

## **Who are we? What is the mission of PHA Pterocarpus Forest, Inc. – *The Friends of the Pterocarpus Forest?***

The 55-acre Pterocarpus Forest, one of the largest of the few remaining swamp forests in Puerto Rico, overflows with biodiversity in the heart of Palmas del Mar..

A group of volunteers, The Friends of the Forest work to ensure that this rare ecosystem remains accessible -- in perpetuity -- **to the people of Puerto Rico and visitors to the island** for passive recreation, environmental education and research.

For the past 10 years, the Friends have sought the funds and other resources for educational and public benefit projects that promote awareness of and knowledge about this unique ecosystem, as well as funds with which - for the benefit of the public - to conserve this nature preserve; maintain an up to date Forest's website, presence on social media, on-site interpretative signage (including an on-site “tour app”).

A **new catalogue of the flora, fauna, fungi and other organisms that inhabit the Forest** has been underway for the past year, thanks to the efforts of university professors and hundreds of volunteer students of all ages. The results have been startling! While a 2010 baseline study conducted by Forest-partner **Para la Naturaleza** identified only 44 species of flora and 52 species of fauna, ongoing research by professors and students has revealed 125 **new** species in 2023 alone!

As a result of the research, the creation of the new virtual catalogue has become a priority, as it is central to our environmental education mission. We envision having an illustrated, bilingual, and user-friendly digital catalog, showcasing the Pterocarpus Forest's biodiversity online in the first quarter of 2024! Crafted with ongoing university-led investigations, this catalog will highlight valuable information and images of the flora, fauna, fungi, and other organisms discovered within the forest.

The Friends, in collaboration with the Palmas Homeowners' Association, the Puerto Rico Conservation Trust / Para La Naturaleza, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service and other committed parties – and hundreds of individual donors - began the restoration of the forest in 2010. Our efforts made it possible, in less than 5 years, to turn a devastated and moribund environment that had suffered decades of neglect (particularly since Hurricane Georges in 1998) into a lush and vibrant ecosystem and a unique ecotourism destination.

Thanks to the collaboration of the Palmas del Mar Homeowners' Association, funds have been traditionally made available to physically maintain the 3/4-mile elevated boardwalk, rest areas, observation tower, visitors' center, and other facilities.

The Friends of the Pterocarpus Forest, also known as the *Amigos del Bosque de Pterocarpus* (incorporated as PHA Pterocarpus Forest, Inc.) are a group of citizens committed to the conservation of the *Pterocarpus Officinalis* forest at Palmas del Mar, in Humacao, Puerto Rico.