



Go-Jamaica	Classifieds	Discover Jamaica	Youthlink
Business Directory	Go Shopping	Inns of Jamaica	Communities

- Home
- Lead Stories
- News
- Business
- Sport
- Commentary
- Letters
- Entertainment
- Arts & Leisure
- Outlook
- In Focus
- Social
- Auto
- International
- The Star
- E-Financial Gleaner
- The Voice
- Communities
- Hospitality Jamaica




- Web
- Jamaica-gleaner.com

**Archives**

- 1998 - Now (HTML)
- 1834 - Now (PDF)

**Services**

- Find a Jamaican
- Library
- Live Radio
- Podcasts
- Weather

**Subscriptions**

- News by E-mail
- Newsletter
- Print Subscriptions

**Interactive**

Ads by Google Ads by Google Jamaica Art To Jamaica Sun of Jamaica WWW Go Jamai

- [Medical Store](#)
- [Jamaica Resort](#)
- [Couples Resort](#)

**LETTER OF THE DAY: Biologists speak on Cockpit mining**

published: Sunday | January 21, 2007



Cockpit Country in Trelawny as seen from Alps district. -Ian Allen/Staff Photographer

For a number of weeks now, the debate on the unique portion of our island called the Cockpit Country, and the intention to undertake prospecting for bauxite resources, has proceeded in the media. We, the undersigned biologists, wish to add our voices to the debate through this medium.

Several interested persons and environmental and stakeholder groups have correctly described various attributes of the Cockpit Country. The Cockpit Country is a section of the island straddling several parishes - Trelawny, Westmoreland, St. James, St. Elizabeth, Manchester, and St Ann - characterised by a profusion of large side-by-side, steep circular depressions formed by the differential erosion and collapse of old limestone material riddled with caves and holes.

The very features of this rugged and inaccessible area have for centuries provided a refuge for much of Jamaica's unique biodiversity, and a haven for runaway slaves, (the Maroons), first from Spanish and then English estates. All have sought and found refuge in and around the Cockpit Country. An examination of a satellite photograph of the island shows that the Cockpit Country is the largest unbroken area of green existing at present, as it is relatively isolated from other habitable areas by its rugged nature.

source or headwater

The Cockpit area serves as the source or headwater of the island's only navigable river, the Black Rivers, as well as the Martha Brae and Great rivers, and dozens of invaluable springs ringing the area. Many smaller villages depend on water from these springs. It also supports the entire Upper and Lower Black River Morass wetland area, home to the spicy shrimp of our local culture and the largest fish and freshwater shrimp farming venture in the island. Much of the island's central western water supply thus comes from this important area.

But what animals and plants of importance live there?

It is a major refuge from human activity for 27 endemic (found nowhere else in the world) of our 289 bird species. Nearly all the world's Black-billed Parrots and the Jamaican blackbird, which are endangered, are found in the area. Additionally, it is



Jamaican blackbird, which are endangered, are found in the area. Additionally, it is one of the last places that the Jamaican boa called the 'yellow snake' is found.

The island's second-largest underground cave complex, the Windsor Caves, is found in the Cockpit Country. This cave system shelters and supports some of the largest bat colonies in the entire island.

At least three endemic bat species, one of which is at-risk, are found there. Other non-cave dwelling bats in the area include the fig-eating bat and the hairy-tailed bat. Many of the bats are responsible for pollinating fruit trees in surrounding areas. It is also one of the last refuges of Jamaica's giant swallowtail butterfly, the largest butterfly in the Western Hemisphere, which is now very rare in the Blue and John Crow Mountains.

Other unique insect species also occur in the Cockpit Country which are protected by their isolation.

Though much of the hardwoods have long been logged out, the area is also able to sustainably support a small number of loggers who slowly remove larger trees.

Some 66 of the island's 828 flowering plant species, two amphibians and two reptiles are found only in the Cockpit Country.

We strongly urge that the proposed mineral prospecting in the Cockpit Country be indefinitely postponed as, if implemented, permanent alterations of the delicately balanced ecology of the area will occur. In the meantime, we encourage the review of the biological information of the area as part of a comprehensive approach for its consideration as a World Heritage Site or National Protected Area.

We also strongly recommend the consideration of long-term sustainable options for the economic development of the area.

We are convinced that mining of bauxite by traditional open cast mining is not an advisable option. We suggest that there are superior non-extractive, indefinitely sustainable and income-generating alternatives that must be considered instead, such as carefully planned and implemented eco-tourism and cultural tourism.

Although Agriculture Minister Clarke should be commended for postponing the issuing of the prospecting licence for bauxite, it is clear that what is needed is more debate and airing of all issues that surround the Cockpit Country. Policymakers must meet with the persons who are the stakeholders in the area to get their views as well. We suggest the biologists too, have a role in the debate, and we are willing to offer our advice where appropriate.

I am, etc.,

**Karl Aiken, Ph.D.; Peter Vogel,**

**Ph.D.; Byron Wilson, Ph.D.;**

**Eric Garraway, Ph.D.; Ivan**

**Goodbody, Ph.D.; George Proctor,**

**Ph.D. Department of Life Sciences,**

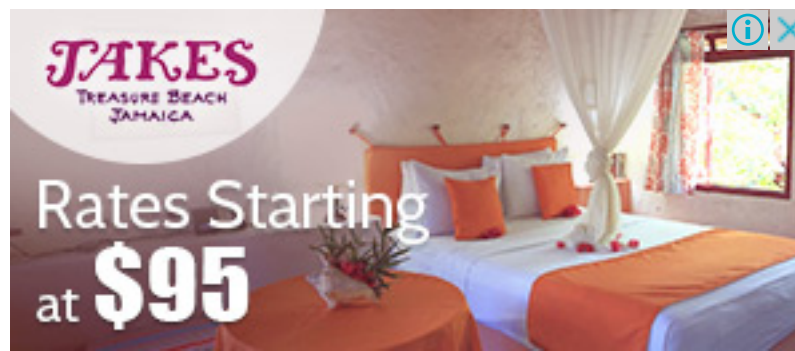
**UWI, Mona Campus.**

[More Letters](#)

[E-mail this story](#)[E-mail this story](#)

[Print this Page](#)

[Letters to the Editor](#)



**NEW LOW PRICES**

**Send money  
online to Jamaica**

**Live 106.6  
POWER  
Jamaican Radio**

**Pick Your Caption**



**Amnesty Int'l  
Reports  
Click Now**

**On Vacation?  
Looking for a place  
to stay??**

**JAS Jamaica  
AIDS  
Support**

**PERF Report on  
Violent  
Crimes  
in The  
Corporate Area**

**JAMAICA KIDZ  
.com  
USAID UPLIFTING  
ADOLESCENTS  
PROJECT**



[Book Now](#)


 **Call 1-876-965-3000**  
Treasure Beach, Jamaica  
JakesHotel.com

**JAKES**  
TREASURE BEACH  
JAMAICA

Rates Starting  
at **\$95**

[Book Now](#)

 **Call 1-876-965-3000**  
Treasure Beach, Jamaica  
JakesHotel.com

 A Public Service Announcement from  
**The Society for Women's Health Research  
& Marcia Cross**

 A Public Service Announcement from  
**The Society for Women's Health Research  
& Marcia Cross**

