
BOOK REVIEW

Wetlands of Trinidad and Tobago

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Indeed it was a very pleasant surprise to see such a long overdue book for Trinidad and Tobago (TT). This timely publication fills a gap, for at least one of our natural ecosystems. The book has some very good content and is written in clear, concise language and is therefore easy reading. Bearing in mind one of the target groups, (*students at secondary and tertiary levels and the general public*) this book will be well-received. One of the main goals (Preface) of the book is to: (i) “describe to domestic and international readers the importance of wetlands in the development of TT” and is (ii) “addressed to the makers of public policy, economic decision makers, land use planners, students at secondary and tertiary levels and the general public”.

In terms of these 2 goals, the text was reasonably successful, presenting the information in a logical manner with appropriate headings. Chapter 1 explains what a wetland is and describes in detail the variety of services which wetlands provide: provisioning services, cultural, regulating, and supporting services. In Chapters 2 and 3, Emergent Wetlands (“those above sea level”) are described in detail with key information on specific ones provided in the latter.

Chapter 4 should be re-titled “Submerged Wetlands - Seagrass Beds” since it presents very good and up to date information *only* on seagrass beds and similarly, Chapter 5 should be re-named “Submerged Wetlands - Coral Reefs” with its appropriate descriptions and beautiful photographs. It would have been more informative if for each of these (seagrass beds and coral reefs), their specific valuable services (provisioning, cultural, regulating and supporting) had been highlighted. It would have also been useful to detail specific activities and their negative impacts on these wetlands within the chapters themselves. Such clarification would have benefitted readers and “makers of public policy, economic decision makers and land use planners”. Chapter 6 discusses threats to wetlands in general and although appropriate, the specific details are lacking. The various threatening activities should have been clearly presented and moreover the specific “service” which they impact on.

Chapter 7 entitled “Policy, Management and the Law” was quite appropriate to describe the status of wet-

land conservation and protection in terms of the existing policies and laws. The chapter is not very well written though, in that the information appears to have been plucked from a number of existing documents and the text and ideas do not flow. There is no clear conclusive statement with respect to what gaps exist, what needs to be done etc. Again, this section lacks those specific details which may have appealed to “the makers of public policy, economic decision makers and land use planners”.

On pg. 83 there is an interesting “What we can do” box. This is a good idea and quite appropriate to present here in order for readers to better appreciate how specific activities can mitigate or reduce the negative impacts. The activities listed here are however not quite specific to “conservation of wetlands”. The list reads more like a list of things “environmentally friendly” eg. “take shorter showers - do not waste water” and “car-pool when you can”. This list could have been better used to identify actual activities persons (including decision makers) can do to reduce or mitigate the negative impacts on wetlands. For example: *Action* - Stop unmanaged clearing of land for agricultural and construction purposes. *Result* - Reduced siltation and contamination in wetlands.

General

Most of the photographs in this text are beautiful and quite appropriate. However, there should have been a standardized format in terms of acknowledgements. For example, on pg. 2, the photographer was not acknowledged while on pg. 3, she is. The use of “capital letters” for all captions is inappropriate and the actual text is inappropriate in many instances. For example, on pg. 3 the caption reads “Rivers attract cultural and religious activities, as shown by these flags beside the Moruga River”; it may have been more appropriate to say “Rivers are popular sites for religious (coloured flags) and cultural activities”. Additionally on pg. 72, “The siting of an oil refinery close to the Guaracara River has sometimes led inevitably to pollution problems”; this sentence construction is clumsy.

This book lacks historical perspective in terms of the important contributions that a number of key wetland re-

searchers/scientists and other contributors have made to wetland ecology in Trinidad and Tobago. Some of these include: Prof. Peter Bacon (deceased), Ms. Molly Gaskin, Ms. Karlene Sheppard, Dr. Eugene Ramcharan, Prof. Julien Kenny, Dr. Doon Ramsaroop, Mr. Richard Laydoo, Dr. Carol James, Ms. Nadra Nathai-Gyan and Mr. Gerard Alleng and members of the Wetland Committee to name a few. It is important to highlight the efforts of these researchers in this text which aims to “describe to domestic and international readers the importance of wetlands *in the development of TT*”. It is due to much of their combined conservation efforts and work that both Nariva and Caroni Swamps, and the Buccoo Reef Lagoon, have finally been designated as Ramsar sites.

The author admits to having “assembled information from more than 100 published documents” (Preface) and a bibliography (pgs. 85 to 89) is presented. Under copyright laws, the general rule is that “the creator of a work is the first owner of copyright in that work, unless a contrary arrangement is made”. The University of the West Indies’ (UWI) policy on research ethics highlights the following: “Researchers should not knowingly represent the published or unpublished work of another person as their own” and “the use by a researcher of work done

by other people must be appropriately and adequately acknowledged”. In even more detail, the “attribution of authorship is addressed in a separate section and details the order in which author’s names should be presented and especially in terms of their contributions to the work”.

Good ethics dictates that it is therefore not adequate to present the bibliography as it is done in the book - a list of references at the end. Authors should have been acknowledged appropriately within the text where their work was being presented and/or where they were directly being quoted. In addition, referenced text is useful to guide those readers requiring in-depth information from original sources. I strongly recommend that this book be revised in the very near future bearing in mind some of the comments above and more importantly, that all works/research be properly attributed to the appropriate authors.

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