

First Caribaea Initiative Research & Conservation Workshop

Fort de France, Martinique : 22-24 March 2016

Current Situation of Haiti's Animal Biodiversity and Wildlife

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Introduction

- ❑ **Based on Haiti's biodiversity, natural beauty and luxuriance, Christopher Columbus described it in 1492 as an "earthly paradise", as an evidence of its multiple biomes resulted from its geologic history, varied topography and variability of temperature and precipitation**
- ❑ **This great biodiversity included a high number of endemic and presumably separated species due to the isolation and adaptation to specific environments**
- ❑ **A drastic decrease of Haiti's wildlife has been observed as a result of the introduction of dogs, cats, rats, mongooses, cattle and goats by the Amerindians, Spanish and French, the hunting of wild animals and the long standing deforestation of the country's wildlands**

I- Mammals

- ❑ Only 2 species of Haiti's 25 endemic mammals which once included primates and a large 400 pound sloth, now survive, although threatened with extinction: the "agouti" (*Plagiodontia aedium*) and the "nez long" (*Solenodon paradoxus*)



I- Mammals

- Another marine mammal, the West Indian Manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) still survives off the coasts of Haiti in reduced numbers and occasionally sighted



II- Birds

- ❑ Among the 229 species of birds niching Haiti's territory, 75 are residents, including more than 30 as being endemic and 45 of them are rare and threatened



The Black-crowned Palm Tanager (*Phaenicophilus poliocephalus*) is the only bird remaining completely unique to Haiti

Large colonies of Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) still found wading near the shores of the Artibonite River estuary as well as "Etang Saumâtre", the largest and brackish-water lake (11,300 ha) of Haiti, and "Baie des Flamands" in the southern "Les Cayes" area



II- Birds



Magnificent Frigate birds (*Fregata magnificens*), perhaps the most arial seabird, and the unusual Tropicbirds can be seen soaring off the coast of Haiti's southern peninsula



Hispaniola and Haiti in particular, have at least 2 breeding colonies of the almost extinct Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*) feeding over the sea at a time. It goes back to breed in its burrows in the steep inaccessible cliffs high in the mountains of "La Selle" as well as "Massif de La Hotte"

II- Birds



The Narrow-billed (*Todus angustirostis*) and the Broad-billed (*Todus subulatus*) Todies, among the most beautiful small birds in the world, reside only in Hispaniola



High in the mountains of "La Hotte" and "La Selle", one can hear the musical flute-like call of the Rufous-throated "Solitaire" (*Myadestes genibarbis*) aptly named: musician bird in Haiti

II- Birds



In huge communal nests perched high in Royal Palm Trees, lives the endemic and highly social Palmchat (*Dulus dominicus*)



The Village Weaver (*Ploceus cucullatus*), a brightly colored yellow and black, a highly noisy bird, was brought to Haiti presumably by slaves from Africa

II- Birds



Haiti is also a winter home for hundreds species of migratory North America's warblers, ducks, shorebirds, terns, herons, ibises, bitterns, egrets, hawks and falcons, including the highly endangered Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

Many other North America's birds such as: the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) and the American Redstart (*Stenophaga ruticilla*) have become permanent residents in Haiti

III- Reptiles and amphibians



There is also a great population of herpetofauna endemic to Haiti, including several unusual boas and other snakes

In particular, snakes were rapidly decreased as a result of illegal exportation to North America and Europe as exotic pets, as well as frequent killings by peasants due to a lack of awareness of their ecological role

III- Reptiles and amphibians



The American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*), once widely distributed in Haiti, now ranges in very restricted areas, and the existing population is severely depleted, with the highest number in "Etang Saumâtre"



Most of the turtle species found in Haiti : Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Leather Back Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), Loggerhead Turtle (*Carreta carreta*), Haitian Slider (*Trachemys decorata*) are endangered



V- Fishes

The marine fisheries resources in neritic waters and the underlying continental shelf are overfished, while those of the continental slope are rather less accessible, not well known and underexploited



Over 300 demersal fish species were recorded in Haiti's marine waters, but only 150 are regularly found & harvested

Widespread ornamental reef fish as well as coral reef pieces collecting have been known in Haiti for export to the tropical aquarium industry

Highly destructive fishing techniques such as dynamiting and fish poisoning have also been practiced

V- FISHES



Migratory large pelagic fish species (tuna, marlin, dolphin fish...) still offer great opportunities for sustainable exploitation



Highly invasive exotic fish species as *Tilapia sp.* introduced in inland waters, seem to take over the ecological niches of several native species

Findings in the Dom. Rep. indicate that few if any fresh and brackish-water environments remain unaffected

VI- State institutions involved in natural resource conservation

- 1- Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development (MARNDR)**
- 2- Ministry of Environment (MDE)**
- 3- Institute for the Saving of National Patrimony (ISPAN)**

VII- Conservation Effort

1- The National Historic Park La Citadelle, Sans Souci and Ramiers

- Area** : 2,200 ha
- Established** : 1961 by Presidential Decree
- Administered by** : National Office of Tourism/ ISPAN
- Vegetation** : Subtropical wet Forest
- Objectives** : Historic Monuments & Endemic Species Protection, Tourism, Recreation



VII- Conservation Effort

2- La Visite National Park

Area : 2,200 ha

Established : April 1983 by Presidential Decree

Administered by: MARNDR/ ISPAN

Vegetation : Pine and Montane Rain Forest

Objectives : Watershed, Endemic and Rare Species Protection, Tourism, Scientific Research



VII- Conservation Effort

3- Macaya National Park

- Area** : 5,500 ha
- Established** : April 1983 by Presidential Decree
- Administered by:** MARNDR/ ISPAN
- Vegetation** : Pine and Montane Rain Forest
- Objectives** : Watershed, Endemic and Rare Species Protection, Tourism, Scientific Research



VII- Conservation Effort

4 sites were designated in 1985 and a 5th one lately (Three-Bay project related to the Caracol Industrial Park) as a potential for marine reserves, but no follow-up so far

Several environmental related laws enacted, but not adequately enforced

Environment and conservation related associative groups in the civil society:

- FOPROBIM**
- FAN**
- SOCIETE AUDUBON**
- Fondation Seguin**
- Fondation Macaya**
- Fondation Saut-d'Eau**
- Réseau Ecolo**
- Reef Check Haiti**
- REPIE (Env. Education)**
- Iguana Foundation? (operating in Haiti)**

VII- Conclusion

Haiti is facing a marked lack of qualified human resources and specialized educational institutions in the field of animal biodiversity and wildlife management that needs to be addressed

"Caribaea Initiative" cooperation, seen as a starting point towards the creation of a critical mass of expertise in this field for Haiti

Thank you