



## THE GEF SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME Trinidad and Tobago

### Building capacity of Asa Wright Nature Centre to Facilitate Conservation, Ecotourism and Community Development

**Project No: TRI/SGP/OP5/CORE/BD/12/09**

**Grantee: Asa Wright Nature Centre(AWNC)**

**Location: Arima, Northern Range, Trinidad**

**SGP Contribution: TT \$317,000.00**

**Co-financing in cash: TT \$70,374.00**

**Co-financing in kind: TT 41,339.00**

**Project Duration: 2 years**

**Number of people served: 1400 Primary**

**School Children, 1000 participants in the  
School Camp Safari, 40 Staff Members, 25  
community members**

**Focal area: Communities in the Arima Valley**

#### Background:

One of oldest Nature Centres in the West Indies, the Asa Wright Nature Centre was established as a Not-for-Profit Trust with a mission “to preserve a part of the Arima Valley in its natural state; to create a conservation and study area; and to protect the wildlife therein for the enjoyment and benefit of all persons of this and succeeding generations.” This project aimed to support this mandate by enhancing the Centre’s capacity to carry out conservation education, and ecotourism activities and nurturing community development and partnerships. Located in the lush Arima Valley, The Asa Wright Nature Centre conducted workshops for employees and near-by communities of Brasso Seco, Morne La Croix, Blanchisseuse, Lopinot, Verdant Vale and Sunshine Valley and continued outreach to schools in the Arima Valley as part of this GEF SGP project.

#### Project Objectives and Key Activities:

##### Objectives:

1. To contribute to national efforts towards biodiversity and watershed conservation, environmental education, economic diversification, poverty reduction and rural development.
2. To enhance the capacity and capabilities of the Asa Wright Nature Centre, to strengthen and execute its conservation, education and community development programmes and its ecotourism operations.
3. To strengthen relationships and partnerships with target communities (Arima, Brasso Seco, Morne La Croix, Blanchisseuse and Lopinot) in the planning and undertaking of mutually beneficial community-based initiatives.
4. To enhance the Centre’s capacity to execute its Education and Interpretation Programme.
5. To develop a sustained Research Programme that will fill gaps in scientific information critical to biodiversity conservation, ecosystems and economic valuations.
6. To heighten the Centre’s profile as an international destination for ecotourism.
7. To improve the financial status of the Centre, and thus the ability to carry out its Mission.



#### Activities:

1. Meetings with stakeholders to discuss project objectives and status and engender buy-in
2. Meetings with stakeholders to plan for and advance sustainable community-based entrepreneurial initiatives.
3. Redesign of functional modules (in anticipation of enhanced capacity and capabilities).
4. Workshops to train staff in skills relevant to the Centre's Mission and operations
5. Workshops to build capacity of staff and community members to facilitate entrepreneurial development.
6. Engagements with schools and public on conservation education.
7. Development of a range of environmental education materials targeted towards both children and adults.
8. Initiatives to promote ecotourism and improve the Centre's marketing strategy.
9. Engagements to build collaboration with institutions involved in research.

#### Results and Impact:

Six communities were engaged in activities which aimed to strengthen community-based entrepreneurial initiatives and AWNC's partnership with communities. Community members participated in workshops on topics such as grant proposal writing, building with bamboo, chocolate-making, art and tour guiding skills. Asa Wright employees benefitted from tour guide training and other activities designed to help the Centre improve its education/interpretation program such as a snake handling workshop, the Zoo to You program and an arthropod workshop. These workshops gave staff a better understanding of certain wildlife in the area so that interpretation skills could be improved. A workshop on Recording the Biodiversity of Trinidad and Tobago, done by Mike Rutherford, was done to give staff the tools to carry out a sustained research program. Customer service training was also done for staff to enhance its capacity to carry out ecotourism activities. There was continuous engagement with schools and the general public on conservation education. A variety of educational materials were developed: a 'Can You Identify Me?' interactive poster board, children-friendly posters (Backyard Birds, Forest Mammals, Forest Flowers, Reptiles, Amphibians, Insects and Bats of T&T) wildlife stickers, brochures and display signage. An estimated seventeen primary schools in the Arima Valley benefitted from outreach programs, which also included the distribution of new posters. To date, over 1000 acres of land has been preserved by the AWNC.

