



JAMAICA

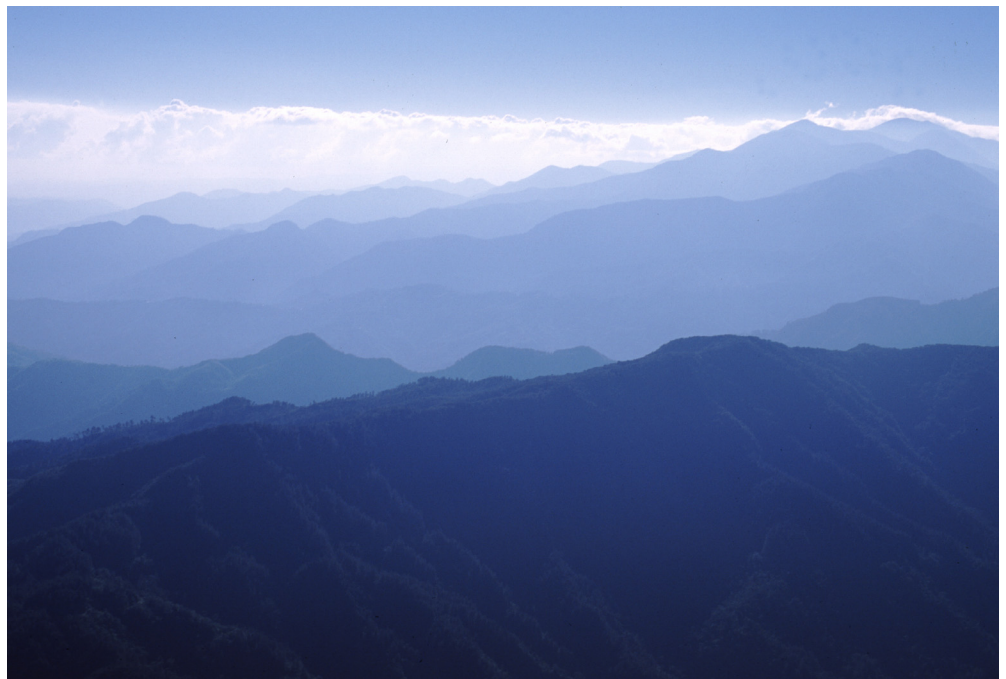
Working to Conserve the Biodiversity of the Caribbean's Third Largest Island

Jamaica, the third largest island in the Greater Antilles, contains many ecological zones ranging from dense rainforests to expansive coral reefs. Jamaica is home to more endemic orchids, ferns, reptiles and birds—ten of which are near extinction—than any other Caribbean island. The Nature Conservancy focuses its work around the central mountains that extend across the island from the majestic Blue and John Crow Mountains in the east to the uniquely rugged hills and valleys of the Cockpit Country further west.

Nearly 30 percent of Jamaica is covered in forest, one-third of which is under some form of protection. However, human population growth, agricultural practices, mining and housing developments have all contributed to a serious decline in these forests. Deforestation, particularly in the upper watershed areas, is leading to reduced water quality, soil erosion and the loss of important fauna and flora.

Spinal Forest Corridor

One of the primary threats to the health of biodiversity is habitat fragmentation. An effective response is to protect corridors that link protected areas. In Jamaica, substantial natural forests remain in the mountainous area between Blue and John Crow Mountain National Park and the forest reserves of the Cockpit Country. This "spinal forest" is the source of nearly all of the island's freshwater. The



Blue Mountains, Jamaica ©Jonathan Kerr

Conservancy, in partnership with local conservation groups and the Jamaica Forestry Department, is working to protect this spinal forest corridor.

Together, we are working directly with private landowners in the spinal forest, introducing them to voluntary, incentive-based conservation easements. The Conservancy is also advising the Natural Environmental Protection Authority and the Jamaican Forestry Department in the design of a national strategy for private lands conservation, including protecting buffer zones, creating biological corridors and protecting critical habitats in private hands.

Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park

In 1992, The Nature Conservancy and its partner, Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust, established the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park, Jamaica's first designated terrestrial park. This park is home to a variety of diverse tropical rain forest habitats, with some of the highest levels of species diversity and endemism in the Caribbean. This includes approximately 150 resident and migratory species of birds. The numerous watersheds in Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park supply water for the Kingston metropoli-



Heliconia and hummingbird ©Gina Green/The Nature Conservancy

tan area and other town centers, so conservation of the forest resources will also ensure a continued supply of clean water.

Funded in part by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Conservancy has helped the Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust develop park infrastructure, post and secure park boundaries, hire and train park rangers and conduct scientific research. We also helped build community leadership and develop environmentally compatible community micro-enterprises in the area surrounding the park.

Cockpit Country

Cockpit Country is a mostly roadless 150,000-acre area of limestone karst with a dramatic topography of rounded peaks and depressions. These formations drain water through porous bedrock and sinkholes connected to a complex, subterranean network of caves, supplying 59 percent of Jamaica's freshwater. Cockpit Country's vegetation includes 152 vascular plant species, 101 of which are found nowhere else on Earth. Bats dominate the Cockpit Country's mammalian diversity, with some caves sheltering more than 50,000 animals. 27 of Jamaica's endemic land birds and 37 of its species of amphibians and reptiles are also found here. The Conservancy's goal is to develop stable long-term conservation protection for the region. We are

working with the Government of Jamaica's Forestry Department and other partners to develop better knowledge of local biodiversity and human threats, to guide successful protection.

National Implementation Partnership

Governmental and non-governmental organizations from Jamaica and the United States have agreed to a partnership to enhance the protection of Jamaica's natural heritage. Partner institutions will work to establish and maintain an effectively-managed system of protected areas that represents Jamaica's rich biodiversity. Achieving this goal will represent an important contribution toward the global target of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 as agreed to by governments at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and adopted as part of the Convention on Biological Diversity's Strategic Plan.

The Government of Jamaica has designated its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan as a top priority, and has recognized protected areas as a cornerstone of conservation efforts. Together, we are working on a biological gap assessment, preparations and planning for new protected area designations, rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems and data collection and storage. We are also creat-

ing sustainable ways to fund protected areas, increasing conservation capacity and expertise in the government and on the ground in protected areas, and facilitating the conservation of private lands.

Strengthening Jamaican Conservation Providers

The Conservancy is also helping increase collaboration and networking between the Jamaican government's environmental agencies and local conservation groups, with emphasis on the Jamaican Protected Areas Network (J-PAN) members. Building up J-PAN's capacity has important implications for Jamaica's protected areas, as its members will be better able to share conservation resources, best practices, and lessons learned. Our activities include establishing "best practice" models of visitor management in the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park and Montego Bay Marine Park, increasing financial sustainability of J-PAN members, and increasing the management skills of J-PAN members and government environmental agency staff. At the same time, we are identifying future opportunities in other protected areas.

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