

EAG TALK

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS GROUP

World Environment Day 2021: Ecosystem restoration



Students engaged in ecosystem restoration

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On June 5, World Environment Day (WED) will be celebrated under the theme “Ecosystem Restoration,” with the official hashtag #GenerationRestoration. The United Nations (UN) observes WED to promote worldwide awareness and action on the

environment.

This year’s week of activities will see the launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021– 2030. The United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration aims to dramatically scale up ecosystem restoration to combat climate change, avert the extinction of a million species of biodiversity, improve food

security and water supply, and improve livelihoods. As a result, it is important to educate persons on ecosystem restoration, and what we are doing to restore our local ecosystems.

According to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is a leading international framework agreement on biodiversity, an ecosystem

is “a dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit”.

And according to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), ecosystem restoration refers to the process of “reversing the degradation of ecosystems such as landscapes, lakes and



Boggy Peak National Park Interpretation Centre, within the Shekerley Mountains (Photos courtesy Department of Environment)

oceans...to improve the productivity and capacity of ecosystems to meet the needs of society. This can be done by allowing the natural regeneration of overexploited ecosystems or by planting trees and other plants”.

Far from being an issue that is relevant only for “environmentalists”, restoring healthy ecosystems provide significant benefits to us as a society, even on a daily level. A healthy ecosystem helps to purify the air that we breathe, provide drinking water without the need for costly purification or desalination, and ensuring that we have various varieties of food sources from plants and animals that are more resistant to disease and stress. Without these healthy ecosystems, we suffer from pollution, food security, and other effects. It is therefore crit-

ical for the world, and indeed Antigua and Barbuda, to restore ecosystems.

Antigua and Barbuda, through both governmental and civil society avenues, have been making significant strides to restore our local ecosystems. One example of this is the Sustainable Pathways for Protected Areas and Renewable Energy, or SP-PARE Project, which is being implemented by the Department of Environment. This project aims to create a protected area around the Shekerley Mountain area, which includes Boggy Peak. Through the project, several hundred trees have been planted, which will help to improve the variety of plant biodiversity, while also improving the habitat for birds and other animal life. Some of these trees will also help to serve as fire breaks

in case of forest fires, improving the resilience of the forested areas.

Of course, ecosystem restoration is not a job for the government alone. Another example of ecosystem restoration is the Redonda Restoration Programme, which is led by the Environmental Awareness Group (EAG) with support from several partner agencies such as Flora and Fauna International and the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, including specifically the Department of Environment. This project aimed to restore the delicate ecosystem of Redonda, a small offshore island whose ecosystem had been ravaged by invasive species such as rats and goats. After the eradication of rats and removal of goats from the island, the ecosystem showed amazing signs of rebounding.

Within a year, the population of landbirds increased tenfold, and the population of seabirds increased significantly. Meanwhile, the populations of the Redonda Ground Dragon and the Redonda Tree Lizard, both species found only on Redonda, doubled and tripled respectively. Redonda is now being seen as a model through which efforts of ecosystem restoration has shown nearly immediate improvements in biodiversity.

Finally, we as individuals are all stewards and can all contribute to ecosystem restoration as part of #generationrestoration. Doing simple things such as planting trees during the annual Arbour Month celebrations, or volunteering for local groups such as the EAG can go a long way in helping to restore our own local ecosystems.