#### Lessons Learnt:

In the execution of the GEF Project activities, we have been able to overcome difficulties using creativity and problem solving. Community outreach was one of the focal points of this program and it became apparent over time that communication is essential between AWNC and the communities. Our communication was often set up either via a simple call or an on site visit and this would help us to ensure that we were always on the same page and meeting the needs of the community through our various initiatives.

The importance of developing partnerships was also a key factor during the development of this project. We often found that our capabilities in executing certain activities e.g. research were strengthened via the collaboration with institutes such as the University of the West Indies. Our activities were thus greatly improved by the establishment of these partnerships.

Up to date reporting on projects is an essential part of the GEF SGP and the benefits of this has highlighted to us the importance of reporting not only within the scope of the funded projects but for all of our future activities. The need for measuring the outcomes of our projects in order to determine successfulness and areas for improvement, has also been highlighted and we have put several systems in place (eg. feedback forms and surveys) for this.

### **Replication and Up-scaling:**

Input is needed by the relevant Government institutions, management and staff, communities, schools and researchers/scientists to ensure success. Involving stakeholders in the decision-making process is important to facilitate projects that meet the needs of specific communities. One must provide adequate support for the projects and develop a framework for follow-up on the progress of projects.

### **Partnerships:**

Over the course of our GEF project we have established several partnerships including:

The University of the West Indies

- This partnership was established for both our research and training initiatives. Lecturers from the University were involved in the training of our Naturalist Guide staff and researchers assisted us in the development of some of our ongoing research projects.

Communities: Brasso Seco, Morne La Croix, Lopinot, Blanchisseuse

- The listed communities are those neighboring the Asa Wright Nature Centre and were the focus for our community outreach initiatives. We have worked closely with them to determine what their needs are and to develop programs/workshops that can be of benefit to them.

Arima Valley Schools

- Our Valley Schools Outreach program is geared towards the Primary Schools within the Arima Valley. A close relationship has been established with these schools in order to ensure the success of this program. Teachers are always consulted to ensure that our lesson plans are in line with student's syllabus.

Summer Camps

- Camps are often on the look out for activities for their participants. AWNC decided that offering a day trip for these camps at our Centre would improve the environmental education of young children and also provide a fun day outdoors.



Above: The Green Honeycreeper- one of the many tropical bird species that can be seen at the AWNC



**Project indicators:**

GEF SGP OP5 Results Indicators:

**Project specific indicators:**

1. Number of people trained	35
2. Number of participating community members	25
3. Number of quality standards/labels achieved or innovative financial mechanisms put in place	
4. Hectares of protected areas influenced	Over 400 hectares of land conserved by the AWNC
5. Hectares of significant ecosystems with improved conservation status	

1. Equipment purchased and installed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Can you identify me" interactive poster board made and installed at the AWNC</li> <li>2. 10x10 Fabric Curve Wall as purchased to display existing AWNC panels of information at exhibitions.</li> <li>3. LED Flashlights</li> </ol>
2. Increase in number of school visits, within and external to valley	<p>Schools that were visited by AWNC staff (outreach):</p> <p>2012 – 2013 academic year: 427 students taught 2013 – 2014 academic year: 1068 students taught. Educational presentations were given to 8 schools outside the immediate Arima Valley e.g. St. Augustine, Lopinot, Tunapuna. The 2013-2014 academic year was the first time that these schools were visited.</p> <p>Schools that visited AWNC :</p> <p>2012 – 2013 academic year: 39 schools and a total of 883 children visited AWNC 2013-2014 academic year: 47 schools and a total of 1201 children visited AWNC. In the second year of funding the number of children that visited increased by 318.</p>
3. Increase in frequency of same school visit	<p>Schools were visited with the same frequency. However, visits to additional schools outside of the Arima Valley resulted in an increase in the number of students reached (as indicated above).</p>
4. Number of new products for sale	1 – Venomous Snakes Poster



