My name is Marvin; I am 11 years old and a student at River Sallee Government School in the parish of St Patricks in Grenada. My family has been living in this area for as long as my grandfather remembers. Sunday afternoons are my favourite, spent with my grandfather learning about the mystical stories about the Levera area. Some say that there are monsters hiding in the depth of the pond, some others say that there are spirits in the woods. Now that I have participated as an environmental ranger with the Ramsar project, I know that the big red bird he is talking about was in fact a Scarlet Ibis and that the mermaids in the pond were Manatees. Both species are now extinct in the Levera area and I am very sad that I will never be able to see them for myself. I am also scared that some of the species that I now see in the area will not be there when I will tell stories about them to my children. This is why I want to tell you the story of the Ramsar project and share with others the importance of protecting our natural sites that I learned to appreciate.

Before I started as an environmentul ranger, I did not even know that Levera was a Ramsar site or what Ramsar was. The leader of the rangers told us that Ramsar is a city in Iran where a conference was held to protect wetlands around the world. Levera was selected as Grenada’s only site to be protected under this convention. That made me really proud to think that my grandfather’s hunting ground was discussed in a place so far.

The site really needed some help - because of Climate Change, the wetlands of Grenada are at risk but they also have important qualities such as protecting our communities from heavy weather events. As a result, the Ramsar site was selected as a recipient for a grant from the United Nations Development Programme Integrated Climate Change Adaptation Strategies (UNDP ICCAS) Project, under its Community Climate
Change Adaptation Fund. My grandfather told me so many times of the decline of the area. So many species that he used to hunt, fish or harvest were not to be found again. The Ramsar project aimed at collecting information about the species present in the area so that this information could be compared to historical studies made several decades ago and bring tangible data for decision makers to take action to protect the area.

In order to collect this data, the project trained over 50 local community members like me, a student, but also adults, like my uncle. There were some challenges in working with the local community members. Some of them did not have any knowledge of the environmental terms such as biodiversity or even the real name of the species in the area; some people did not even show up so our teams were smaller than expected. Also the leader ranger thought that data collectors could also input the data in the computer but most people did not have any computer skills. To overcome these challenges the project had to set about building the capacity of the community, which created delays but at the same time had a great educational impact. In order to gain the technical expertise to identify the species, the project had to rely on experts but this was not easy either because experts are busy, they cost a lot of money and often, they are not in Grenada.

But the project did not stop there it extended its commitment to build awareness to children though involvements of schools. Eight schools, including my own in River Sallee, were invited on field trips to the site to learn about it and the project also gave presentations to the other schools within the parish. The project partnered with a local NGO, Ocean Spirits, to include the Ramsar site information in their turtle awareness classes. I am lucky to live near the site because Levera is located at the most northern tip of the island, which did not make it easy for any of the other schools in the country to visit due to their heavy curriculum and the duration of the journey to travel up the island. I hope that one day the other kids will also get to learn about the natural riches of our country.

Hopefully, the nature trail, that was cleared and marked, as well as the interpretation boards, that the project installed to make the area more attractive as an eco-tourism destination, will motivate some of those kids families to come on weekend visits. Soon there will even be flyers and a map available at the visitor’s information centre for people to know about all the great work we have undertaken. The project installed an additional eleven large billboards around the area and the country to advertise the site - there is one of these at the airport to welcome foreign visitors – and other boards are information boards about the nature around the site. Sometimes it was not easy because the site is away from main roads and the installation team did not expect to have to go off-road. They were not happy and that made me laugh to see St George people struggle in the mud!

The local community is very excited about the prospect of seeing more visitors to the site. This offers the opportunity of alternative livelihoods now that their traditional income through fishing and hunting has become unsustainable. They also realise, and they have witnessed first-hand, that the site needs more protection from further degradation but it is not easy for them to change their habits and they are afraid that this project will bring about more stringent rules about
hunting and fishing in the area. Some people understand it and in the end, it will be showing them that the site has more value to them when kept pristine and rich in biodiversity.

The lead ranger is still working on the recommendations but I hope that the project will achieve the Marine Protected Area status for the coastal zone and that there will be regulations on fishing, hunting and harvesting, especially the mangrove for making charcoal. Most excitingly, they talk of having rangers maintaining and interpreting the site. Maybe when I grow up, this could be me!