

Jamaicans Urged to Preserve Wetlands

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Jamaicans are being implored to protect the island's wetlands, as the destruction of these ecological systems will adversely affect marine life, and ultimately, the human population.

The urging came from Education Outreach Officer with the Natural History Museum of Jamaica, Dr. Shereene James-Williamson, as she addressed a function held Monday (February 2) at the Kellits Branch Library in Clarendon to mark World Wetlands Day under the theme: 'Upstream, Downstream; Wetlands Connect Us All'.

She said that every effort should be made to avoid contaminating wetlands with pesticides and other chemicals, while advising people who live upstream, to dispose of garbage and other waste properly.

"We all live in a river basin and whatever we do upstream affect the people downstream. We need to become more aware of our activities, and how they affect the watershed or drainage basin. Whatever we do within the drainage basin affects everyone," she stated, noting that "fish can't spawn, birds can't live and eat, and that (waste) will end up in the sea, where it can damage corals. When the garbage goes downstream, it causes lots of problems and kills off the animals down there."

Wetlands are areas of land with water covering the soil surface all year or for varying parts of the year and include swamps, bogs and marshes.

Commonly called morass, wetlands in Jamaica account for less than 2 per cent of the country's total area, and occur mostly along the coast. They are among the most productive ecosystems, facilitating the growth of several species of plants and animals.

The Mason River Protected Area and Bird Sanctuary, situated on the border of Clarendon and St. Ann, is the only inland bog, and is home to over 30 species of birds and unique plants. It was established in 1963, as a means of preserving the organisms, which regard it as home.

Each year, on February 2, Jamaica observes World Wetlands Day to mark the country's adoption of the RAMSAR Convention in 1971, when the Black River Lower Morass was declared a RAMSAR site.

Since then, two other locations - Portland Bight and Palisadoes (Port Royal) have also been so designated.

Source:- JIS