

Roatán Marine Park Newsletter

July and August 2010 Highlights



Welcome back Grazzia



Having spent the past 6 months in Germany studying Environmental Management, we are happy to welcome back Grazzia to the RMP. Sadly however, Wendy, who has been running our schools education program for the past 5 months has had to leave us.

Marine Infrastructure Update



The channel entrance to Gibson Bight has had a major overhaul with 5 new markers and a solar beacon installed. Moonlight and the El aguila had new mooring lines attached, in addition to some of

the dive sites between Key Hole and Flowers Bay.

Photo competition results



With over 220 entries from 40 competitors, it was tough for the judges to choose the best photos in all 6 categories. To see all the entries and winners from this year and 2009, please visit our [Facebook](#) page.

Lionfish Update



With so many divers hunting the lionfish around the island, the next step in the eradication program is to visit the local communities and introduce them to the idea of catching and eating them.

Education



A total of 1,073 students, from 6 schools were visited by our staff and volunteers, with almost half of the kids being taken on the glass bottom after their talks.

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Introduction

The second half of the year is well underway and so are our new projects and improved patrols. The RMP has had yet another change of staff this month. We would like to thank Wendy for her great work coordinating the Education Program for the past 5 months; she is now in Tegucigalpa but will hopefully return to us next year. We would also like to welcome back Grazzia who returned from her studies in Germany ready for new challenges! We wish you happy readings of the RMP July-August newsletter.

Patrols

Sandy Bay West End Marine Park Patrols



Conch and lobster confiscated in Sandy Bay

In the past two months, there were 15 incidents which resulted in the arrest of 8 individuals and the fining of 2 others. In addition, a minor was made to empty the recycling bin in West End. A total of 5 masks and fins, 4 gaffs, a 400ft net, and a fish pot were confiscated. We also seized 23 lobster, 7 fish, and 60 conch, 8 of which were later released.



Over 30 juvenile conch smashed near AKR



Gill net confiscated in Gibson Bight

While the use of nets, other than cast nets, has been illegal within the Bay Islands for quite some time, it appears that it's not general knowledge for some. One day, David, our Ranger spotted several men setting a large gill net in Gibson Bight and promptly arrested them. It turned out that the man responsible for the net was an informant for the RMP and recently received the net from a relative on the mainland. Pleading ignorance, it was agreed that the men would not be punished as long as the net was removed promptly from the island.



Fish trap found by our Rangers near Mud Hole

In addition to nets, fish pots and lobster traps, with the exception of those for industrial lobster fishing on the Banks, are also illegal throughout the Bay Islands. The RMP receives reports of fish pots and lobster traps from concerned divers and fisherman every month. This month, we discovered a large fish trap and several small, home-made lobster traps constructed out of pieces of chicken wire. The smaller traps were destroyed on site while the larger trap will be sent to DIGEPESCA for demolition.

South Side Chapter Patrols



Suspected poachers searching for conch and lobster near Brick Bay

As per usual we've been having problems with the police not showing up for work, but despite them playing hooky and strong easterly winds, our boat captains have still been able to operate daily patrols. Due to a family crisis, our boat captain Crist McKenzie, is currently unable to work so a temporary captain, Richard Alvarez, has taken over. On his first weekend working, he arrested a person in possession of 6 small lobsters, bringing the total number of items confiscated to 7 juvenile lobster, 4 spears, 4 conch, a hook and a lobster trap. We have been receiving reports of people going out poaching at night, we have sent the Frontier Police to inspect, but have been unable to catch anyone just yet.

Infrastructure

Gibson Bight channel renovations

With the Honduran Independence Day only weeks away, that can only mean that the Annual Fishing Tournament is just around the corner. Over the weekend of September 17th, dozens of fishing boats will amass in Half Moon Bay for the annual tournament. While many of the fishermen are from the islands, others have travelled from the mainland or further afield and will require a safe harbor for their boats. The new marina in Gibson Bight will be offering its services to competitors and requested that the RMP help demarcate the channel. After renovations, there are now 6 markers, 3 green and 3 red, indicating safe passage into the bight. A solar powered beacon will be added to a marker shortly, bringing the total number of beacons within the SBWEMR to 5.



Six new channel markers indicating the entrance to Gibson Bight

Education

Trip on the glass bottom boat



For some children, this is their first glimpse of the reef that surrounds their island

The RMP has been working with the glass bottom boat in West Bay for over 4 years. Since April 2010, our staff and volunteers have visited 11 schools from around the island and lectured to almost 2,000 kids. From those, over 700 have been fortunate enough to see the wonders of Roatán's reef first hand. When visiting schools, we teach the students about the reefs, its inhabitants and their importance, as well as a host of environmental subjects. To reinforce the importance of the reef and the fact that they're the guardians of this fragile ecosystem, we provide them with an intimate view of the coral, fish and other strange marine creatures. As they load onto the boat, the kids are excited about their adventure ahead. For some, this is the first time they'll experience the wonders below the waves. Even though they live on an island, many can't swim or have ever seen coral. Their first view is the vast expanse of seagrass inside the lagoon, and then as they near the channel, with faces pressed against the glass, the reef slowly materializes before their eyes.

