

EAG TALK

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS GROUP

WE ARE 'GENERATION RESTORATION': TACKLING INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES (IAS)

Controlling invasive species such as the black rat helps preserve and restore the natural environment

The Department of Environment is once again celebrating Arbour Month! This November, the Department of Environment is celebrating the importance

of trees to the environment, as well as our health and wellbeing. For 2021, Arbour Month is taking place under the theme "Ride the Climate Wave: We Are Generation

Restoration".

This was adopted from the United Nation's Declaration that the decade from 2021-2030 be declared as the UN Decade on Ecosystem

Restoration. This declaration provides an emphasis on the need to prevent, halt, and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and ocean to help end poverty, combat climate change, and prevent mass extinction.

Worldwide, and specifically in Antigua and Barbuda, one of the major threats to our local ecosystems is the presence of Invasive Alien Species, or IAS. These species of plants, animals, pathogens, and other organisms are introduced to new ecosystems where they have a negative effect on local ecosystems.

This negative effect can be through competition for resources, the transmission of diseases or pathogens, and direct predation of important species. Examples of invasive species in Antigua and Barbuda that have a negative effect on the local ecosystems are the black rat, the lionfish, and the lethal yellowing disease.

Thankfully, the Department of Environment and other collaborating agencies are working to help restore our native ecosystems, including by addressing IAS and the problems that they



Black rat on prickly pear cactus, Redonda (Photo by John Cancalosi)



Rat eating placebo bait (Photo by Jenny Daltry)

cause. One of these is the project "Preventing costs of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in Barbados and the OECS Countries", also known as the IAS Project.

The main aim of this project is the prevention, early detection, control and creation of management frameworks for IAS that emphasize a risk management approach by focusing on the highest risk invasion pathways of Barbados and OECS countries.

The IAS Project has three main components. Component one deals with the creation of a National Invasive Species Strategy and Action Plan, or NISSAP, to create or

improve legal frameworks around IAS management as well as raise awareness and build capacity on IAS.

This awareness will include the creation of a Public Service Announcement as well as an app that will help the public to monitor and report IAS in their area.

Component two is the piloting of an eradication of IAS on Antigua and Barbuda offshore islands and Redonda and improving protocols to detect and prevent IAS re-establishing themselves there.

And the third component is the creation of a regional strategy for prevention and surveillance

at the ports and the establishment of an IAS Regional Working Group.

It is anticipated that through the project Antigua and Barbuda will be able to reduce the number of IAS in the country, as well as control the number of IAS coming into the country, leading to significant restoration of our natural environment as well as providing benefits to our own health, society, and economy.

The IAS Project is being undertaken in collaboration with the UN Environmental Programme or UNEP, with funding from the Global Environment Facility, or GEF. The Department of Environ-

ment is also working with a number of partner agencies on the ground, both government and NGO, such as the Environmental Awareness Group and the Ministry of Agriculture.

In addition to projects that are helping to preserve and restore our natural environment, Arbour Month 2021 includes a number of other activities for others to be a part of Generation Restoration. Arbour Month 2021 will culminate in the annual Arbour Day Plant Fair and Climate Fest on November 25 at the Department of Environment headquarters just above the Botanical Gardens.