

Old News on Caribbean Biodiversity Online

By Bert Hoeksema, Naturalis Biodiversity Center

Many publications on the Caribbean Flora and Fauna have recently become accessible online via the repository of Naturalis Biodiversity Center in Leiden.

During the last decades, biologists of Naturalis Biodiversity Center and other scientific institutes have been participating in biodiversity research in the Caribbean. Many of their publications concern overviews of particular groups of plants and animals, either marine or terrestrial. Most of these studies were hardly accessible because they were only available in printed form. These papers could not easily be found because they were published in scientific journals that were kept in libraries of scientific institutions. Only dedicated naturalists knew of their existence. This is a pity because such old publications include many detailed species descriptions, including those that were new to science at the time of their discovery.

Contrary to popular belief, new species are usually not discovered during field expeditions but in museums and herbaria that house extensive collections and a special library dedicated to biodiversity studies. Without such reference material and the expertise of taxonomic specialists it is hard to conclude whether an unknown species is new to science or not. A good example consists of new sponge species recently sampled from Bonaire with the help of the Curasub, which is based at Substation Curaçao. These species were published in a recent issue of *Zootaxa*. The publication (Van Soest et al., 2014) was directly available online ([click here](#)). A recent overview of the gall crab fauna of Curaçao (Van der Meij, 2014) is also available via internet ([click here](#)).

Many old species descriptions in printed journals cannot be found on the internet. A short survey of this old literature revealed that many Caribbean species were originally described from Curaçao. Most type specimens that served as basis for the descriptions are presently housed in the collections of Naturalis because they were published by Naturalis scientists. The collections are part the cultural heritage of the Netherlands. The species descriptions were published in journals like “*Beaufortia*”, “*Bijdragen tot de Dierkunde*”, “*Zoölogische Mededelingen*”, “*Zoölogische Verhandelingen*”, “*Studies on the Fauna of Curaçao and other Caribbean Islands*”, “*Studies on the Flora of Curaçao and other Caribbean Islands*”, and “*Studies on the Natural History of the Caribbean Region*”. These journals can now be browsed via the repository of Naturalis Biodiversity Center ([click here](#)).

Hopefully, this access to old literature will help conservationist, naturalists, students and scientists to find and use information on the Caribbean fauna and flora, which is about much more than just the discovery of new species.

Van der Meij S.E.T. (2014) Host species, range extensions, and an observation of the mating system of Atlantic shallow-water gall crabs (Cryptochiridae). *Bulletin of Marine Science* 90: 1001-1010.

Van Soest R.W.M., Meesters E.H.W.G., Becking L.E. (2014) Deep-water sponges (Porifera) from Bonaire and Klein Curaçao, Southern Caribbean. *Zootaxa* 3878: 401–443.



Examples of historical dry and wet coral samples from the Dutch Caribbean in Naturalis.