

Graeme Hall Swamp, its Mangroves and the Sea ... (Nov 16, 2002)

About a week ago I read with interest the article in a newspaper that quotes a spokesman from the Graeme Hall Sanctuary as saying that there is a need for the exchange of fresh and sea water between the mangrove swamp and the sea/ocean. Now I see a further article on the subject that continues along this line and also from the opponents.

I wrote a letter to the editor, which was given near full page or article coverage on this subject a few years ago that touched on many aspects of this issue.

I will continue with my main argument that since the sluice gates were constructed about 1930 for the sole purpose of regulating the water levels in the general shooting swamp area and not much is known before that, then one must consider that there was a free exchange between mangrove swamp and sea prior to this, and therefore the sluice gates, working or not, should in fact be removed all together. I find hard to believe that some people would be so short-sighted that they would want the gates shut forever, well, either short-sighted or selfish, take your pick.

As I have said before, the sluice gates when closed will only result in the backup of water flow and therefore stagnation, this only obvious. However, if the sluice gates were not there and the passage was widened to possibly what it might have been before 1930 – one only has to look at the area with a keen eye to realise that the 'mouth' of the 'river/stream' was much wider than the canal that was built back then to contain it – then we might really see what naturally should happen between a mangrove swamp and the sea.

I also wager that sea bathing in the area will not be a problem once an equilibrium is established due to a 24/7 exchange between the two ecosystems. The discolouration of the water is mostly tannin from the fallen leaves and bark of the trees – any tourist should recognise this as it colours all of their lakes and rivers – again, this only builds up but should be hardly detectable if the water flow was free, and you would see major discolouration when there is heavy rainfall, which is only natural but we seem to have an aversion to anything natural. There is such a thing as Eco-Tourism.

Once established, we should see much more Tarpon and Snook in the area, which has been sadly lacking in the last 20-30+ years, but the proper mangrove setting also provides havens for many more small fry, young fish and other sea life than the two species mentioned above.

Maybe this could mean that more fish species would (once again) populate our south coast and maybe the flying fish might move back nearer here to our coast line instead of Tobago, which has the oldest protected rainforest in western hemisphere and many mangrove swamps that have unheeded connection with the ocean. Food for thought, or rather thought for food.

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