Vogel

ZOOLOGISTS LEARN TO APPRECIATE HOG DOCTORS IN THE HELLSHIRE BUSH

by Dr Peter Vogel, Department of Zoology

Once a zoologist has graduated, he normally has little time left to study plants. Learning to recognize the many species of a tropical forest becomes a luxury he can ill afford on top of a busy schedule. How sad this is though as the real feel for a forest and a deep understanding of its nature can only develop through appreciating the plant life. The zoologists working in the Hellshire Hills, fortunately, had to realize that they cannot bypass the plants. Two of the most remarkable Jamaican animals live side by side in these Hills and feed on leaves, fruits and flowers: the Jamaican Iguana (*Cyclura collei*) and the Jamaican Hutia or Coney (*Geocapromys brownii*). Both species are endemic to Jamaica and represent a genus and family, respectively, which occur exclusively in the Caribbean archipelago. Yet, learning to know the plants of a tropical forest turns out to be a difficult undertaking for people with little training in plant taxonomy.

Jamaica had been fortunate in attracting a number of outstanding plant taxonomists and ecologists such as **Denis Adams** and **George Proctor**. Both men have published monumental volumes on Jamaican plants, "The Flowering Plants of Jamaica" by Adams working out of the Department of Botany and "The Ferns of Jamaica" by Proctor who worked at the Institute of Jamaica. In the meanwhile, however, all taxonomists and ecologists of terrestrial plants have emigrated from Jamaica; though field studies on the plants continue, they are mainly carried out by visiting scientists and their students.

Including the zoologists working in Hellshire, persons other than plant taxonomists find it hard to access Adams' book. It contains no keys to the many plant families, while the keys within the families to genera and species greatly depend on reproductive characters which are often absent throughout most of the year. In strong contrast to temperate zone floras, comprehensive illustrated guides for plants in Jamaica and most other tropical areas do not exist.

Franz Fuchs and Edwin Duffus trecking in the Hellshire Hills

To assist the research and conservation project on the Jamaican Iguana, the Swiss biologist **Franz Fuchs** recently visited the Department of Zoology on a sabbatical for five months. Franz and myself soon agreed that he could help best by laying the foundations to an illustrated guide to the plants of the Hellshire Hills. A very valuable list of plant species had been assembled by scientists from the Department of Botany and the Institute of Jamaica during a survey of the Hellshire Hills in 1970; this list served Franz as a starting point. It greatly narrowed the options when identifying specimens collected in the field and comparing them with preserved material stored at the herbarium at the Department of Botany. Franz then drew the leaves and other characteristics of each plant on a separate sheet and added the information given in Adams as well as his own observations as far as they help identification.

Though at present no plant taxonomist resides in Jamaica there are a number of experience "bushmen" who possess excellen knowledge of species in specifi areas. One example is **Edwi Duffus**, a farmer and hunter feral pigs, who rediscovered t Jamaican Iguana in 1990 and h since become a virtually full-ti assistant to the Iguana proj team. He is able to distingu most species and has popu names for many of them. E more, he knows and tells m fascinating stories about plants and their names. For ample, pigs with cuts and bru are said to visit the "Hog Do (*Metopium brownii*) and to their damaged skin in the ca sap released by the tree. Hu lore also has it that the boars their canine teeth on the tr cause otherwise the lower would grow into the eye blind them, while the uppe would grow into the throat and c

What is a doctor to a hog d necessarily suit a human. The sap of the tree can cause a bad sk spreading all over the body. Fr to endure days of terrible itchi being burnt by a poisonous tree