

El Bosque Pluvial

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El Yunque's Quarter - a 'Picture-Perfect' Coin!

On March 14th, 2012 the El Yunque National Forest, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and The United States Mint shared in the celebration of a very special event - the inauguration of the El Yunque National Forest Quarter. This special issue coin, the eleventh in the US Mint's 'exciting AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL' series of commemorative quarters, and the first to be released in 2012, became a reality after almost three years of planning. The coin's design process involved several carefully considered steps and lots of interaction between El Yunque staff, Puerto Rico's citizens and coin designers at the US Mint -- initial queries resulted in a number of design ideas, which ultimately resulted in four 'concept illustrations', each one depicting dissimilar combinations and placements of examples of El Yunque's unique tropical plant and animal life. These illustrations were then thoroughly reviewed and a single drawing was nominated -- the 'winning' design - an intricate portrayal of a Coqui tree frog sitting on a leaf and a Puerto Rican parrot behind an epiphyte plant with lush tropical flora in the background was then released to engravers at the US Mint, who did their 'magic', and the El Yunque coin became a reality.



On the appointed day, Treasurer of the United States, Rosie Rios joined Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi, Secretary of State Kenneth McClintock and El Yunque National Forest Supervisor Pablo Cruz for the official inauguration ceremony at El Yunque's El Portal Rainforest Center. "El Yunque is a perfect selection for inclusion in the America the Beautiful Quarters Program," said Treasurer Rios. "As Americans use this new quarter, they will connect to the stories of the endangered Puerto Rican parrot, the magnificent effort you are making to rescue this beautiful bird from extinction, and the bio diverse national treasure that is its home - the El Yunque National Forest." Famed documentary film producer/director Maria Falcon was perfectly cast in her role as 'master of ceremonies' during the ceremony, keeping the proceedings rolling along effortlessly.

The landmark event culminated in a coin exchange where members of the crowd were encouraged to trade their currency for rolls of the sparkling new El Yunque National Forest quarters.

The America the Beautiful Quarters Program is authorized by United States Public Law 110-456 (the America's Beautiful National Parks Quarter Dollar Coin Act of 2008). Customers may purchase the El Yunque National Forest quarter in collectible bags and rolls online at <http://www.usmint.gov/catalog> or by calling 1-800-USA-MINT (872-6468). Hearing- and speech-impaired customers with TTY equipment may order by calling 1-888-321-MINT (extension 6468).

The Forest Supervisor's Message

Greetings!



It has been a while since we last linked-up to tell you about what is happening at our beloved Forest - El Yunque.

There have been quite a few changes affecting us, and we have accomplished lots of hard work geared to improving our stewardship and expanding our service. In addition, there have been some extraordinary circumstances such as changes in the global economy and potential uncertainties of the upcoming election year that have subtly influenced our capacity to serve the public.

Let's start by discussing the changes: just recently, we implemented a planned Forest-wide personnel reorganization that was concluded and implemented with great success. Our employees are assuming their new roles and function with great enthusiasm. The reorganization's implementation is almost complete - we still need to fill some positions.

This reorganization was carefully planned with the objective of reducing our dependency on appropriated funds in order to achieve a financially sustainable operation and enhance our service efficiency.

We are approaching the first anniversary of the inauguration of the Rio Sabana Picnic Area. Begun as an experiment, this project was the first-ever Forest amenity to be operated in full partnership with an island municipality. Despite some initial difficulties 'learning the ropes' of the operation, the Municipality of Naguabo has done quite a good job. However, there is room for improvement, so we will maintain our high level of support in order to ensure continuing improvement to the area's operation. We plan to add the neighboring community of Cubuy as an operating partner in the near future. Discussion and negotiations to establish a three party agreement between the Forest, the municipality, and the community are in the works.

Much of our trail and road infrastructure

was adversely affected by last year's Hurricane Irene. We received badly needed emergency relief funds from the U.S. Department of Transportation to repair hurricane-related damage to the roads, and we are presently completing the reconstruction contracts that will soon be released for bids. Many of our most popular nature trails were severely damaged. We assessed the damages to our total trail system, and closed many trails until full repairs could be made, to ensure maximum visitor safety and enjoyment. We were forced to make difficult priority and financial decisions when deciding which trails to repair first. Fortunately, we will be able to open at least a third of the presently closed trails very soon; however, there remains much hard work to be done. We encourage interested persons to volunteer their service to help us in this vital work...

