

REPORT ON THE CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIODIVERSITY 2009

INTRODUCTION

The International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) was created in 1993 to increase the understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues. It was initially celebrated on December 29, the date of entry into force of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD). However, in December 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted 22 May as IDB, to commemorate the adoption of the text of the Convention on 22 May 1992 by the *Nairobi Final Act of the Conference for the Adoption of the Agreed Text of the Convention on Biological Diversity*. The date was also changed because it was difficult for many countries to plan and carry out suitable celebrations for December 29, given the number of holidays that coincide around that time of year.

Jamaica became a signatory to the CBD on June 11, 1992 and became a Party member on January 6, 1995. Since then, Jamaica has remained committed to fulfilling the mandates under the Convention, one of which is the celebration of IDB.

The theme for 2009 was “Invasive Alien Species (IAS) - one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, and to the ecological and economic well-being of society and the planet”. This theme gave Jamaica the opportunity to raise awareness on IAS, the problems/issues associated with them and the actions needed to eradicate (where possible) or mitigate their impacts.

This year, an inter-Agency approach was taken to celebrate IDB which resulted in the setting up of an International Day for Biodiversity Committee. The members of the committee were Jerome Smith, Director, Natural Resources, Environmental Management Division (EMD), Office of the Prime Minister (OPM); Andrea Donaldson, Coordinator, Ecosystems Management Branch (EMB), National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA); Shakira Azan Environmental Officer, EMB-NEPA and Secretariat for the Alien Invasive Species Working Group; Maureen Milbourn, Community Outreach Officer, Public Education and Corporate Communications Branch, NEPA; Suzanne Davis, Senior Research Officer- Jamaica Clearing-House Mechanism, Natural History Museum of Jamaica, Institute of Jamaica (IOJ)/Jamaica Clearing-House Mechanism, and Elizabeth Morrison, Zoologist, Natural History Museum of Jamaica, IOJ.

ACTIVITIES

The objectives were as follows:

- To sensitize Jamaicans about IAS, their impacts and ways to prevent/mitigate their spread.
- To provide information on the research that is currently being undertaken in Jamaica with respect to invasive species.

The Committee during its deliberations decided to take a multi-agency planning approach to the celebration of IDB. In addition to the organizations of the IDB Committee, other stakeholders involved included the Maritime Authority of Jamaica (MAJ), the University of the West Indies (UWI), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Jamaica Conservation Development Trust (JCDDT). The activities for IDB 2009 were focused on several areas:

Print and Electronic Media

Five articles were published in the print media with sponsorship from both the Gleaner and the Jamaica Observer (links attached in appendix II). In addition, a press release entitled “Jamaica to Mark International Biodiversity Day on May 22” was sent to all media houses. This was also placed on the Jamaica Information Service (JIS) website, and circulated to over 100 organizations inclusive of embassies on the JIS list service.

Displays

Several displays were mounted on IAS in celebration of IDB. The main exhibit was located in the Discovery Room of the IOJ and was officially opened on Friday May 22, 2009 by Mr. Vivian Crawford, Executive Director, Institute of Jamaica. Greetings were also brought by Miss Leonie Barnaby, Senior Director, EMD-OPM. The exhibition remained in place until Wednesday, May 27, 2009 and was viewed by the general public and schools (more than 50 persons signed the exhibition visitor’s book).

Other displays were mounted on the day at the Tom Redcam Library, the National Environment and Planning Agency and the Environmental Management Division in the Office of the Prime Minister.

Displays were also mounted at the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) “Hellshire Enviro Fair” which was held at Two Sisters Caves, Hellshire, St. Catherine on Friday, May 29, 2009 and at “Green Expo 2009”, held at the National Arena from June 5-7, 2009.

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE AND INTEREST

The feedback garnered from the three (3) displays mounted indicated that the general public had limited knowledge on the issue of IAS. Few persons (mostly with scientific backgrounds) had previous knowledge of the subject but in general, the level of interest was high and persons sought to educate themselves on IAS and their impacts. Persons were particularly interested to learn about the impacts on their livelihoods as well as on Jamaican biodiversity.

A visitor book was placed at the displays and persons invited to give comments on the display. Some comments are listed below:

- Shereida Clarke from Tarrant High School wrote *“Informative and gives a new perspective on the environment”*
- Donna Blake, Country Director for the Nature Conservancy in Jamaica wrote *“We need to get this information more widely distributed”*
- Fancois St. Juste, of Radio Jamaica wrote *“Interesting! Scary!”*

LESSONS LEARNT

1. With regards to the exhibitors, their contributions gave a rough indication of the range of available educational material on the topic of invasive alien species. In addition to the preserved specimens of the IOJ, there were posters, pamphlets, CDs, and an online database currently being revised. Many of the species in the exhibit were animals. There is definitely scope for more information products on invasive alien plants and methods of controlling invasive species in general.
2. The limited public awareness on matters related to the theme for this year is an indication of the magnitude of work to be done with respect to biodiversity issues. Next year (2010) is the International Year of Biodiversity and is the year by which all parties to the CBD have committed to have achieved a significant reduction in the rate of Biodiversity loss. Jamaica must increase its efforts to promote the importance of Biodiversity and its conservation as we plan activities for 2010.

Appendix I

Images illustrating the various activities celebrated on the International Day for Biodiversity

Exhibitions



Opening Ceremony. Jerome Smith, Chairman of IBD Planning Committee (centre)



Vivian Crawford, Executive Director of the Institute of Jamaica officially declaring the IBD Exhibition open.



Viewers to the IBD Exhibition



Leonie Barnaby, Senior Director of Natural Resources, Office of the Prime Minister (Centre) receiving a tour by Suzanne Davis, Invasive Species Information Network Lead (left) with an IOJ Librarian in foreground.



Tracy Commock, Director of Natural History Museum (IOJ) and Shakira Azan, Secretariat for the Invasive Alien Species Working Group (NEPA)



Signing of guest book at brochure table



Invasive Aliens Display at Jamaica Green Expo 2009

Appendix II

Published information

Print Media

Published articles can be found at the links below.

- <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20090521/news/news3.html>
- <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20090520/news/news10.html>
- http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/magazines/Environment/html/20090523T170000-0500_152036_OBS_INVASIVE_SPECIES_THREATEN_JA_S_BIODIVERSITY_.asp
- http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/magazines/Environment/html/20090516T210000-0500_151553_OBS_JAMAICA_AND_INVASIVE_SPECIES.asp
- <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20090520/news/news11.html>

Information was also published on the NEPA website at:

- <http://www.nepa.gov.jm/ibd-2009/pages/>