With every turtle, barracuda, eel, and ray they see, their curiosity about the reef and its inhabitants grows.

Each trip on the glass bottom boat is a new adventure and a memorable experience for the kids. We are very proud to provide this opportunity to Roatan's youth and would like to say a huge thank you to Mario and John who operate the glass bottom boat. If you are interested in the RMP visiting your school and taking your students to see the reef, please contact us at info@roatanmarinepark.net

Recycling in the schools

As mentioned in June's newsletter, the RMP hosted a recycling competition between Arobia Welcome School in Los Fuertes and Santos Guardiola School in Coxen Hole. The winning school was to receive 1,000 lempiras to go towards the construction of a green house. Since both schools did such a good job, collecting almost twenty-five 55 gallon bags of plastic bottles per school, the competition was deemed a tie. The prize money was split between the two schools, who are continuing their recycling efforts. With help from Serranos Hardware, all the plastic bottles collected will be delivered to the Municipal Dump each week for recycling.



Students displaying the bags stacked full of plastic bottles at the Santos Guardiola School

Waste management being taught in the schools

During July and August, our staff and volunteers visited 6 schools and addressed a total of 1,073 students. The main topic of focus during these visits was solid waste management, which included information on the recycling of PET-1 plastics, how garbage affects the environment, and classification of waste into organic and inorganic matter. We visited all the students in the 7th, 8th and 9th grade who attend classes in the morning from Guardiola School. After our waste tutorial, the students were fortunate enough to be taken on the glass bottom boat in West Bay. We would like to thank all our volunteers, Monica, John and Annick, who spent their time visiting schools and taking the kids on Mondays to West Bay.



A volunteer teaching the kids from the Guardiola School

Meetings and Workshops

AGRRRA monitoring course



Attendants of the AGRRRA course celebrate finishing

The RMP was invited to attend an AGRRRA (Atlantic and Gulf Rapid Reef Assessment) course held in Cayos Cochinos on August 24th-31st. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce a new protocol for monitoring fish, benthic organisms, and corals to conversationalists who could then apply this knowledge to surveying the Bay Islands and else where in Central America. The developers of the AGRRRA protocol are Judy Lang, founder of www.ourreefs.org and coral specialist, and Ken Marks, the copy editor for the Florida, Caribbean and Bahamas Reef Fishes, Corals and Creatures book.

In addition to Licario Zepeda and Jenny Myton from the RMP, representatives from other environmental organizations from Honduras, Belize and Mexico participated in the course. The hope is to foster unity in developing regional efforts for reef conservation.

Fisherman Alliance

A meeting was held at the RMP office between our staff, Waleska Henriquez from DIGEPESCA, and several members of the Fisherman Alliance. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss recommendations and ideas to promote a sustainable fishery within the Reserve. The fishermen were extremely concerned that people are exploiting the natural resources with a total lack of consideration for sustainability. They mentioned how populations of some species have been declining over the years and suggested the RMP and Fisherman Alliance work together to introduce a conservation tax where, as in other countries, tourists and locals would pay to use the Marine Reserve.



Meeting with DIGEPESCA and fishermen at the RMP office

Roatan Fishing Tournament 2010

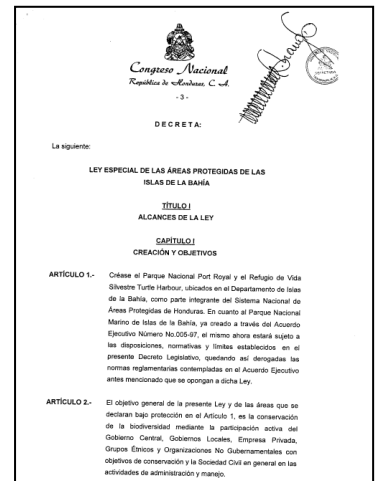


A huge billfish in all its glory

The Roatan Fishing Tournament will again be taking place this September. Several meetings have been held at the Municipality to coordinate this year's regulations for the tournament, which include the release of all billfish below 700lb (the local record for Blue Marlin is 708lbs). A leaflet containing the rules and regulations within the Marine Park will be given to every contestant the day of registration in order to keep everyone informed about the do's and don'ts.

Legislative Decree No. 75-2010 “Special Law of the Protected Areas of the Bay Islands”

After 13 years of studies and efforts to declare the whole of the Bay Islands a Marine Protected Area, Congress has finally approved the Legislative Decree No. 75-2010 “Special Law of the Protected Areas of the Bay Islands” in July. However, several questions have risen among the population, including the meaning of this new law and how it will affect development on the island. A meeting attended by the mayor of Roatan, Julio Galindo, congressman Romeo Silvestri, ZOLITUR’s director Ricardo Merren, lawyer Italo Tugliani, representatives from the Chamber of Tourism, and community leaders was held in the Municipality in August. Sadly, many people still don’t understand the importance of declaring protected areas and that development in a sustainable way should be a must not only on Roatan, but around the world.