We continue our important work to improve Forest road infrastructure maintenance with the Commonwealth Department of Transportation. This is quite a challenge as we work with the communities, the tourism industry, and the PR-DOT to ensure the continued safe operation of these roads for our staff and visitors. Thanks to the diligence of the Puerto Rico Tourism Company we are well on our way to designating PR Road 186 located in the El Verde sector on the western side of the Forest as a 'Scenic Byway'. Also, PR-DOT has committed to cleaning unsightly vegetation from the highway's edges and to provide the necessary road repairs to this picturesque route. With these changes in place, the PR road 186 corridor will further diversify and enhance Forest recreational opportunities.

In the coming months we will assume the responsibility to implement the planned US Forest Service 'Land Management Plan' revision. In close collaboration with the International Institute of Tropical Forestry we have assembled an interdisciplinary team to begin work on this landmark planning effort. El Yunque has been selected as one of eight National Forests to be the first to participate in this visionary plan revision project under the new US Forest Service planning rules. I am counting on your active engagement throughout this process. Your participation will serve to complement and enrich our planning efforts.

Thanks in great part to the U.S. Department

of Agriculture's 'All Lands' policy, the forest has significantly increased involvement with the Puerto Rico Planning Board and the planning entities of our seven adjacent 'Cooperating Municipalities'. Through this initiative, we intend to promote the conservation of the Forest's supporting ecosystems, and to stimulate the creation of greens jobs within surrounding communities. On May 17, the Forest sponsored the first 'Conference on El Yunque and its Periphery'. It was a complete success, enriched by the participation of attendees from a wide range of environmental sectors and academia. The proceedings were enlightened by the magnificent presentation of world renowned architect Hitesh Metah. We intend to continue these dynamic and engaging dialogues at future conferences. Our most sincere gratitude goes out to all participants and sponsors of this important event.

Amigos del Yunque, our 'Friends of the Forest' Group, is presently undergoing an important transformation process. Under the able leadership of Ralph Rexach, they are working to establish a solid Board of Directors. The group has been able to attract and recruit a superbly capable host of board members from both industry and academia. With the inception of this new and solid Board of Directors, Amigos del Yunque will vastly improve their capacity to augment and serve our Forest mission.

As you can see, our labors for El Yunque and for you, our public have been 'non-stop'. Despite many challenges we continue to work unceasingly to build a better, and more sustainable Forest. This is an extremely tall order -- we cannot accomplish it alone. We need your help -- I urge you to **GET INVOLVED AND LEND A HAND - DON'T DELAY-VOLUNTEER TODAY!**

Hasta pronto!

Pablo

Notable Notes/Quotable Quotes!

- ⇒ A multi-agency effort has recently been initiated as part of a national conservation initiatives - called Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC's), there are 22 of them throughout the Nation. The Caribbean Islands Landscape Conservation Cooperative (CLCC) forms an energetic part of this important national network., performing as applied conservation science partner with commonwealth and federal agencies, non-government organizations (NGO's), universities and other units within the Caribbean geographic area. The CLCC is designed to inform resource management decisions in an integrated fashion across landscapes at a broader scale than any individual partner's responsibility. The partnership will consider landscape-scale problems including climate change, habitat fragmentation, urban sprawl, invasive species, and water availability in order to assess the conservation status of species and habitats and provide a vision for sustainable landscapes under future scenarios. El Yunque National Forest will participate in this initiative. More information can be found at: http://www.fws.gov/southeast/LCC/pdf/factsheets2011_caribbean.pdf



- ⇒ Throughout its long history, the US Department of Agriculture that President Abraham Lincoln called the 'People's Department' has touched the lives of each and every American every day. True to his roots as a frontier farm boy, on May 15, 1862, the President signed legislation to create the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Over the next two months - in the midst of the Civil War - he signed additional legislation that expanded and transformed American farming, including the Homestead Act, and the establishment of the Land Grant agricultural university system. Through drought, a great depression and two world wars, the USDA has continued to serve the American public in hundreds of helpful ways. Learn more about the USDA and its many programs at: <http://www.usda.gov>



- ⇒ Earlier this year, along with the rest of the nation, we celebrated National Volunteer Week (April 15 - April 21, 2012) at the El Yunque National Forest. This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the US Forest Service's Volunteer Program. We are grateful for, and very proud of the outstanding contributions of the volunteers who selflessly donated a whopping 10,610 labor hours to the El Yunque National Forest during the past fiscal year; their dedicated volunteer work saved the US Forest Service an incredible \$226,640! Thanks El Yunque Volunteer Corps - We would be lost without your vital contributions!



