

Jamaica

CARIBBEAN DIVISION | THE WORLD WE DEPEND ON DEPENDS ON US

From verdant mountains to vibrant sea this natural wonderland needs protecting

The name Jamaica is derived from the Taino word “xaymaca,” which means “land of wood and water” and is fitting for a country where beauty flows from lush green mountains through crystalline rivers to a turquoise sea. Here, nature weaves its way through villages alive with rich Jamaican history and blends into burgeoning centers of prosperity and growth. Forested slopes stretch the length of the island and are home to over 3,500 plant species, 900 of which are endemic. Jamaica also has an exceptional array of birds and reptiles, with more endemic species than any other Caribbean island. From the Blue Mountain range made famous by the coffee that bears its name to Pedro Bank, historically one of the world’s largest suppliers of queen conch, the country’s natural treasures are its most valuable resources. Millions of visitors are drawn to Jamaica each year, but its extraordinary biodiversity and the communities it sustains are under threat from development pressures, pollution, overfishing and a changing climate.

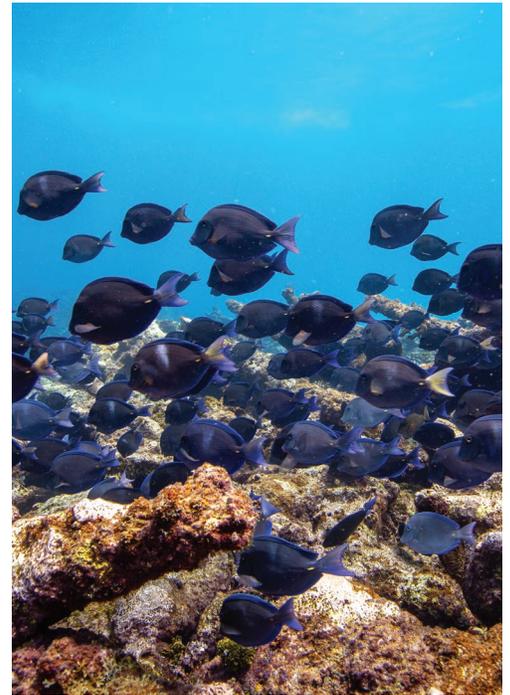
For over 30 years, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has worked to conserve Jamaica’s lands and waters, helping these natural assets persevere and thrive, as well as the 3 million people who depend on them every day. Early conservation efforts helped protect the vast forests of the Blue and John Crow Mountains, resulting in Jamaica’s first national park. TNC was also instrumental in establishing Jamaica’s first marine protected area, the Montego Bay Marine Park, as well as a national conservation endowment to support ongoing protected area management. Today, TNC continues to work with government, communities and local partners to protect Jamaica’s precious marine and coastal resources and help secure a sustainable future for this island full of diverse beauty.



Championing Dramatic Marine Protection Expansion

In 2008, TNC helped Jamaica become a founding member of the newly launched Caribbean Challenge Initiative (CCI). This historic initiative, created through the support of TNC and partners, joins Caribbean countries and territories in a commitment to protect at least 20 percent of their marine environment by 2020 and to ensure the protected areas are effectively managed into the future. The government of Jamaica committed to nearly double its marine protected areas, expanding protected area coverage from 11 to 20 percent.

To help the country realize this ambitious goal, **TNC has supported the creation of multiple fish sanctuaries, provided guidance for shaping new national fishery policies and assisted with the implementation of effective management practices in almost all marine protected areas.** TNC scientists have worked with government and local partners to gather essential habitat data that helps identify the highest priority areas for protection to support Jamaica in advancing to its CCI goal. Securing reliable funding for long-term protected area management is a key element of the CCI commitment. TNC therefore helped establish the National Conservation Trust Fund of Jamaica, an endowment that will generate sustainable funding for continual, effective management of Jamaica's marine protected areas.



Improving Fisheries to Benefit Ecosystems and Livelihoods

Protecting marine environments helps ensure healthy coral reefs and thriving ecosystems. But in order to help economies prosper and to secure livelihoods and food stability for communities, effective fishery management and fishery policy reform are vital. To proactively address this issue, **TNC is partnering with local organizations to increase fishery management capacity, deploy new tools for improved management and raise awareness among fishers about the need for sustainable fishing practices.**

Pedro Bank, one of the country's most important fishing areas, was once home to abundant marine life, including highly marketable species like queen conch and spiny lobster. However, decades of unsustainable fishing practices have severely diminished stocks in the area and damaged the fragile ecology. TNC led an initiative in Pedro Bank to establish Jamaica's first offshore fish sanctuary—the South West Cay Fish Sanctuary—and has been co-managing it since 2012. During this time, communication and trust has been established with the relatively isolated fisher community at Pedro Bank through TNC-led outreach and education efforts. **Bringing together the fisher community and local conservation organizations, TNC has gained increasing support for fish sanctuaries and marine protected areas from the fishers, who often fear that additional regulations will jeopardize their livelihoods.**

In 2014, through the USAID-funded Caribbean Marine Biodiversity Program (CMBP), a marine spatial plan for Pedro Bank was created with significant support from the local fishers. The plan includes areas zoned for sustainable fishing as well as no-fishing areas that allow populations to grow to breeding age. In addition, through the CMBP, TNC and partners implemented on-the-ground training to educate fishers in sustainable practices. The training provides guidance on how to determine appropriate harvesting sizes for conch, lobster and fish so that juveniles are not taken before they can breed, causing stocks to further decline in the future.

