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Ecological feast in Old San Juan [1]

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By Liz Yanira Del Valle / Special for El Nuevo Día endi.com [2] Don't even dream about seeing a ceiba, a real palm, húcar or an oak. This usually happens in parks or the Botanical Garden. Few imagine seeing a guaraguao or their strong opponent, the pitirre. How about the presence of many caterpillars on the branches of frangipani, the flight of the Galician gull, an encounter with a turtledove or a brown pelican? Visitors to the old city of San Juan usually focus their glance in the cats and the doves that are so abundant in the streets of San Juan. All these examples are integral part of the nature of the city that from the 2005 counts on an ecological route organized by the Conservation Trust of Puerto Rico (FCPR). The stroll starts in the headquarters of the FCPR (Ramon Power Giralt House) and concludes in the Plaza de Soportal, with a total of eight stops. Before going out, Glorimar Toledo, environmental interpreter of the FCPR, distributed instruments like binoculars, a list to write down the count of birds, and measurers of wind, temperature and humidity. In the Bastion of the Palms, Toledo offered an introduction of the geologic development of Puerto Rico and Old San Juan. With this story, she takes the participants back to the glacier era to explain the volcanic origin of the Island and the formation of its wooded hills. Soon, she explained the importance of cemented dunes (solidified sand) in the formation of the North coast of Puerto Rico, in specific the zone from San Juan to Arecibo. "The best example is the legend of the Stone Dog. When they segmented, these dunes allowed the entrance of the sea, an important element in the formation of the bay", she said. In Plaza de las Monjas, the guide summarized the urban development of the city during the colonial era and added data of general interest. "Dogs were introduced by the Spaniards to exterminate the crabs of mangle that where common in the zone. In 1519, the coconut palm was introduced and we recognize that the Street of the Christ was the first paved street in America." From the beginning, Toledo explained each subject without neglecting to identify each tree and bird seen during the walk. In the fourth stop, the Door of San Juan, the participants took a sample from the water of the bay to make several tests of nutrients, oxygen and salinity. "The oxygen minimum level should be 50% and we got 42% . Over-population of marine plants not only affects the amount of nutrients of the water, but also oxygen. When decomposing, these plants and seaweed consume a lot of oxygen. Also, the draining of hot water affects the oxygen levels – she said- talking about the return of the bay water of the bay used by the thermoelectrial plant of Cataño". The interpreter

mentioned that Old San Juan is considered one of the geographic areas of greater impact in the process of ecological transformation product of human activity and urban growth of Puerto Rico. The fifth stop marks is a pterocarpus tree that's on the way to the sculpture of La Rogativa. That stop is very amusing because it includes games. According to Toledo it is the most pleasant form to explain what the bird emigration process entails. In Ballajá, we analyzed with Toledo the results of the parameters taken during the route. The subject of the seventh stop, la Plaza de la Beneficencia, was the importance of urban sowing. The route is free although you need to make reservations calling to (787) 722-5844. Old San Juan also deserves to be remembered by the beauty and the value of its nature, and this one must be protected as much as its buildings.

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