- ⇒ Carmen Young is currently assisting in developing volunteer recruitment strategies for the Forest Service's Southern Region as well as for El Yunque National Forest. Carmen is working with the Mobilize Green Internship program which provides developmental opportunities for students or recent graduates interested in acquiring experience in natural and cultural resource and developing their awareness of green and sustainable strategies while working with employees, partners and the public to strengthen volunteerism and service in National Forests and Grasslands. Carmen comes from Greensboro North Carolina and recently graduated in biological engineering from North Carolina A&T State. We are fortunate to have Carmen on board through December.



- ⇒ In April the Forest participated in Luquillo's 'Festival de Tinglar' providing information about rivers flowing from El Yunque using a 3-D map highlighting the Forest topography. Forest Service staff, assisted by Eastern National employees and Venture Crew 919, interacted with festival participants throughout the day.



Forest Clean-up Days – ‘Cool’ Fun – Great Results!

By *Carolyn J. Krupp, El Yunque NF Public Affairs Officer*



El Yunque's annual Clean-up events just keep getting better and better! This year marked the 22nd anniversary of this traditional Forest activity and this year's theme 'El Yunque Clean-up Day - Volunteering is the Way' was calculated to ensure a good turnout - and so it did!

Early Saturday morning, April 21st, volunteers assembled at the El Portal Rain Forest Center's upper parking lot, where they signed in - they were quickly formed into teams and dispatched to locations throughout the Forest.

On the previous Friday, April 20th, a related Clean-up activity took place at the Rio Sabana Recreation Area on the Forest's southern edge in the municipality of Naguabo.

A quick check of the sign-up records at both locations revealed that about 500 volunteers, mostly from the surrounding municipalities of **Rio Grande, Naguabo, Fajardo** and **Luquillo**, augmented by a number of eager helpers from additional island locations, had joined with Forest Service staff and our long-time partner and enthusiastic sponsor, **American Airlines** to pick-up and bag an astonishing total of **four tons** of trash and scrap-metal from El Yunque and Rio Sabana roads and trails!



The amount of trash collected was only one ton more than was collected during 2011's El Yunque clean-up event - a hopeful signal that the Forest's '**Pack-it-in/Pack-it-out**' program, which encourages visitors to responsibly remove their trash when they depart the Forest continues to pay dividends.



Over 350 volunteers participated in Saturday's Clean up Day in the Forest while 'underwater public service group' **Scuba Dogs** helped to clean up areas along the Mameyes River outside the Forest boundaries. Approximately 130 volunteers assisted in cleaning the Rio Sabana Recreation Area and surroundings in Naguabo during an activity on Friday April 20.

Other partners included: Amigos del Yunque and the Municipalities of Rio Grande and Naguabo. Various other organizations, businesses and municipalities provided transportation, informational exhibits, food and entertainment during the event including: the Municipalities of Luquillo and Carolina, North East Coast Inc., 4H Club, USDA Farm Services Agency, Solid Waste Authority, Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, Venture Crew 919, Yuquiyu Delights and Eastern National. Musical entertainment was provided by: Ruiseñores de la Montaña - Maria and Gianne, Comparsa de Luquillo and Teodoro Canela who entertained the volunteers as they returned from cleaning the Forest. youngster's conservation idol '**Woody Owl**' enchanted the many children attending the event with their parents!

And 'yummy' victuals and soft-drinks were available all day long - a perfect compensation for the hard working clean-up crews and their excited kids!

At day's end, Forest Supervisor Pablo Cruz commented; "We appreciate the tremendous efforts of our volunteers, partners, neighbors and employees for their support in helping this year's Clean Up Day to be a success, this event symbolizes the Forest Service's commitment to Earth Day by helping to remove trash from the Forest and to promote conservation messages regarding the importance of conserving our tropical forest."



