

Extinction in Progress (DVD, 56 minutes; Green Planet Films, 2014; <http://www.greenplanetfilms.org>)

Most of us have never heard of the rare Hispaniolan solenodon (*Solenodon paradoxus*), a venomous mammal (you read that correctly: a venomous mammal). Native to Haiti, this insectivore resembles an overgrown shrew. Unfortunately, as a result of deforestation caused primarily by human intervention, Haiti now resembles a lunar landscape – far from the lush ecosystem that once protected species like the Hispaniolan solenodon. *Extinction in Progress* portrays the story of scientists working to preserve, conserve, and save this and hundreds of other species in Haiti – and, I must add, it is one of the most outstanding DVDs I have reviewed.

The shining feature of this video is that the producers have dedicated a great deal of attention to showing scientists actually at work, revealing their intensity, excitement, enthusiasm and even humor as they search, observe, classify, and explain the characteristics of native animals, particularly

amphibians and reptiles. Viewers will also discover thought-provoking glimpses of Haitian culture and economics. I believe this program will engage high school and college biology or environmental science students, and maybe even inspire some to consider going into the adventurous life-science careers highlighted in the film.

The storyline tracks a team of scientists and naturalists led by Penn State Biology professor Blair Hedges. Exploring areas of tropical forests, some in the mountains, they look for species that still exist on the island. A camera crew follows the team; their extraordinary photography amplifies the heartbeat of this video. By studying the animal diversity, the Penn State research team realizes that “immediate action to protect Haiti’s remaining natural forests has to become a priority.” They collaborate with the Philadelphia Zoo and the Haitian Audubon Society. Students will see how samples of endangered amphibian species get transported to the Philadelphia Zoo, where healthy colonies are developed to ensure that in the event of the species’ extinction in

Haiti, the zoo’s colonies can replace them. Researchers collect plants, as well, including their tissues, which undergo cryopreservation at -200°C . It is suggested that the entire biodiversity of a country could be stored forever at a fairly low cost. Described as an “ark-type” situation, this preservation of species in zoos and labs could eventually allow organisms to be moved back into their wild environment.

For the people of Haiti, restoring the biodiversity of their country remains a daunting task that lands heavily on their shoulders. Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, was once an ecosystem with thousands of plant species and a rich variety of animals. The amount of forestland is now less than 2%. Species like the Haitian solenodon, one of only two mammals endemic to Haiti, would face peril if not for the hard work of scientists from different countries who nurture positive change.

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