

GREEN REFUGES:

BREJO FORESTS OF PERNAMBUCO - A DARWIN INITIATIVE SUCCESS

Rising up from the dry lowlands in the interior of Pernambuco state are areas of higher ground on which thrive islands of green forest, locally called 'brejos'.



Brejo dos Cavalos, Pernambuco

These higher-rainfall forests are oases to the people living in the semi-arid lowlands, providing them with food products, fuel, timber, water, refuge and forage during long periods of drought. Most importantly, these forests protect the sources of rivers that feed and irrigate the dry lowlands. The brejos are therefore vital to the productivity of the region and the people living there.

However, these forests are highly threatened through their continuous exploitation for fuelwood and charcoal, together

with the encroachment of agriculture and livestock pasture. The resulting environmental changes caused by forest removal have effects on a regional level by altering rainfall patterns, causing erosion and reducing the useful life of water reservoirs, as well as causing reduction in species diversity

The brejos, occurring in isolated patches, owe their existence to the precipitation from warm humid air from the Atlantic when confronted with the higher ground. Relatively little is known about the unique flora of the brejos, and there is a real danger that they will disappear before their biodiversity is fully known.

A project submitted by Plantas do Nordeste (PNE) to investigate the plant biodiversity of the 11 remaining brejos of Pernambuco state was successfully awarded funding from the Darwin Initiative. The Darwin Initiative, announced in 1992 by the British Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, at the Earth Summit in Rio, supports the Biodiversity Convention by providing funding for collaborative projects which assist the conservation and sustainable use of the world's resources of biodiversity and natural habitats. The focus is on partnerships between the UK and countries with high biodiversity.

The PNE project "Floristic composition and diversity of the brejos of Pernambuco" was one of the first 26 projects to be selected by the Darwin Initiative in November 1993, and the first to be supported in Brazil. The project is jointly coordinated by Dr. Margareth Sales from the Botany Department of the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco (UFRPE) and Dr. Simon Mayo (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew).




Dr. Margareth Sales in the Herbario Vasconcelos Sobrinho (UFRPE).

The project will run for a period of three years and aims to carry out a survey of plant species in the remaining areas of brejo forest which will be vital to formulating conservation and sustainable utilisation strategies. With the purchase of a project vehicle and other basic equipment, the field programme is now underway and training courses are planned for the near future.

VISITORS

TO BRAZIL

 Dr. Simon Mayo has left for Brazil to take up a two year post as visiting professor in the Botany Department of the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE) in Recife. He will be responsible

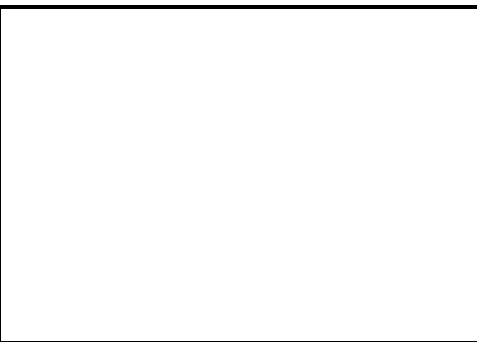
for teaching post-graduate students and help with research programmes. He will also be helping Dr. Margareth Sales run the PNE project "Brejos of Pernambuco", and is joint coordinator

of the Biodiversity Subprogramme together with Dr. Regina Barbosa of the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB).

✠ Andrew McRobb, the Kew photographer, and Vanessa Sequeira, PNE Assistant, spent 5 weeks in NE Brazil during January and February, visiting a number of PNE projects. The purpose of the trip was to collect images for a PNE picture library and information for publicity and fund-raising purposes. For more information on the PNE picture library please contact the PNE Assistant.

To KEW & PNE

✠ Rosângela Lyra Lemos is arriving in the UK during the first week of May. Her trip has been financed by a bursary awarded by the Ciba Foundation. Rosângela will be spending 12 weeks in the herbarium at Kew which will enable her to further the work she is carrying out on the PNE project "Medicinal Plants of the State of Alagoas".



Rosângela Lyra Lemos carrying out ethnobotanical surveys with local people.

✠ Ricardo Marinho, a renowned Brazilian garden designer, and his wife Berta visited Kew in November last year to further discuss plans for the first botanical garden in Northeast Brazil. The proposed site of the botanical garden is the old Johnson & Johnson wax palm plantation - Fazenda Raposa - situated in Fortaleza, state of Ceará.

UPDATE

Darwin Initiative Meeting

A meeting was held in London on March 28th for projects which are being funded under the Darwin Initiative. The objective of the meeting was to bring together project leaders, to share their experiences and the initial project results. Dr. Simon Mayo, UK co-ordinator of the Darwin Initiative funded project "Brejos of Pernambuco", was one of six project leaders to give a presentation on their work.



The Rt Hon John Gummer, current Secretary of State for the Environment, announced at the meeting that 22 new projects had been selected for the second round of Darwin Initiative funding. He also announced that applications will be invited later this year for funding in 1995.

PNE Committee Meeting

The PNE Committee held a meeting in Recife on the 13th and 14th of April to discuss progress of current activities and the future development of the three subprogrammes. The Committee met with the lawyer who will guide the setting up of a PNE Association. It is hoped that the Association will be in place by the end of the year. A follow-up meeting is planned for the 30th and 31st of May.

UPDATE

PNE Data Standards

The PNE Core Descriptors list (version 3.2) is now completed and is available in English and Portuguese. It is being distributed amongst the PNE projects for use during the next 18 months. The medicinal and forage plant standards are due to follow.

New PNE Assistant

In July of this year a new PNE assistant will be taking over from Vanessa Sequeira, who is leaving to undertake a post-graduate course. More details in the next issue of the PNE Newsletter.

WHAT IS PNE?

PLANTAS DO NORDESTE (PNE) is a collaborative research programme between the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and a number of academic, governmental and non-governmental institutes in Northeast Brazil. **PNE** is working towards the preservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of native plant resources for the benefit of local people in Northeast Brazil.

PNE consists of three interlinked Subprogrammes: the **Economic Botany**, the **Biodiversity** and the **Information Dissemination & Training** Subprogrammes. The Economic Botany and Biodiversity Subprogrammes undertake research on the plants of Northeast Brazil, whilst the Information Dissemination & Training Subprogramme brings together and disseminates the resulting information so that it can be used effectively in practical ways, and offers training to contribute to the sustainable use of plant resources in Northeast Brazil on a long term basis.

PNE raises funds independently to support its activities.
