

Hurricane Matthew Destroys Botanical Garden of Cayes in Haiti

PLEASE HELP REBUILD THIS VITAL INSTITUTION

The Botanical Garden of Cayes (Jardin Botanique des Cayes) in southwest Haiti was founded in 2003 by William Cinea and is supported almost entirely by private individual contributions and admission fees.

Economic, environmental, and social issues have long plagued Haiti, making it vulnerable to natural disasters. Haiti suffers from a degree of environmental degradation almost without equal in the entire world. Forests that once covered the entire country have now been reduced to 4% of the total land area, and according to the United Nations, Haiti loses 3% of its remaining forests every year. Deforestation has had a disastrous effect on soil fertility, because the steep hillsides on which so many Haitian farmers work are particularly susceptible to erosion.



(above) The Botanical Garden of Cayes is the first and currently the only botanical garden in Haiti, and has played a crucial and developing role in conserving and restoring biodiversity to the country. (left) William Cinea founded the garden in 2003.

Hurricane Matthew

The most recent devastation to this island nation came on October 4 when Category 4 Hurricane Matthew hit the southern coast of Haiti, demolishing everything in its path.

Tragically, the Botanical Garden of Cayes was situated at the heart of the storm and has been severely damaged. Most of its facilities and collections were destroyed, setting their conservation efforts back almost immeasurably. Their irrigation system, electrical system, herbarium, and greenhouse have been completely wiped out. The hurricane also sets back their efforts to support community development, through the distribution of fruit trees and other important plants for the local economy. And of course their living collection of Haitian flora—one of the most threatened floras in the world—is now gone.

The future of the region is bleak. Most of the population relies on breadfruit, mangos, avocados, bananas, and coconut to feed their families, and unfortunately almost all these crops have been destroyed. At worst, these trees will take 5 to 10 years to return to good production. Rebuilding the Garden's community support to address these needs will be an urgent and vital priority. The work to reestablish the Garden will take time, but it is important that it begin as soon as possible.

Together with other international partners, the Missouri Botanical Garden is working to help secure funds and other resources to help the Botanical Garden of Cayes in its efforts to rebuild the Garden and to resume its vital work. Your donations will be put to use immediately on rebuilding the Garden so that conservation and restoration of the island's biodiversity can begin again.



(top) The greenhouse and all the endemic and natives species for habitat restoration were all lost. (bottom) Hurricane Matthew also affected the Garden's living collections.

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