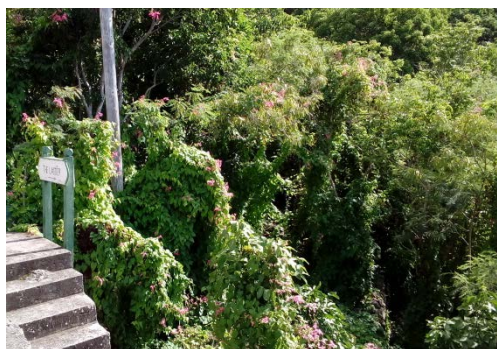


Coralita on Saba

The Unspoiled Queen's crown or veil of death?

The Coralita Girls on Saba
22 October – 28 December 2016



- *What is Coralita?*
- *Practical tips for managing*
- *What do Sabans think?*
- *Future plans*



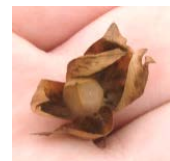
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Eight facts about Coralita

1. Coralita originally comes from Mexico, where the dry climate keeps it in check.



Coralita tuber and seed



2. Coralita has been on Saba from at least 1909, according to Boldingh's *Flora of the Dutch West Indian Islands*.

3. The roots can grow up to six feet deep, and the potato-like tubers serve as an energy storage.

4. Since the seeds are rather heavy, only very strong winds can carry and spread them.

5. The intestines of goats and

birds damage the seeds to such an extent that they're very unlikely to sprout once excreted. Therefore goats and pigeons are unlikely to spread Coralita.

6. The most common way of spread (next to creeping), is through clippings being moved around by wind or people. Even the shortest of clippings has a high chance of re-sprouting.

7. On Statia, pigs have been used to dig up the tubers, which they like to eat. Multiple Sabans have told us goats down in Fort Bay dig up the tubers, so experiments with fencing in goats in a Coralita patch could be worthwhile!

8. The elaborate root systems of trees are much better at preventing erosion than Coralita. When Coralita grows into trees and smothers them, erosion is even exacerbated.

Practical tips regarding Coralita

The tubers underground are not killed by weedwhacking. Superficial application of herbicide, such as Round-Up, will only kill other plants and give Coralita extra space to grow. The entire root with all the tubers needs to be pulled out, which becomes very hard to do once it's grown to 6 ft.'s depth. Therefore, immediate

removal as soon as it has entered the garden is crucial!

Saba's concern about Coralita

Coralita clearly has Sabans worried. The roots with tubers that grow 6 feet deep prove a real struggle when trying to remove them. Worse yet, when left unattended it will smother plants and trees, and many Sabans are familiar with the vine overgrowing their garden. In general, Coralita's speedy spread raises concern, and worry exists it will do irreparable damage to Saba's unique nature.

How do Sabans value their nature?

About twenty participants conducted a puzzle on nature values, to indicate how and when Coralita is a nuisance for Sabans. First and foremost, Coralita hampers putting to use the scarce and valuable land on Saba. Many people indicated they'd like to see villages Coralita-free, so gardens and public areas can be used for ornamental plants, fruit trees and vegetable



Mopsy Every with the nature value puzzle

gardens; a more worthy use of Saba's arable soil! In other areas it is doing damage to Saba's unique nature, by smothering the vegetation under a pink carpet. Coralita has already reached to Bottom Mountain trail and the Mountain Road; alarmingly high up on Mount Scenery.

The nature there is highly valued by tourists and locals alike. Many of the participants stressed the wish for The Unspoiled Queen to remain unspoiled, and worry that Coralita will alter her permanently.

How to move forward

We aim to support Saba in deciding on the best approach to Coralita management. Having spoken to people working in government, SCF and citizens, we see several ways forward that Saba could consider. One, zones could be established where action will be undertaken as soon as Coralita is found there. Participants suggested to let SCF and the community decide on these zones, for example covering erosion-prone areas, those valuable for agriculture and important nature areas. For example Tara's ground, Rendez-Vous and everything above 550 meters' elevation. Two, since Saba is vulnerable to more invasive species than just Coralita, an invasive species management plan would be appropriate. Such a plan could set priorities, distribute tasks and assign resources. Three, training for garden owners and farmers on how best to control Coralita was often called for by participants. We encourage Saba to further explore those options and would be happy to provide assistance in assessing pro's and con's!

What will we be doing?

Elizabeth is currently in Utrecht working with satellite imagery of Saba to determine where Coralita is growing. Jetske is leaving Saba the 28th of December to go to Statia, where she'll conduct similar studies as on Saba. Once this data has all been processed, we will start preparing our next visit to Saba, scheduled for the end of 2017. We will then probably be looking into concrete measures that could be implemented. This project will run until early 2019, which may seem like a very long time, but is not uncommon for scientific research. Data collection needs to happen in a very thorough manner, to make sure conclusions drawn are legitimate and robust. Therefore after each visit to Saba we will spend significant time back at university analysing,

processing and writing up our findings. Though it might feel like a long time before you actually see results from our work, we hope you will feel it was worth it in the end!

Sea & Learn – such a great opportunity!

Last week of October

Our stay on Saba couldn't have started any better! We participated in Sea & Learn, which offered us the opportunity to engage with school kids, who did a compass search and dug for tubers. The public lecture the 24th of October raised much response from the audience, offering us valuable views from Sabans on the Coralita problem. As scientists you don't often get to interact this directly with your audience!



Jetske and the Reach students

Debate at Lions club

6 December 2016

Jetske moderated a debate with the Lions club on Coralita with statements such as "Managing Coralita should be a community effort" and "We should decide on zones where no Coralita will be allowed to grow". The audience agreed everyone should be involved in Coralita management, and liked the idea of establishing Coralita-free zones. It was great to get their input and we would love to work with them in the future!

Who are we?

Elizabeth Haber and Jetske Vaas are both PhD candidates from Utrecht University in Holland. While Elizabeth's expertise lies with botany and satellite imagery, Jetske focusses on communities managing their environment. Jointly we work to help Saba decide how to manage invasive plant species, mainly Coralita.



Elizabeth examining a Coralita tuber

Contact us!

Feel free to contact us whenever you have a question, advice or story regarding Coralita. We are always interested to hear what you think and happy to help when we can. You can contact us through e-mail, phone or Facebook. We're looking forward to hearing from you!



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