"At American Airlines we have a strong commitment to preserving our environment," said Jose Rucabado, General Manager for American Airlines in Puerto Rico. "Our commitment to the Clean up Day in El Yunque is a continuation of the work that our company and employees have done throughout the years to help conserve the environment in Puerto Rico for future generations. We are proud to help so we can all continue to enjoy the natural beauty offered by El Yunque. "

The Forest Service has announced April 20, 2013 as the tentative date for the next annual Clean up Day.

EUREKA! How Budget Woes Inspired An Innovative El Yunque Technology Idea!

By Felipe Cano; El Yunque NF Biologist

It was definitely a 'Eureka' moment. As I stared out of my office window late one summer afternoon last year, glumly contemplating the impending transfer of two colleagues, biological science technicians Anastacio Gomez and Benjamin Fuentes to another El Yunque NF Team - victims of a shrinking federal budget, I racked my brain, hoping to come-up with a viable fiscal solution that would allow these highly-skilled technicians to continue their field biology work. Like most El Yunque National Forest divisions, the Ecosystem Team had been pared to the bone; a combination of the El Yunque NF Leadership Team's recent consultations and agency funding cuts brought-on by the nation's current fiscal woes...

Then, suddenly, a thought worthy of Archimedes' famous interjection 'Eureka' popped into my head -- what if we could utilize innovative thinking to devise a technology solution of some sort that would raise enough funding to augment our team's budget sufficiently to retain our technicians for the remainder of the fiscal year?

As I began to explore what might work, I spoke with Ashwin Mahadeo of Chiral Software, Inc. - Ashwin and Chiral had recently been contracted to re-organize and re-format El Yunque's website appearance.

Our brainstorming session gave birth to an elegant idea -- an 'El Yunque NF smartphone application program, or 'app' in current techno-jargon -- Forest visitors would pay a small fee to download this 'app' to phones that utilized the popular 'Android' operating system. The resulting funds would be managed by our NGO (Non-Government Organization) partner, 'The Friends of El Yunque' and would be used to support some of El Yunque's vital conservation programs within the forest and in surrounding communities. Initially, the idea was to provide our visitors with a means to identify El Yunque's many bird species by listening to their recorded calls and then matching them to the birds they were viewing and hearing - more interactive elements including trail maps, weather information, and other 'web-based' options were swiftly added to the mix, and the project was launched in February of this year.

This was the very first smartphone 'app' project to be envisioned, developed and launched by a Forest in the agency and it has received lots of attention - Forest Service components ranging from individual forests and grasslands to regional offices and on up to national headquarters have recognized its core value.

Despite its outstanding technical appeal and successful implementation, the project has so far been unsuccessful -- its quest to become a viable funding option due to fiscal guideline restrictions. Instead, the smartphone 'app' was introduced as a 'free' download for users.



Future project plans include the development of a similar, but even more powerful 'app' which will be downloadable through the popular Apple 'i-phone' platforms for a small fee. The i-phone 'app' will incorporate a number of pioneering tools which we expect will 'turn some heads' in this rapidly developing technology arena.

The experience we have gained in 'birthing' this groundbreaking 'app' has also allowed us to identify potential partners who will 'own and manage' the program and the profits derived from its marketing - these profits will be directed exclusively towards the funding of cooperatively identified Forest conservation projects and programs...

Last year's serendipitous 'Eureka' moment may have inadvertently ignited a new vision for robust and practical partnership -- let's hope!



The Official android app for the El Yunque National Forest

El Yunque Selected Among First For New Planning Rule

The U.S. Forest Service has announced eight national forests that will be the first to revise their land management plans using a new National Forest System Planning Rule, after it is finalized in the months ahead. The El Yunque National Forest joins national forests in Alaska, Idaho, New Mexico and California to begin revising their plans shortly after a final rule is selected.



Earlier this year, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack stated the agency's intention to complete a 'preferred alternative' to the **Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement** for the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule.



"These forests will demonstrate straight out of the gate what we've been talking about in terms of collaboration," said U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. "People will see that under a new rule, public engagement increases and process decreases, while providing stronger protections for our lands and water."

