

Aliens of Kamayca

a newsletter on non-indigenous species in Jamaica

ALIEN AMONGST US

Bronze Mannikin (*Lonchura cucullata*)

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Source: <http://www.warwicktarbóton.co.za/birdpgs/357BrMan.html>

Mannikins and munias are a group of birds native to the tropical and subtropical regions of the Old World such as India, southeastern Asia to Taiwan, Indonesia and the Philippines. These birds are seed-eaters belonging to the genus *Lonchura* of which there are forty-one species worldwide. They are very colourful songbirds made popular by the international pet trade. This popularity has resulted in them being one of the most common caged birds. Unfortunately however, this pet trade is believed to be the main reason behind the establishment of new populations outside their native range.

The mannikins and munias have undergone recent reclassification and name changes based largely on work done by Robin

Restall in the 1990's. While this served to split a few species into full species status and streamline the naming process, it also introduced a bit of confusion as one species sometimes have more than one English names and recognized by different Latin names by various authorities. At least three species, the Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*), also known as the Nutmeg Mannikin, the Tricoloured Munia (*L. malacca*), also known as the Tricoloured Mannikin, and the Black-headed Munia (*L. atricapilla*) also known as the Chestnut Mannikin have established populations in Jamaica. The latter two were once considered subspecies of *L. malacca* and were recently given species status. A fourth species, the Bronze Mannikin (*L. cucullata* also known as *Spermestes cucullatus*) has also

been recorded in small flocks on the island.

The most likely means of introduction of these species into the Jamaican landscape is from intentional or unintentional release of caged birds. The Bronze Mannikin and the Tricoloured Munia for example, were first recorded subsequent to the passage of Hurricane Gilbert in 1988. They have since been seen in flocks in open grassy fields, freshwater marshes and along road margins. Their distribution is still very local and may be rare to fairly common where they occur.

The mannikins and munias could prove potentially invasive posing a threat to the native

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MANNIKINS AND MUNIAS IN JAMAICA CONT'D

flora and fauna in the areas of the island where they are established. Being grain and seed-eaters they will compete with native Jamaican birds such as the Yellow-faced Grassquit (*Tiaris olivaceus*), Black-faced Grassquit (*T. bicolor*), Yellow-shouldered Grassquit (*Loxipasser anoxanthus*) and even the larger Greater Antillean Bullfinch (*Loxigilla violacea*). These introduced species are also potential pests to various grain crops such as rice.

At present, mannikins and munias are not recorded in any great numbers on the island which suggests that their impact may be minimal. In addition, grains are not a significant crop item in Jamaica. The presence of numerous species of mannikins and mu-

nia therefore plays an important role in emphasizing the ease with which non-native bird species can become established in the wild through the pet trade. This highlights the deficiencies of the present wildlife management legislations such as the Wildlife Protection Act (1945) and the Endangered Species (Conservation and Regulation of Trade) Act (2000). A comprehensive wildlife trade policy to regulate the activities of the pet trade industry is urgently needed.

This however, will only be effective if the required funding, monitoring and enforcement programmes are in place.

**Contributed by:
Ricardo Miller**

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Invasive Alien Species through the Eyes of an Intern

Ms. Gabrielle Watson a recent graduate from the Marine Biology programme at the University of the West Indies is currently a volunteer in the Ecosystems Management Branch. She was asked to give her views on invasive alien species and she had this to say.

An invasive alien species is any species whose presence becomes detrimental to or has the potential to become detrimental to a country's natural biodiversity, economy or populace. Invasive alien species are often thought to be restricted to alien (foreign/introduced) species, however it should be noted that native species may become invasive in the event that their populations are not effectively monitored. Biological manipulation, breeding programmes, wildlife/pet trade and trade of plants for agricultural or ornamental

purposes are some means through which "would-be" invasive species can become a nuisance if they are not properly managed.

Invasive alien species can be plants, animals or micro-organisms and they can become invasive in any type of ecosystem, including but not limited to freshwater, marine, wetland and terrestrial environments. They often act by preventing other species from growing to maturity by, in the case of plants, overtopping/overgrowth of other species and in the case of animals, by preying on juvenile stages of the animal's development. Invasive species may also lead to species extinction.

Examples of species invasive in Jamaica:

Marine invasive:

Animal: Lionfish (*Pterois sp.*)
Plant: *Caulerpa taxifolia*

Freshwater invasive:

Animal: Red-claw Lobster (*Cherax sp.*)
Plant: Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)

Wetland invasive:

Animal: Green-lipped Mussel (*Perna viridis*)

Land invasive:

Animal: Small Indian Mongoose (*Herpestes javanicus*)
Plant: *Lantana sp.*

**Contributed by:
Gabrielle J. Watson
Intern—Ecosystems Management Branch**

MELALEUCA

Scientific Name: *Melaleuca quinquenervia*
Common Names: Bottlebrush/Paperbark Tree
Native Land: Australia

DESCRIPTION:

- aggressive and highly invasive plant that grows very rapidly, typically up to 3-6 feet per year,
- produces dense stands that displace native plants and animals,
- two distinctive stands have been identified in the Black River Lower Morass, the largest freshwater wetland ecosystem in Jamaica,
- introduction of this plant was deliberate and is used extensively in landscaping.

