

Project Update: September 2011

Since 2007, when I began work on the Antigua and Barbuda Plant Conservation Project (ABPCP) with Chris Pratt, I have been on an urgent quest to reconnect myself with Antigua and 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 the 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 sympathizers. 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 and 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 of 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 and Barbuda are one of the least studied and least understood groups of plants. Many are quite rare and several new species such as the Adder's Tongue (see photo) have recently been added to the country plant record. The current list now stands at over 60 species.

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. By focusing on ferns, this project is supporting a long-term integrated conservation approach to help address both acute and broader conservation issues, including the plight of regional (West Indian) plant and bird endemics, and critical ecosystems. This project forms part of an ongoing plant conservation effort being led by the EAG in Antigua, and supports the organization's long-term goal to conserve and protect the country's native biodiversity.