<p>5. New entrepreneurs established and offering products for sale</p>	<p>Some community members are in the process of developing their own locally made “Chocolate Bars” as an outcome from one of our “Bean to Bar” chocolate-making workshop.</p>
<p>6. Training workshops for staff and community members</p>	<p>15 workshops/seminars on various topics were attended by staff and/or community members</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An Art workshop by Mathew Palmer</li> <li>2. Guidelines for the preparation of a Grant Proposal</li> <li>3. Bamboo building/Permaculture Workshop</li> <li>4. Bean to Bar Workshop</li> <li>5. Basic Introduction to Art Workshop</li> <li>6. Follow-up on Grant Writing Proposal, Vision/Mission</li> <li>7. Snake Handling Workshop</li> <li>8. Zoo to you program</li> <li>9. Tour Guide training, Rhikkie Alexander CDE Consultant</li> <li>10. Natural history talk on Bats</li> <li>11. 2 staff members attended a Basic Wildlife Rehabilitation Course held at El Socorro</li> <li>12. Insect Workshop with Prof. Starr and Dr. Jo-Ann Sewal</li> <li>13. Prof. Starr conducted a Neotropical Social Insects Insect Field Course in Neotropical Ecology at Simla and Asa Wright Nature Centre</li> <li>14. Mike Rutherford on “Recording the Biodiversity of Trinidad and Tobago”</li> <li>15. Customer Service Training</li> <li>16. The official launch of “Friends of Asa Wright Nature Centre”.</li> </ol>
<p>17. Increase in number of special events held at Centre: educational/scientific, social and corporate</p>	<p>14 workshops/ training sessions were held at the Asa Wright Nature Centre</p>
<p>18. Increase in number of research reports, videos and newsletters on research initiatives.</p>	<p>Substantial increase in the number of collaborative research projects which lead to an increased number of reports in newsletters etc.</p>



Over 4000HA of Tropical Rainforest is protected by the Asa Wright Nature Centre



Above: Community members participate in a Chocolate Making Workshop entitled 'Bean to Bar' facilitated by the University of the West Indies Cocoa Research Centre



Above: Students participate in an interactive biodiversity summer camp at the Center



Above: community members and visitors to the AWNC participate in a 'Snake Handling' workshop facilitated by the Trinidad and Tobago Zoological Society

## Forest Mammals

**Characteristics of mammals\*:**

- Suckle their young
- Breathe using lungs
- Give birth to live young
- Have hair or fur on their skin
- Vertebrates (have a backbone)
- Warm-blooded (maintains/controls body temperature)

*\*However, there are some exceptions to these traits.*

**Fun Facts:**

- Bats are the only mammals that can fly
- The Common Opossum locally called Manicou is a Marsupial, which means they carry their babies in a pouch.
- The Ocelot is the only species of wild cat found on the island.

Red-rumped Agouti

Common Opossum (manicou)

White-fronted Capuchin Monkey

Ocelot (tiger cat)

Brazilian Porcupine

Collared Peccary (quenk, wild hog)

Red-howler Monkey

Red Brocket Deer (biche)

Nine-banded Armadillo (tattoo)

Common Tent-making Bat

Silky Anteater (poor-me-one)

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\*Photos courtesy of: Douglas Henderson (Red-rumped Agouti), David (David) Phipps (Brazilian Porcupine), (uncredited) (Common Opossum), (uncredited) (White-fronted Capuchin Monkey), (uncredited) (Red-howler Monkey), (uncredited) (Red Brocket Deer), (uncredited) (Collared Peccary), (uncredited) (Nine-banded Armadillo), (uncredited) (Common Tent-making Bat), (uncredited) (Silky Anteater)

Above: A poster on Forest Mammals- one of the knowledge management products produced as part of the AWNC's grant