The 'preferred alternative' is grounded in science and public input, and seeks to deliver stronger protections for forests, water, and wildlife while supporting the economic vitality of our rural communities. It requires providing opportunities for public involvement and collaboration throughout all stages of the planning process, as well as opportunities for coordination with state and local governments and other federal agencies.

The eight national forests were selected because of the importance of the benefits they provide, and the strong collaborative networks already in place. They will emphasize solid science, collaboration, strengthened protections for land, wildlife and water, and opportunities for sustainable recreation and other multiple uses that support jobs and economic vitality as they begin the process to revise their plans.

The planning rule provides the framework for U.S. Forest Service land management plans for the 155 forests and 20 grasslands. Early adopter forests will begin the plan revision process in the months following a final decision.

Members of the public will have a number of opportunities to continue to be involved after a final planning rule is selected, in addition to participating in the plan revision process for the announced national forests. The Forest Service also will be revising and issuing new directives for public notice and comment that will provide further guidance in implementing a final rule.

A new federal advisory committee for implementation of a final planning rule provides another opportunity for the public to collaborate in National Forest System land management planning.

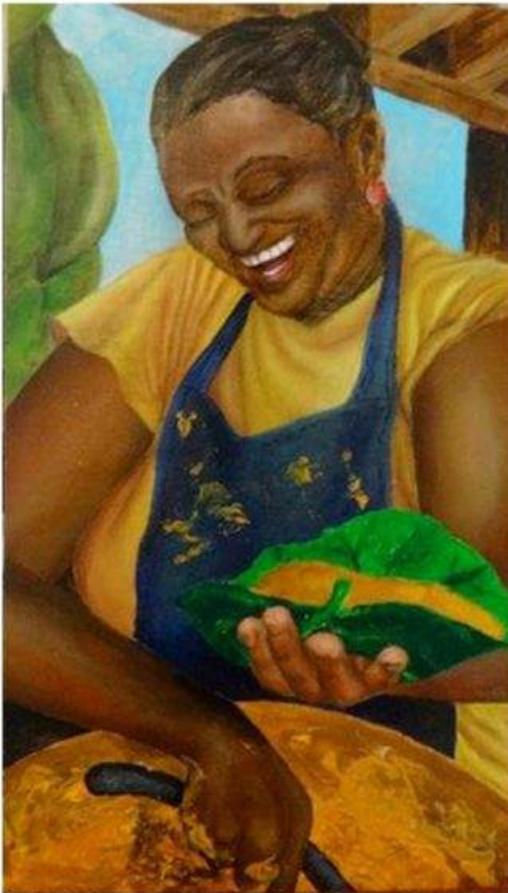


"I am gratified that the El Yunque National Forest has been selected by the US Forest Service to be among the first forests to revise Land Management Plans under the new National Forest System Planning Rule initiative" Forest Supervisor, Pablo Cruz commented recently "The new planning rule will update planning procedures that have been in place since 1982, creating a modern planning process that reflects the latest land management science and knowledge, while achieving better results for people and the environment."

The mission of the U.S. Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world.

Omar Sebastian's Prize-winning Painting

El Yunque's multi-talented Recreational Forestry Technician, Aurea L. Moragon had an exciting surprise recently - on May 10 she received a telephone call from the Puerto Rico Resident Commissioner's office in Washington DC informing her that her gifted teenage son, Omar Sebastian had won the prestigious 'Congressional Art Competition' in Puerto Rico. Thirty High School Art students from all over Puerto Rico had participated in the contest, submitting art works that depicted scenes of the island's vibrant culture. Omar Sebastian's winning selection entitles him to travel to Washington, DC with his art work to compete for the 'grand prize' together with entrants from all 50 mainland US states! Winning in Puerto Rico also earned Omar Sebastian a well-deserved \$3,000/year scholarship to help defray his expenses when he attends Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Savannah, Georgia, after graduating from high school in 2014.



Sixteen year old Omar Sebastian is a 10th grade student at San Juan's esteemed Central High School Visual Arts curriculum where he has been studying since 7th grade.

