

THE FORESTS OF ST. KITTS

The native peoples who originally inhabited the island did little to change the forest of St. Kitts. They practiced small-scale slash and burn agriculture and mild selective tree harvesting.



When the English and French arrived in the 17th century, St. Kitts was almost completely covered with forests. These were soon cleared to make way for the cultivation of tobacco, indigo, cotton and sugar cane.

The highest elevations were not suitable for agriculture so the colonists exploited these areas for timber.

Throughout history the peoples of St. Kitts have depended on wood. From the 1860's to the 1930's an enormous quantity of lumber was used to build houses, boats, buggies, furniture, wheels and fences. In addition, charcoal and wood were the traditional fuel sources of the island.

The wildlife of St. Kitts has been depleted by the introduction of mongooses and Green Vervet monkeys. Parrots, ground birds, St. Kitts Bull finch, Mountain Chicken (a large edible toad), iguanas and snakes are all extinct now.



The different types of forest found in St. Kitts correspond to their elevation above sea-level and to the extent of their rainfall.

LITTORAL and MANGROVE: Found mainly on the Southeast Peninsula, the dominant species in these low-lying wetland areas are the red and white Mangrove, which are adapted to the saline environment. A variety of resident and migratory shorebirds find shelter and food in these areas.

DRY SCUB WOODLAND: The low eroded hills of Conaree and the Southeast Peninsula support trees such as Manchineel, Accacia, Cacti and the Century Plant, which are salt tolerant and drought resistant.

DRY EVERGREEN FOREST: Found above the canefields and in ravines, this type of forest is replacing cane and other cultivated areas on the steeper slopes. Forests are reclaiming these areas, making St. Kitts one of the few countries in the world with expanding forest cover. Dominant trees include Mango, White cedar and Strangler fig, with Bamboo grass and ferns at ground level.

RAIN FOREST: Very few areas of true rain forest remain except in Upper Wingfield and Mansions areas. Gommier and Palm are the dominant species and hurricanes are thought to have considerably reduced these evergreen strands of forest.

PALM BREAK: At elevation between 1200 and 1800 feet the Mountain Cabbage and Tree Ferns dominate.

ELFIN WOODLAND: Above 2000 feet, windy, moist conditions do not allow the trees to grow above about 12 feet. They are covered with moss and epiphytes and are matted with lianas.

WHY ARE OUR FORESTS IMPORTANT? They:-

- provide our fresh water supply.
- prevent the erosion of soil.
- supply us with food, medicine and wood.
- provide a home for wild life.
- have a role in ecotourism.
- provide enjoyment for everyone.



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