

## **Overview of the Natural History Museum of Jamaica (NHMJ)**

The Natural History Museum of Jamaica is one of the original divisions of the Institute of Jamaica and was once the home to a small zoo that later moved to Hope Gardens. The Division is also the pioneer institution in biological research and publications in the Jamaican scientific community.

The Division's mandate is to advance scientific research and education by collecting, storing and maintaining specimens of Jamaica's plants and animals and educating Jamaicans on the importance of preserving the island's natural history. The biological collection comprises Jamaican plants and animals but also includes specimens from the wider Caribbean region.

The Botany Department manages a herbarium that houses a collection of over 130,000 plant species. The Zoology Department manages a collection several faunal groups and insects. The latter accounts for over 31,000 specimens.

Open to the public, the Division's Science Library consists of over ten thousand volumes and an audio visual facility. The Division is also home to the Jamaican Clearing House Mechanism (JA-CHM) which was established in 1999 as a unit of the Natural History Division. The JA-CHM is web-based and functions as a national information gathering and distribution network on biological diversity via the internet.

The Education Department manages the Exhibition Gallery and Discovery Room. These display areas are popular sites for visitors. The staff conducts educational outreach programmes on the importance of Jamaican biodiversity and natural heritage. The Mason River Field Station in Clarendon and Green Hills in Portland fall under the purview of the Division. In 2002, the Mason River Reserve was declared a Protected Area under the Natural Resource Conservation Authority Act. It is an important game sanctuary and has several plant species unique to Jamaica. The Green Hills field station in the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park, is an important habitat for a variety of bird life and home to a significant number of birds endemic to Jamaica.