Omar's winning art work is an exciting and evocative painting of a Puerto Rican lady creating an 'Alcapurria de Jueyes', a favorite island 'fritter' snack. The scene is Piñones, a popular beach location near San Juan featuring an abundance of fried food vendors. Plantains, a part of the alcapurria recipe as well as that of many other dishes can be seen in the background. The lady is forming her alcapurria in a sea grape leaf to prepare it for frying. She is laughing happily, or what is called 'esta basilando' in Spanish, indicating how much she loves her work!

Omar Sebastian's thrilling painting will be exhibited in the US Capitol for an entire year...

We at El Yunque are extremely proud of Omar Sebastian's fine accomplishment, and we wish him continued success as he travels to Washington DC to continue his competition...

'El Yunque and its Periphery' - a Public Forum

On May 17, 2012, the El Yunque National Forest joined the International Institute of Tropical Forestry, the Coalition for the Northeast Ecological Corridor and other partners, sponsoring a public forum: 'El Yunque and its Periphery - Uses and Conservation of Land in the Northeastern Region of Puerto Rico'. The event took place at Interamerican University in Hato Rey, Puerto Rico with approximately 200 persons attending, including representatives from federal, commonwealth and municipal government, academicians and students, members of non-government organizations representing environmental and social/economic interests, members of the architecture and planning sector, and the general public.



Topics presented included scientific information regarding historic trends in urban development in the region and potential impacts to its natural resources. The landscape connections of the rain forest to the coast, and the effects of regional development on the Forest, watersheds and coastal and marine ecosystems were also explored. Information was provided on current efforts for protection of a key coastal ecological corridor located within the region. Ideas were also shared regarding the sustainable development of the communities in northeastern Puerto Rico and innovative concepts regarding ecotourism, nature tourism and eco-lodges were presented by world-renowned eco-tourism expert, and architect Dr. Hitesh Mehta, the event's keynote speaker.

The forum focused on an all-lands concept of planning and management of National Forest System lands, watersheds, wildlife, water resources and wilderness zones and their connection to areas beyond their jurisdictional boundaries and how more protection to the rivers and the riparian zones will contribute to healthier aquatic systems, estuaries, and oceans for the region.



The forum was also a key opportunity to begin a collaborative dialogue that will continue as the El Yunque National Forest begins its Forest plan revision efforts as an early adopter Forest under the US Forest Service's New Planning Rule.

All in all, this pertinent public forum provided an exceptional foundation for determining future dialogue - hopefully leading the way to impending solutions...

Two New Books About El Yunque!

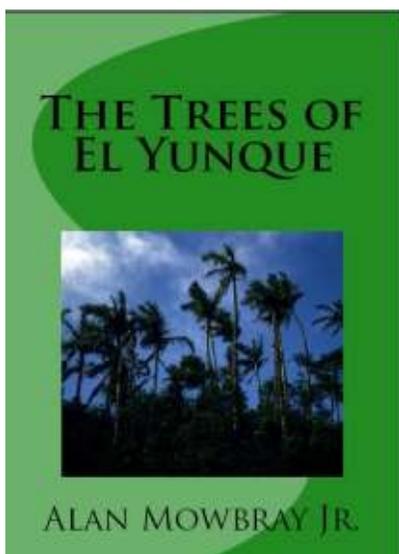
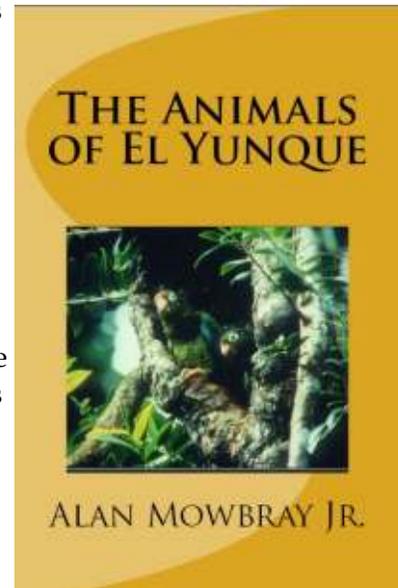
By Zoraida Rosa, Eastern National Caribbean Region Manager

For a decade, El Yunque National Forest website visitors have regularly consulted the informative 'Wildlife Facts' and *Endemic Plant Facts* features to research school projects or just to find out more about the remarkable tropical forest animals and plants that populate El Yunque - 'America's Only Tropical Rainforest'. The Wildlife Facts web-page was initiated as a monthly feature in 2002, while the Endemic Plant Facts page began some years later in 2009. Regrettably, new entries to these popular features ended with long-time El Yunque National Forest volunteer natural history writer, Alan Mowbray Jr.'s retirement last year. Over an eleven year span, he had compiled literally hundreds of descriptions of El Yunque's unique biota.

