

## The Biological Diversity of Trinidad and Tobago

**Julian Kenny**

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Bibliography, Glossary, illustrated (maps and photographic plates) xiv; 265pp. ISBN 978-976-9508-23-1

The term *Biological Diversity* is in common usage today in the print and electronic media, yet its full meaning is perhaps not appreciated by the general public. The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity defines the term as ‘*The variability among living organisms from all sources, including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.*’

Attempting to cover the biological diversity of a country in 265 pages is a tall order and requires an imaginative treatment of the subject to include all relevant aspects. It is thus necessary for the author to determine quite clearly his intended readership and to cast the material at a level and depth appropriate to such an audience.

Julian Kenny, a well-known local naturalist and a past Professor of Zoology at the St. Augustine campus of The University of the West Indies, has chosen as his audience students in the sixth forms of our Secondary Schools, first year undergraduate students and the interested adult reader who wishes to get a general feel for the subject, and has thus aimed not at producing ‘a comprehensive guide to the natural history of Trinidad and Tobago’, but ‘a general introduction, from the very personal perspective of someone who has looked at the subject both directly and

through the eyes of others.’

The work treats with living organisms in one of three ways: grouped according to habitat, for example *Freshwater fish, Marine invertebrates, Epiphytes* to mention a few; by division/phylum as *Amphibians, Reptiles, Birds*; or occasionally as a family as is the case with *Orchids*; there is further, a treatment of natural ecosystems such as *Savannas, Caves, Beaches* and man-made ecosystems such as *Agricultural ecosystems, House and Garden ecosystems* and the interactions among the organisms in each system, with each other and the environment in which they exist. A feature of interest in the sections on organisms is the inclusion of a brief statement on the palaeontology of the group in question, which places present-day forms in some context.

The stage on which the information unfolds is set in an initial Chapter on *Trinidad and Tobago*, detailing the location, climate, topography and soils, the developmental processes of these features and the direct relationship each has with the biological diversity of the islands.

The treatment of the groups is somewhat uneven; greater detail is given to those groups with which the author is more intimately familiar. This is to be expected, for as he points out the work is based on personal experiences. It must also be remembered that a comprehensive account

was not intended.

The author holds that the effective management of a country's natural heritage requires not only an understanding of the organisms and ecosystems but also the threats posed to these. He therefore treats with hazards; threats to the systems and various treaties (and the meaning of the terminology therein) which the country has signed for the protection of its biodiversity.

The text is clearly written; all technical terms are clearly defined in a glossary; and the scientific names of

all species mentioned, the family to which each belongs and the local names are given. From the coverage and treatment given, the author has realized his objective and the reader should gain a better understanding of the breadth of the term biological diversity and become more familiar with the diversity that exists in the twin island Republic.

The book is on sale at local bookstores.

**Julian Duncan**

*pippal@mail.tt*