

The University of the West Indies vegetation survey team for the ecological baseline survey took the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) for a test flight on Tuesday 4th October, 2016. The Project Officers happily accompanied them to the Mike De Freitas Radio Control Flying Field in Frederick Settlement to see the UAV take flight.



It was remarkable to see that this UAV was unlike your typical aerial drone. There were no overhead propellers, but rather two foam wings which made it more like a glider, reminiscent of the paper planes one would make in primary school.

After numerous checks and balances were done, the UAV was ready for takeoff. Interestingly enough, the UAV was launched almost in a sling shot manner. Once in the air, it automatically took flight and its motors engaged. The computer nearby, which gave its current status on elevation and location, was able to program the UAV in the exact flight path it should take before deployment.

It was astonishing to see that the UAV did not require piloting to the points of interest. It simply utilized its GPS system to auto-pilot. The camera attached to the UAV would take aerial photos at set intervals in order to eventually create a mosaic of the entire landscape in question.



Landing that UAV was a bit of an oxymoron; once the UAV is commanded to descend and reaches a certain elevation, it deploys a parachute which is its

only “landing” mechanism. It seemed quite a contrast to the pilotless flight to which we were just privy.



Having completed the test flight successfully, the drone will now be deployed to capture the vegetation composition in six pilot sites for the baseline survey. Training on the use of the drone will be a next step for continued monitoring after the project.



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Pictoral schematic on UAV launch