TNC is also helping to establish cost-effective stock assessment methods and other best practices for fishery management. For example, TNC introduced a novel tool called FishPath for the first time in the Caribbean by working with the Jamaican government to apply it to the country's lobster fishery. Developed by TNC and partners, FishPath is an engagement process and decision-aiding software used to guide fishery management and harvest strategies, taking into account characteristics of the local marine environment as well as socio-economic data. Continuing to collaborate with the Jamaican government, TNC aims to expand fish sanctuaries in Pedro Bank and to replicate the success of South West Cay in other parts of the country. To this end, **TNC and local partners have implemented awareness campaigns aimed at fisher communities, as it is critical to gain the support and cooperation of fishers in order to build a wide-ranging fish sanctuary network throughout Jamaica.** These Campaigning for Conservation, or C4C, initiatives use community-based platforms like billboards, original songs and church sermons to encourage local fishers to adopt sustainable practices that will protect their livelihoods now and for future generations.

Protecting Freshwater Using Nature-Based Solutions

More than 100 streams and rivers flow through Jamaica, providing freshwater for domestic, agricultural and industrial uses. Access to clean, safe water is fundamental to quality of life. As populations and demand for water grow, the relationship between humans and freshwater ecosystems becomes increasingly vulnerable. Drought and forest fires related to climate change, as well as harmful farming practices, further tax this relationship. To help ensure these ecosystems thrive while also meeting the freshwater needs of communities and businesses, TNC is investing in nature-based solutions that protect and restore green infrastructure, like forests and other natural habitats.

Nature-based solutions, including reforesting lands with native trees and protecting lands surrounding water sources, allow this green infrastructure to do its job of naturally sustaining and filtering freshwater. In fact, nature-based solutions can replace costly engineered methods of filtering water and managing water flow, such as treatment plants and dams. A leader in forest conservation in Jamaica for decades, TNC has supported the protection and restoration of critical areas that harbor many of the country's freshwater sources, including forests in the Blue Mountains and Cockpit Country that house the primary water sources for population centers in Kingston and Montego Bay.

TNC aims to advance green infrastructure protection and restoration in Jamaica by creating a water fund, an innovative tool recently introduced in the Caribbean by TNC and partners that has had success in many other parts of the world. Water funds allow freshwater users, including communities, small businesses and broader industries, to invest in the conservation of water sources, which generates sustainable, long-term funding for the protection and restoration of lands and forests surrounding these sources. For example, a beverage company that depends on freshwater can invest funds that will be used to restore and support the natural systems that produce and filter water. Both industry and communities benefit as revenue is channeled into reforestation efforts, management of national parks and other initiatives.

TNC is working to create a water fund that will benefit the entire Kingston metropolitan area. The fund will provide grants to farmers in the Wag Water River watershed that will reduce agricultural threats, like sediment run-off. TNC is also partnering with the Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust to rehabilitate degraded lands and forests in the watershed and restore their water-capture potential. The water fund will support this work and similar projects that protect the long-term health of the watershed. It will also provide training for farmers in best practices for land management and climate-smart agriculture.



Transforming Debt Into Forest Conservation

TNC's efforts today to preserve Jamaica's diverse forests build on a remarkable achievement from earlier years. **Working closely with the governments of each country, TNC helped bring about a debt conversion agreement that transformed a \$16 million debt owed by Jamaica to the United States into a \$21 million Forest Conservation Fund.** Population growth, agricultural expansion, mining and development pressures were causing an alarming disruption in ecological processes, including freshwater production, when this debt conversion came to fruition and the Fund was established. Through the agreement, the \$16 million debt was restructured using funds from private investors and grants from TNC, allowing Jamaica to dedicate millions of dollars toward the protection of its threatened forests and ecosystems. **The Fund now serves as an endowment that generates sustainable financing for ongoing forest conservation, education and community outreach activities.**



Creating More Resilient Coasts and Communities

As the impacts of climate change continue to escalate and hurricanes, flooding and coastal erosion become increasingly prevalent, it is more urgent than ever to help Caribbean islands become more resilient and adaptable—from both an environmental and socio-economic standpoint. TNC and partners launched the Resilient Islands initiative to do just this. **Resilient Islands promotes nature-based interventions, including the protection and restoration of forests, mangroves and coral reefs, that reduce climate-related risks while also supporting sustainable economic development.** Jamaica is one of three Caribbean countries, along with Grenada and the Dominican Republic, in which TNC and partners have launched Resilient Islands, before expanding the initiative throughout the region.

Resilient Islands will provide Jamaican communities and government with tools to integrate TNC's nature-based resilience solutions into community planning and national policy and to aid decision-making around disaster risk management. The initiative will also train climate adaptation leaders and educate communities about ways they can build climate resilience—like pursuing livelihoods that reduce threats to ecosystems, implementing coastal habitat restoration projects or other initiatives that stem from unique ideas generated by the community. **Working on the ground to prioritize natural solutions, TNC aims to empower Jamaica to reduce climate-related risks, protect critical ecosystems, advance sustainable development and become a leader in innovative climate adaptation.**

Building a Sustainable Future

By forging strong and productive partnerships with government and local conservation organizations, TNC continues to build on its long history of conservation achievements in Jamaica. Every advancement we make to expand marine protected areas, improve fisheries, restore degraded forests and increase climate resilience is bolstered by the tremendous support of local communities, as we work together toward a sustainable future for Jamaica. Looking ahead, **TNC is committed to investing in solutions that allow nature to thrive while people prosper—so the next generations of Jamaica are certain to inherit all of its magnificent beauty and biodiversity.**



OUR MISSION: TO CONSERVE THE LANDS AND WATERS ON WHICH ALL LIFE DEPENDS



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