

Sunday, June 09, 2002

I am writing to inquire what is happening about the development of Graeme Hall swamp as a Natural Reserve for birds and other wildlife. I live in Amity Lodge directly 'behind' or to the northwestern section of the swamp and over the last few years I've notice some changes that I'm not sure are in the best interest of the ecology of the area.

Most people would be familiar with what is happening around the central and more so the south end on the swamp area, as that is where they enter and are shown around, but not many venture to the northwestern side where it meets with the residential area of Amity Lodge – to be blunt the whole area has become an over-grown mini-jungle and is an eye-sore from our backyards.

Please don't get me wrong I applaud the conservation effort but they are some details that need attention both to the ecology of the area and the neighbours who have to live with it day and night.

First of all, the area used to be kept reasonably de-bushed by the fact that some nearby person(s) would stake out their cows, sheep and goats there which at least kept the grass level down and of course reduced the number of small shrubs and young saplings from getting too tall.

Now, after it has been fenced in, its over-grown with every wild plant, shrub and tree possible and these in turn are covered by all kinds of vines – including love-vine is some parts which is illegal to have on ones property. Of course, the monkeys love this environment but when it's the dry season and food levels are low the neighbours don't see much of the mangoes, sour sops and other fruits ground in their back yards.

The dozen or so cocoanut trees that are in the northwest corner, which have been there for about forty years or so, used to be harvested by (I assume) cocoanut vendors – as they were in the open – and this kept things at an equilibrium.

Now, with the fencing in place, the trees are over-burdened with at least 20-30 cocoanuts each (not counting the small ones), they just fall on the ground and now numerous young cocoanut trees are taking root and growing underneath, so in a few years it will become a dense cocoanut grove contributing to the young-jungle, as I call it, that has taken root as outlined above.

One of my main concerns, however, is if we have a hurricane around here, there will be plenty of additional flying missiles with cocoanuts as ammunition! The trees themselves, especially the heavy tops, can be a

menace should their trunks break under the strain of hurricane winds. I suppose I could live with the fact of the dozen or so that are there now, even though I eye them a certain caution and consider that one of them could end up in the backyard or come crashing through a windows in very strong winds. However, when the uncontrolled numbers that are springing up now get taller, then that will be another matter.

The marl-road that was built, which runs directly behind our backyards just to the inside of the fencing, caused some problems when first laid down as basically it stopped the normal drainage of water that would run down from the higher Amity Lodge and Rendezvous areas. Of course, they were concerns of wastewater from the various properties getting it the ecological system of the swamp and I can understand that, but what about simple rain water runoff, which floods my backyard and stays there for a days – it never used to so before the road was built and even though my landlord arranged for pipes to be put in under the road to assist with the drainage – it has never been the same.

The fence itself stops certain land-based animals from moving freely, namely the swamp-crabs, that are part and partial of the whole ecological system there. In years gone by, directly before the road and fence, we would experience the normal 'crab-walk' that would occur around this time of year (June/July) when the first rains start, now one sees only the occasional one or none at all.

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