

GUANA ISLAND SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME CARRIES OUT IMPORTANT RESEARCH



Texas Tech students also participated in the activities on Guana Island

An international team of scientists, led by Dr. James Lazell, President of the Rhode Island USA based Conservation Agency, has completed a month of research on Guana Island.

Every year in October, Guana Island hosts a scientific research programme. Scientists are invited to the island to conduct their studies in the areas of natural history, ecology, conservation biology, systematics and biogeography. Their results are relevant to natural resource preservation and species conservation in the BVI.

In an interview with The Island Sun Tuesday, Dr. Lazell, who is also Director of the Guana Island Wildlife Sanctuary, explained that the sanctuary on Guana Island was established in 1980 and the programme featured a month of activities focusing on plants and animals.

Dr. Lazell pointed out that a large number of species had been wiped out thousands of years ago, e.g. a guinea pig like rodent domesticated by the Amerindians, a chicken like bird called the flightless rail, parrots and the stout iguana.

"The first that occurred to me from the inception was the need to do an inventory of the island," according to Dr. Lazell. "There were two counts which had to be done, one was the presence/absence and then the second was to get an idea of the population and that was not an easy thing to do, so we had to engage a cadre of experts."

He said there were scientists working on the different species of lizards, of which they found eight; snakes - 3; bats - 4; butterflies - 31; spiders - 150; land crabs - 10; grasshoppers - 4 or 5 and others.

"As we develop this list, other people work on the ecological physiology of the animals, like water balance," he continued. "We also look at energetics, that is how fast they can run, how much time they spend basking in the sun and their diets - what do they eat and who eats them."

In addition, the scientists examine the molecular biology of the animals by tagging them with micro chips and monitoring their activities from year to year to see whether they've grown and whether they've lived in the same place or moved around.

The focus of the research programme expanded in 1990 to include the marine environment, with the activities directed by Ms. Lianna Jarecki, daughter of the Guana Island resort owners Dr. Henry and Gloria Jarecki of the Falconwood Foundation that supports the research programme.

The research is not only confined to Guana Island. The scientists go island hopping as well to collect specimen and this year, they found an unidentified species of the whipscorpion, which they have taken back for analysis at the Harvard University museum.

This year, the team of scientists were drawn from China, the U.S., St. Croix, Dominica and Romania and included botanists, herpetologists, entomologists and archaeologists.

While here, they conducted a lecture and symposium at the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (HLSCC). The symposium highlighted talks and photographs on Raptors in the BVI, The Mysteries of Distress Calling, Invader Plants, Body Size and Habitat in BVI Lizards and

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Dr. Lazell said the HLSCC provided strong support to the programme. He also mentioned that every year, the scientists play host to a number of students who take part in the science fair and also youth from the Adventist Pathfinders.

"It's an outreach to let the community know what we're doing and some of what's unique about the territory," he said. "Unfortunately, we don't get as big an audience as we would like at the lectures, which really aren't technical at all, we try to avoid using scientific names, we're really just re-telling the story."

The team of scientists left the territory Wednesday. The research programme resumes next year October.



A new addition to Nature's Little Secrets: this never-seen-before in the BVI Worm-eating Warbler has been found at Guana Island. About 15 different types of Warblers pass through the BVI on a seasonal basis but this type has never been recorded before. The Yellow Warbler is indigenous to the BVI and the Blackpole Warbler is another rather common type, Dr. James Lazell told The Island Sun.