

GERARD ALLENG

Representative for Trinidad and Tobago

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

Caroni Swamp

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago received a loan from the Inter-American Development Bank for the undertaking of six environmentally related projects throughout the country. One of these projects is the development of the Caroni Swamp National Park. The project is separated into various components, the major component being the development of a Visitor's Center, and ancillary works of board walks, picnic facilities, trails, and bird-viewing towers. The project began in early 1995, but the construction of the Visitor's Center was temporarily halted in February 1996 because of financial difficulties. However, it is expected that work on the site will soon resume.

One of the components which is directly related to the conservation of birds in Trinidad and Tobago, is the component aimed at determining the feasibility of re-establishing a freshwater marsh community in the eastern sector of the Caroni Swamp. The principal reason for this component is an attempt at the re-establishment of the nesting of the Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*; one of the national birds of Trinidad and Tobago) in the Caroni wetland. The nesting of the species ceased sometime in the seventies, and it has been suggested that this was due to a reduction in the freshwater marsh community. This was the primary feeding habitat for the young ibises, which required a salt-free diet. However, hydrological changes occurred in the area mainly as a result of salt water intrusion. This subsequently resulted in a change in the vegetation from a predominantly freshwater condition to a saltwater one (mangroves). The project is an attempt to reverse this change by the implementation of corrective measures such as embankments.

The project involves investigations into the population of *E. ruber* in the wetland, the ecology of the remaining marsh community, and the possible impacts on the water supply and fisheries of the Caroni wetland when corrective engineering is applied. The project was begun in November 1995 by the Zoology and Engineering Departments, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

Nariva Swamp

The final report of the application of the Ramsar Convention's Monitoring Procedure to the Nariva wetland was presented to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in February 1996. Some of the recommendations of the report include the development of a detailed management plan for the area and the restoration of marsh communities previously destroyed

by rice cultivation. The Nariva wetland is Trinidad and Tobago's Ramsar site.

Development of a National Wetland Policy

A draft of a National Wetland Policy for Trinidad and Tobago was prepared by the National Wetlands Committee of Trinidad and Tobago during 1995-1996 and was presented for public comment in April 1996. The rationale for the policy is to prepare guidelines which will direct the efforts at the protection and wise use of Trinidad and Tobago's wetland resource heritage. The policy is divided into five programs: (1) Public Awareness, (2) Management for Publicly owned Wetlands, (3) Protected Wetlands, (4) Cooperative Wetland Protection, and (5) Wetland Studies. These programs will directly affect the protection and use of the large avian component of the wetlands in the country.

Development of a National Wildlife Policy

A draft version of a Strategic Plan for Conserving the Wildlife of Trinidad and Tobago was presented in 1995. The document was prepared to direct changes in the Conservation of Wildlife Act of 1958, which is the central piece of wildlife legislation in Trinidad and Tobago. It was determined that the Wildlife Act was woefully inadequate and needed prompt upgrading to ensure the sustainable management of the nation's wildlife resources. The draft strategic plan will directly affect the avian resources of Trinidad and Tobago as the definition of "animal" in the Wildlife Act incorporates birds, their eggs, carcass, meat, nest, or young.

RESEARCH INITIATIVES

There are two research projects in progress at the Zoology Department, University of the West Indies, which are directly related to the conservation of birds in Trinidad and Tobago. The first is entitled, "An investigation of the status of palm swamp forest habitat in relation to the conservation of Psittacidae in Nariva Swamp." This project is in its second year. The information obtained from this project will be useful to the current conservation efforts being undertaken in the country's only Ramsar site.

The second project is, "Determining the status of marsh-dependent avifauna of Caroni Swamp, Trinidad in relation to restoration and management of a degraded wetland." This project is in its first year and will provide background information for the larger project aimed at the restoration of the freshwater swamp community in the eastern section of the Caroni wetland.