

# Restoring a Gem

## The Negril Royal Palm Reserve

### *The scene at the NRPR*

The Negril Royal Palm Reserve (NRPR) is an exclusively beautiful, tranquil forest that stretches along the southern side of the second largest wetland in Jamaica; the Negril Great Morass (NGM). The NGM falls within the boundaries of the Negril Environmental Protection Area (N-EPA) located in the parishes of Westmoreland and Hanover. The NRPR features three distinct swamp forest types: royal palm forest, buttonwood forest and bull thatch forest; all are brimming with life. The forest provides a safe haven for 114 species of plants, including shrubs, herbs, climbers, grasses and ferns; and a large number of animal species, such as reptiles, butterflies, frogs and over 50 species of birds.



*The Osprey (Pandion haliaetus) searching for its next prey in the NRPR. (Photo by Ricardo Miller)*

On any regular day at the NRPR one can expect to see the endangered West Indian Whistling Duck (*Dendrogyra arborea*) and the Northern Jacana (*Jacana spinosa*) basking in the sunlit grandeur of the cotton tree lake situated right in the heart of the Reserve. Royal Palms (*Roystonea princeps*) stand frozen in the embrace of the Wicker vine on a wet, dark and densely vegetated forest floor as they graciously bow to the occasional wind that stealthily makes its way through the virtually impenetrable forest. Many tropical birds such as the endemic Red-billed Streamertail (*Trochilus polytmus*), the Jamaican Oriole (*Icterus leucopteryx*) and the Jamaican Euphonia (*Euphonia jamaica*) can be seen as they sing sweet songs on a journey around the mile long, looping boardwalk that is made complete with an observation tower. The tower is where you will truly admire the Reserve in all its glory; providing

breathhtaking views and presenting the perfect photo opportunities.



*Cotton Tree Pond. (Photo by Stacy-Ann Campbell)*

### *A little bit of history*

The Royal palm (*Roystonea princeps*) is found only in Jamaica with its distribution restricted to the western region of the island; the NGM and other wetland areas. To protect the interest of the Royal Palms, the Petroleum Corporation of Jamaica (PCJ) established the Royal Palm Reserve. Years later, in a lease agreement between the PCJ and a private entity, the NRPR made its grand debut into the world of ecotourism; unsurprisingly, its appeal beckoned avid nature lovers who enjoy bird watching, fishing and nature walks. However, this experience was to be short lived due to financial constraints. To the dismay of many stakeholders, the operations at the NRPR came to a jarring halt in 2010 when the location closed its curtains to the public. Today, the infrastructure at the NRPR sits in a state of disrepair due to deterioration over time and a lack of use which has rendered it unusable for commercial operations.



*Aerial view of the NRPR. (Photo by Ricardo Miller)*

### *The show must go on!*

But all is not lost as the IWeco Jamaica Project has major plans underway that will see the NRPR once again breaking into the global market; this time, as the premier location for ecotourism with a whole lot more to offer tourists and locals alike. The development of a strategic Business, Marketing and Management Plan is expected to produce a financially viable nature-based product that is educational, conservation focused and commercially beneficial to the host community. This plan is expected to set into motion a major redevelopment project to renovate existing structures and develop additional infrastructure to support the reopening of the NRPR to the public. As you can imagine, the possibilities are endless for the NRPR; this however, is just a sneak preview of a lot more to come. Stay tuned!



*Photo contributed by NEPT*



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