



Coralita in Statia

The Golden Rock's crown or veil of death?

The Coralita Girls in Statia

28 December 2016 – 10 March 2017



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Eight facts about Coralita

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

2. Coralita has been in Statia from at least 1902, according to Boldingh's *Flora of the Dutch West Indian Islands*.



Coralita tuber and seed



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. Multiple Statians have told us about pigs digging up the tubers and roots, and as such doing the cleaning for you. Fencing an area in, weedwhacking it and then putting some pigs there for a period of time might thus 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 rate is even increased.

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 feet's depth. Therefore, immediate removal as soon as it has entered the garden is crucial!

Statia's concern about Coralita

When speaking with Statians, Jetske noticed that they are clearly concerned and annoyed by Coralita. 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 Statians are familiar with the vine overgrowing their garden. Also, people feel much valuable land is not being put to the best use by just having it covered in Coralita. Agriculture or native vegetation would be better to have there. In general, Coralita's speedy spread raises concern, and worry exists it will do irreparable damage to Statia's unique nature. On a positive note, many Statians indicated we should look at the potential of the vine: it is great for honey, and the tea made from it is nice!



On our Facebook page we have an album with pictures of Coralita devouring cars. Have a look!

Where do Statians not want Coralita?

About 50 Statians have indicated on a map where they don't want Coralita on Statia. We have put all those areas in one map, of which

you can find a high quality version on our Facebook page. Below we show a small version. As you can see, many people would like to see Oranjestad, the airport and the Quill Coralita-free. Also, multiple people worry about Coralita growing on the solar panel and want that to be kept free.



The pink areas are where people don't want Coralita. The brighter the pink, the more people indicated that area.

How do Stations value their nature?

About 25 participants conducted a puzzle on nature values, to indicate how and when Coralita is a nuisance for Stations. First and foremost, Coralita is a nuisance in your garden. Next to that, many people indicated they'd like to see Oranjestad Coralita-free, and instead have nice shady trees or fruit trees growing there. Stations also would like to see agriculture increase, and Coralita can both help and hamper that. Bees are fond of Coralita, so apart from making delicious honey, it is good for pollination of crops. On the other hand, if it overgrows your vegetable garden, that would be annoying. So key here is: keeping it under control! Nature is very important for Stations to relax

and unwind, and several people indicated that having Coralita everywhere makes them stressed.

How to move forward

We would like to support Statia in deciding on the best approach to Coralita. Having spoken to people working in government, Stenapa and citizens, we see several ways forward that Statia could consider. One, zones could be established where action will be undertaken as soon as Coralita is found there. Stations have clear areas in mind, as the map before showed, so they could decide on those themselves. Two, since Statia 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, one should think about what to put back in the areas where Coralita is cleared. Fruit trees, agriculture or trees that offer shade could be good alternatives. We would much like to help considering those options!

What will we be doing?

Elizabeth is currently in Utrecht working with satellite imagery of Statia to determine where Coralita is growing. Jetske will return to Utrecht the 10th of March, and start processing the data of the interviews she did. Once this data has all been processed, we will start preparing our next visit to Statia, scheduled for early 2018. 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 Statia 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!

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 Statia 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. We're looking forward to hearing from you!



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