EFFECTS

The infestation of this plant results in the degradation of ecosystem structure and function; it also reduces native species biodiversity.



WILD GINGER

Scientific Name: *Alpinia allughas*
Common Names: Wild Ginger

DESCRIPTION:

- grows on the banks of streams, canals and rivers and is also found in forests, marshy tracts and swamps,
- propagated via rhizomes and is thought to be dispersed via water.

EFFECTS:

- forms large thickets which smother under-story plants and out competes native species
- found to be taking over the natural vegetation of the Black River Morass and other wetland ecosystems throughout Jamaica



FACT SHEET on IAS in the Black River Pilot Project submitted by:

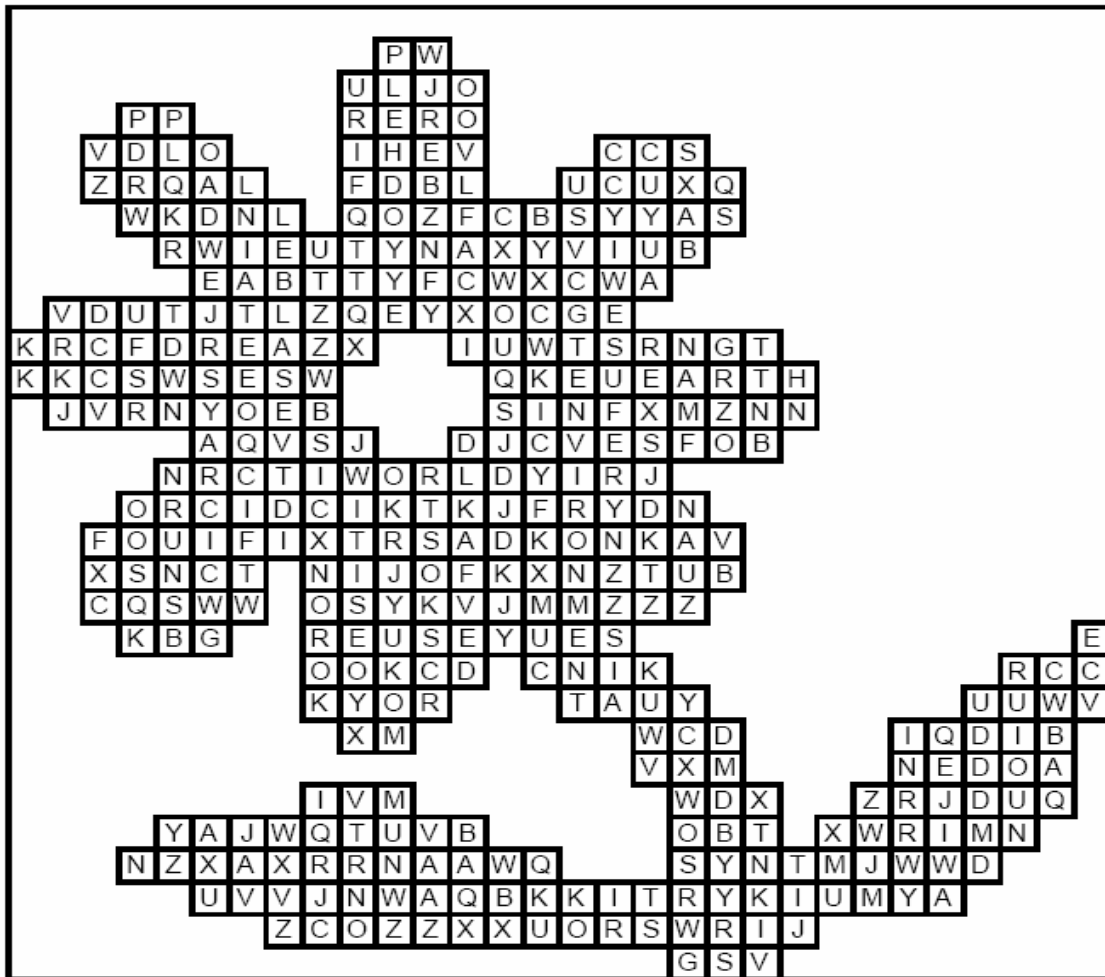
"Mitigating the Threat of Invasive Alien Species in the Insular Caribbean" Project
 THE MTIASIC PROJECT IN JAMAICA



For additional information on the MTIASIC Project in Jamaica and invasive alien species, contact:

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The Aliens of Xamayca is a quarterly newsletter of the Ecosystems Management Branch of NEPA that features non-native species in Jamaica. Persons interested in writing articles for the newsletter may submit them to the Editor at monique.curtis@nepa.gov.jm.