Meeting in ZOLITUR: Advances in Recycling Microbusiness



For nearly two years we have been writing about the plastic recycling micro-business which will be a pilot project for the whole of Honduras. After another meeting with ZOLITUR, we are happy to say that the launch of the project is now closer than ever. All that remains is the construction of the recycling facility next to the dump in Mud Hole and the purchase of the 300 recycling bins which will be placed in strategically chosen places throughout the Municipality of Roatan. A meeting with the private sector will hopefully be scheduled for September to coordinate the funding of this important project and finally get things started.

Community Development

Coral Reef Leadership network

Juan Valla and Arley Brooks, representatives employed by CORAL to spearhead the Coral Reef Leadership Network, have been busy this month meeting with two groups of mini bus drivers and tour guides from Mc Tours. They addressed a total of 53 people and discussed with them how they can promote sustainable practices with their customers at work. It’s essential that cruise shippers and other visitors to Roatan are informed about the fragility of the reef and that even during a brief stay on the island, they can have a huge negative impact.



Tour guides from Mc Tours meet with CRLN representatives

CRLN meeting with the dive shops



Representatives from the RMP and CRLN meet with Reef Gliders’ owners and staff to discuss voluntary standards

For the past few weeks, the RMP has been visiting dive shops with CRLN representatives Christi Etches and Serena Moscati. The purpose of these meetings is to introduce owners, managers, and staff at the dive shops to voluntary standards for diving, snorkeling and boat use. With over 20 dive shops operating out of West Bay, West End, and Sandy Bay, it is imperative that these shops brief their customers correctly on protocol to minimize their impacts on the reef. In addition to introducing/reminding about the voluntary standards, Nick discussed what the RMP has been doing this year, how dive shops can help, the lionfish program, and about operational costs and sources of funding.

Public Awareness

Lionfish problem persists

It appears that the lionfish are here to stay and all we can do to control their numbers is continue to actively hunt them on dives and while snorkeling. With over 100 official spears distributed throughout the diving community, we are making a small dent in their population, however to really make the project island wide, we must now focus on educating local fishing communities outside the Reserve. Quick note, we now have spare rubbers for the slings and to make the prongs smaller, we use hose.



Sling with a hose over the prongs to make shooting small lionfish easier

Photo competition



We would like to thank all those who entered our third annual photo competition. A big thanks as well to the judges, Doug Hayes, Cesar Rodas, and Devon Stephens. We received over 220 photographs from approximately 40 competitors, with the winning entries to appear in the RMP 2011 calendar which should be available in October. With 6 categories, and 1st-4th place, as well as honorary mentions, there are too many winners to name; however below is a shortlist of the 1st place winners. Congratulations to all the winners and thank you again to all those who entered.

Mickey Charteris' winning shot of a lynx nudibrach

1st place in black and white was Mickey Charteris with an eagle ray. 1st place in divers was Vivian Weber-Pagel with a juvenile seahorse entitled "Seahorse Surprise" taken on West End Wall. 1st place in reef inhabitants was Liz Wayne with a golden tail eel in a sponge taken at Calvin's Crack. 1st place in invertebrates was Kathy Dole with a ruby brittle star taken at Overheat reef. 1st place in macro was Mickey Charteris with a lynx nudibrach taken in West End. Finally, 1st place reefs at risk was Tim Blanton with "Out of time and space" taken from the shoreline at Brick Bay on the South shore of Roatan.

Wrapping things up



Daily beach cleanups

Due to lack of funds, August was the final month that the RMP will pay for the daily beach cleanups around Los Fuertes and Brick Bay. The problem of trash gathering on the beaches still persists and will continue doing so unless the root of the problem is properly addressed. We must educate the inhabitants of Los Fuertes that the sea is not a dumping ground and their garbage needs to be disposed of properly.



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We have a **Facebook** page which we post a host of relevant links and photos. Stop by, check it out, and become our fan to receive updates and invites. So far we have over 2,750 fans. Recommend us to your friends and let's break that 3,000 mark!



Our newsletter is sponsored by Roatan Life Real Estate & Roatan Life Vacation Rentals. Roatan Life will donate 10% of net commission earned on the sale of any property or any vacation rental to the RMP if the customer mentions that they saw Roatan Life on the Marine Park Newsletter. Please contact Roatan Life for all of your real estate and rental needs at www.roatanlife.com and www.roatanlifevacationrentals.com or +504-445-3130 or from the U.S. at +1-970-300-4078.

Grazzia, Nic, Wendy, Cesy and Licario

