of inquiry into the fencing of sporting facilities across the country.

The party chairman vowed that legal action would be taken if Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer fails to make an announcement in a month's time.

"As chairman of the party, I am giving ... PM Spencer ... 20 days to call an inquiry or to do something about the fencing scandal, failing which we'll utilise all legal and democratic means available to us to force an inquiry," he said.

and critical ecosystems.

By focusing on ferns, this project is supporting a long-term integrated conservation approach and to help address both acute and broader conservation issues, including the plight of regional (West Indian) plant and bird endemics.

This project forms part of an ongoing plant conservation effort being led by the EAG in Antigua, and supports the organisation's long-term goal to conserve and protect the country's native biodiversity.

MR AND MS INSPIRATION PAGEANT

Are you between the ages of 16 and 25? Are you a Christian? Would you like to be the first ever Mr and Ms Inspiration? If the answer is yes, then you can sign up to be a participant in the Mr and Ms Inspiration Pageant which will be held in December. For more information or to get a registration form contact Avena Robinson at 728-6821, Janelle Trotman Phoenix at 798-9024, Shamaise Peters at 784-5809 or email us at youthinspiration@hotmail.com

YOUTH INSPIRATION GROUP VISIT

The Youth Inspiration Group is up and running and we are going to take Antigua and Barbuda by storm. On Saturday, September 17 we will be visiting the Sunshine Home for Girls to launch the Big Brother/Big Sister project. We will also be taking some toiletries, school supplies and food items to them. If you are desirous of making a contribution towards this venture, you can contact Avena at 728-6821 or Shamaise Peters at 784-5809. Your contribution would be greatly appreciated.