



EAG TALK

The Work to Save Our Pollinators

By Ruth Spencer

MEPA Trust partnered with the GEF Small Grants Programme, the Forestry Division, the Department of the Environment (DOE) and the Beekeeping Cooperative to document, share and receive information from the local knowledge holders on the trends and challenges affecting pollinators on the islands. This dialogue, which was made possible by the support of SwedBio and Forest Peoples Program, serves to showcase best practices from Antigua and Barbuda, and to mainstream and knowledge across the island and further afield, with the aim to make the conservation of pollinators a national effort.

Mr. Bernard Nichols provided expert knowledge of multiple values and benefits from his beekeeping activities at Valley Ventures Flower Farm. The 9-acre farm is a visiting site for a wide variety of pollinators with a pond, tropical flowers and heliconias, a fruit tree orchard, and disease free coconut plants that are resistant to the lethal yellowing disease. The farm is a habitat for three humming birds - green Antiguan crested, emerald carib and the rarely seen purple throated carib. Despite the island's ongoing lengthy drought, the farm has proved to be a living biodiversity lab and bird sanctuary for our pollinators. Mr. Nichols' best practices have led to a partnership with the Antigua State College where students have the opportunity for hands-on education.



Mr Tajah Edward of the Central Board of Health.



Mr Bernard Nichols, bee expert and facilitator showing the root of a 35-year-old logwood tree cut down on Friar's Hill Road for coal.



Mr Jonah Ormond, Registrar of the Chemicals and Pesticides Board.



Interactive group with sharing by Helena Jeffery of the DOE. Also pictured are Craig Thomas of IICA, beekeepers cooperative member and Thaddeus Spencer.



Mr Adriel Thibou of the Forestry Division, bat expert and facilitator.

Chief Forestry Officer Mr. Adriel Thibou spoke about the importance of bats. He believes that they are greatly underestimated, asserting that they play significant roles in ensuring the survival of many of Antigua and Barbuda's native species, in pest control, and in maintaining the natural environment. Unfortunately, relatively little is known about bats, and very little conservation work is being done. This is compounded by the fear of bats caused by beliefs and superstitions based on popular portrayals on various media.

Added to this are the compounded threats from **Climate Change** and **Sea Level Rise**, which are causing more frequent and severe droughts, thereby depleting food sources both for the bats and the insects that they consume. Severe flooding and rising sea levels may destroy their natural habitats. Also, the increasing frequency and intensity of hurricanes may decidedly result in the starvation of pollinators, possibly driving some species to extinction.

Dr. Helena Jeffery-Brown from the Department of the Environment, shared that IPBES, the scientific arm of the UN CBD values and recognizes that local knowledge has to be linked with the science. She stressed that the knowledge in our local communities must be shared to link to sustainability of our plants which supports livelihood and benefits pollinators and critical to our food supply.

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“Dem ABS workers can ‘strike’ more dan arwe!”

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Dr Jeffrey-Brown was able from the information shared to identify two new bat species and has committed to work on adding them to the list of four protected bat species for Antigua and Barbuda.

Mr. Tajah Edward from the Central Board of Health, and Director of the Analytical Services Department, Dr Linroy Christian, have been in communication, looking into alternative chemicals for the thermal fogging, which has been shown to have a harmful effect on local pollinators. Dr. Christian is also preparing a position paper to

the Ministry of Health on the issue and is proposing that the Dept. of Analytical Services handle all procurement of chemicals for the CBH. He is currently awaiting an inventory of what chemicals are in stock at the CBH and will investigate their program to verify their methodology.

Mr. Jonah Ormond, Registrar of the Pesticides and Chemicals Board shared on his unit’s effort to reduce the threats with stricter compliance and controls at the ports of entry along with public education and awareness and building a closer working relationship

with the Custom officials and staff is ongoing. He also linked strengthening our support for pollinators with reducing the food import Bill.

The Inter American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA) representative, Craig Thomas, is working with the Ministry of agriculture and other agencies including the Beekeeping Cooperative, Women’s Agro Processers and other local groups both in Antigua and Barbuda to strengthen local actions aimed at supporting pollinators to enable the Agricultural sector to grow and develop to

meet our food production needs.

Key agencies were in attendance and were able to share information and provide solutions that will lead to policies that will supplement the local communities’ customary sustainable practices which are beneficial for pollinators while supporting livelihoods. The key messages coming out of the Dialogue is that urgent attention needs to be given to the methods of pest control and land clearing, as well as educating the public about the importance of pollinators in sustaining our natural ecosystem.