



?Welcome to Cockpit Country?

Title

Cockpit Country is recognized nationally and internationally as a habitat for more than 60 threatened species, making it one of the highest-ranked Important Bird Areas and Key Biodiversity Areas in Jamaica and the Caribbean. It is also important for its cultural heritage associated with the indigenous Maroons, and for the ecosystem services it provides. Four watersheds derive their source waters from Cockpit Country and together these watersheds support diverse habitats of moist, dry, and mangrove forests for migratory and resident birds.

Windsor Research Centre (BirdLife's project partner in Jamaica) along with Jamaica Environment Trust and Southern Trelawny Environmental Agency are part of a small team representing the wider constituency of the Jamaica Environmental Advocacy Network. The team, supported by credible, evidence-based information, has succeeded in building a platform for countering the threat of bauxite mining to **Cockpit Country**. There is confidence that at least the core section will not be destroyed by mining. Windsor Research Centre has started to define Cockpit Country on-the-ground by working with outlying communities to set up ?Welcome to Cockpit Country? panels at strategic locations, and successfully recommended that these outlying communities attend bi-monthly meetings with the Local Forest Management Committees.

Local communities have been involved in forest restoration and watershed management through the Forestry Department's program for Local Forest Management Committees. In Cockpit Country, degraded pastures and fern-choked hillsides are being rehabilitated to forest by identifying suitable native tree species for wide-scale planting to re-establish and speed-up processes of natural forest regeneration.

?It's really hard (and impossible, if endemic species are extirpated) to restore native tropical forest once an area is completely cleared and invaded by non-native plants, particularly grasses and ferns?. ? Susan Koenig, Windsor Research Centre.

In the mesic woodlands of Cockpit Country's Martha Brae Watershed, habitat rehabilitation is targeting the control of the aggressively invasive Logwood tree. With the support through BirdLife from the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, Windsor Research Centre co-ordinated the transplanting of about 800 ?wildlings? collected from peripheral woodlands while collaborating partner Trelawny Gun Club allowed local charcoal burners to harvest the non-native Logwood for income generation. These mesic woodlands are the preferred habitats of many Neotropical migratory birds and are critical habitat corridors between upland breeding habitats and lowland wintering habitats for resident birds. Windsor Research Centre and its

collaborating partners continue the struggle to improve the process of landscape planning and sustainable development for Cockpit Country and its watersheds before these life-sustaining ecosystems are irreparably destroyed for future generations.

(Photo Credit to this News Post: GeoEye / Jamaica Forestry Department (from IKONOS images)).