

Role of the Wildlife Section, Forestry Division in the Management Development of the Aripo Savannas Scientific Reserve

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The proposal to make the Aripo Savannas a Scientific Reserve is encouraged because of the uniqueness of the area. There are no "virgin" savannas left in Trinidad; the Aripo Savannas are the only ones to remain relatively undisturbed and they are known to have the greatest diversity of flora, fauna and habitats.

The Wildlife Section should have two roles in the management of the Aripo Savannas. One role should be research on the existing fauna including studies of abundance, diversity, and interrelationships; the other role should be management and protection of the area. The proposal for a Scientific Reserve, although based on mainly floral and pedological studies of the area, mandates a better understanding of the fauna which inhabit the area. Such knowledge of the fauna should provide evidence to support designation of the Aripo Savannas as a protected Scientific Reserve and should bring the Aripo Savannas the recognition they deserve.

Protection of the area is an important aspect of management, for if the resource is not properly protected there will be nothing left to research or manage. Field studies by Wildlife Section staff and foreign researchers have revealed many abuses to the area. Illegal activities such as hunting, mistnetting, cutting of vegetation, squatting, and arson fires are examples of some of the activities that can harm wildlife habitat and species in the Aripo Savannas. The Conservation of Wildlife Act, Chapter 67:01 and the Forest Act, Chapter 66:01 provide the legislative support for patrols by game wardens in collaboration with park wardens. The Wildlife Section can help by providing research data which will support its designation as a Prohibited Area (until it is officially declared a Scientific Reserve) under the Forest Act.

The Wildlife Section can also assist in the wise use of the area by co-ordinating research activities. Regulations and written permission for University of the West Indies faculty and students as well as foreign researchers would provide a system for monitoring use. The Wildlife Section can encourage and develop interest and appreciation of local wildlife resources through education and distribution of published materials by collaborating researchers.

Today, the declaration of the Aripo Savannas Scientific Reserve is still pending. Wildlife Section staff and game wardens can visit the area only occasionally to monitor activities and to make their presence known. Plans are now being developed by the Wildlife Section to conduct a detailed faunal study of the area.

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