Happily for the feature's many fans, Mr. Mowbray remained dedicated to the idea after retiring, swiftly setting to work editing and re-compiling hundreds of website descriptions, converting them into book format. The end result - two essential guidebooks; *The Animals of El Yunque*, and *The Trees of El Yunque*, intended to fit easily into a visitor's coat pocket or backpack. Each book's concise species taxonomy, descriptions and habitat definitions are accompanied by full-color photos and a whole lot of quirky details, not found elsewhere.

The species described in the books are those that forest visitors are most likely to encounter and want to learn more about while hiking El Yunque's lush rainforest nature trails. Tropical forest enthusiasts and natural history 'buffs' will be fascinated to discover the immense diversity of the animal and tree species that are described and pictured on the pages of these books...

Visitors to the forest can purchase these indispensable guide-books at the El Portal Rainforest Center's *Eastern National Bookstore* and satellite locations throughout the Forest.



For readers who favor the new '*e-book*' technology, both volumes are currently available on the Kindle 'e-reader' from amazon.com -- once purchased, these 'e-books' can easily be downloaded with a free Kindle 'app' from 'i-tunes' onto most popular touch-screen 'smartphone' platforms.

Remarkably, Mr. Mowbray has directed that all royalties he derives from the sale of print and electronic versions of either of these books be sent directly to the El Yunque National Forest General Fund to aid in forest conservation efforts...

El Yunque National Forest Supervisor **Pablo Cruz** recently had this to say about the books: "I believe that El Yunque's visitors will find *The Animals of El Yunque* and *The Trees of El Yunque* to be invaluable 'pocket companions' as they hike our Forest's many nature trails - these books can be useful tools, revealing attention-grabbing facts about the matchless flora and fauna of our precious tropical forest ecosystem's biological populations. "



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In this issue, El Bosque Pluvial shines its SPOTLIGHT on El Yunque's multi-talented Administrative Support Clerk and Information Specialist, **Elba Garcia**. One of nine children, (six boys, and three girls) Elba was born in the Bronx, New York to Marcial and Alejandrina Garcia. Her father

retired after completing a successful career as an expert machinist in a woolen products factory where he also maintained and repaired knitting equipment. Elba attended elementary school at PS 60, a few blocks away from her Bronx home. Her favorite subject back then was 'Gymnasium', she says, because "it was so much fun!"

When she attended high school (also in the Bronx) her favorite subject was 'Science' because "I had a great teacher" – but, she says "don't ask me any scientific questions now, I've forgotten much of what I learned". Elba moved to Puerto Rico with her family in 1976. She attended Centro de Estudios Multidisciplinario in Humacao with a concentration in multilingual/secretarial studies. After graduating, she began her long and fruitful career with the federal government at Naval Station Roosevelt Roads in Ceiba, starting as a clerk/typist, advancing to positions in procurement and purchasing during her 21 years there. When the base closed in 2004, she was swiftly engaged by the US Forest Service at the El Yunque National Forest as a purchasing agent. In her present role as Information Specialist she has "Had an opportunity to learn about the Forest – visitors seek all kinds of information ranging from driving directions to helping them identify a Forest tree!"

Elba was married to Gerardo Pomaes in 1979; Gerardo followed in his father's footsteps becoming a successful construction contractor - he designed and built their lovely house in Naguabo. They are the very proud parents of three daughters; Janira, Sharitza and Giselle, and have a beautiful granddaughter, Giraymi Gimar. Janira earned a bachelor's degree in Social Work; Sharitza has a bachelor's degree in Office Administration and Giselle is a certified Therapeutic Masseuse.

Elba is also a dedicated worker at her local church - she says "I am an 'all-around hand' - God has been so good to me, that whatever I am asked to do, I do."

El Yunque is indeed fortunate to have such a friendly, outgoing and multi-talented staff member as our 'Front-line Ambassador'!



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