

Roatán Marine Park Newsletter

March 2010 Highlights



New Director of Education

We would like to welcome our new Director of Education and Communications, Wendy Naira. She is from Tegucigalpa and will be committed to educating the youth of Roatan on climate change and how they can reduce their carbon footprint.



SBWEMP and RMPSS Patrols

We confiscated 5 spears, 4 tanks, 4 lobster, 3 masks, 2 fins, a BCD and a regulator from the South Side and 50 live conch, 7 masks, 2 spearguns, 2 spears and a gaff from within and around the Reserve.



Marine Infrastructure

We have been busy working on installing new yacht moorings adjacent to Luna Beach with funds from Project AWARE, maintaining the boat exclusion zones in West Bay, and fixing dive mooring lines that were damaged during rainy season. A new solar beacon was also installed in West Bay.



Lionfish Update

367 lionfish were reported of which 287 were killed. Coconut Tree Divers had the most within the Reserve with 49, followed closely by Native Sons with 42. More than 4 people were stung pretty badly.



Manatee spotted

A manatee was seen by several dive shops both within the Reserve and near French Cay. We are currently looking for the animal as we are worried that it may be hurt or starving.

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Introduction

The RMP has been without a Director of Education and Communications since Grazzia left almost 3 months ago. After much searching, we have hired Wendy Naira, who will be spearheading both the schools education program and the Responsible Seafood Campaign. Sadly, however, we must say goodbye to our Administrator, Sandy Castillo, who worked with us for almost a year. We wish her the best at ZOLITUR and hope this may enable us to strengthen our ties with the organization.

Patrols

Sandy Bay West End Marine Park Patrols



Items confiscated near Palmetto after a patrol there

The past two months have been relatively quiet with only four incidents resulting in the imprisonment of four people. The first capture was due to the vigilance of a dive shop in West Bay who noticed suspicious behavior from two people near Bite on the Beach one evening. After calling the office, the patrol was dispatched and two men were found with several large lobsters and a speared fish and were incarcerated for 24 hours. The second incident involved a man and a woman found in Sandy Bay with 30 conchs in their dory. The people were taken to jail and the conchs were relocated to a safer area further within the Reserve.



Thirty conch confiscated in Sandy Bay

Luckily, the Marine Park doesn't have the pleasure of arresting tourists too often. Every now and then, however, we come across law-breaking holiday makers who plead ignorance to the Reserve's regulations. One afternoon we received a call from workers at the Meridian reporting two Americans with spear guns. The ignorant kids drove their rental car to the Meridian parking lot and brazenly went snorkeling, spear guns in tow, with every intention of catching dinner. Fortunately, our patrol arrived before they were able to spear anything and confiscated their spears and snorkel gear. They were also fined and sentenced to community service in Sandy Bay, collecting trash on the beach. If only they had bothered to read any of the signs and posters the RMP has scattered around the island. Luckily no fish were harmed due to their ignorance.



Spearguns and snorkel gear confiscated from tourists

South Side Chapter Patrols



Confiscated tanks and dive gear

This month our patrols focused on the Cordelia Banks due several reports of poaching and shark fishing. We confiscated a total of 5 spears, 4 tanks, 4 lobster 3 masks, 2 fins, a BCD and a regulator. On March 15th, our patrols encountered a fisherman with dive gear and lobster on his boat, even though lobster season is closed. The police confiscated the equipment and the fisherman received a final warning. A local reporter was filming everything and gave



The lobster which caused the problem

the video to a local TV station. The reporter claimed the RMP is unduly confiscating products from artisanal fishermen, and since it was an open forum on TV, people began to complain. After hearing of the broadcast, the Southside Chapter director called the reporter and scheduled a meeting. He explained what happened as well as the laws regarding lobster fishing. The reporter apologized for misinforming the public and has invited us and DIGEPESCA on his show which is to be aired at the beginning of April.

Infrastructure

West Bay Project Update



Polystyrene buoys demarcating the swim zones in West Bay

Since the recent installment of the multiple swim zones in West Bay, the project has received predominantly positive feedback from both business owners and tourists. The boat exclusion areas have provided safe areas for swimmers, especially during the cruise ship days when visitor numbers and boat traffic swell in West Bay. The project has encountered several teething problems since installation, with disagreements on location of boat channels, boats disregarding the exclusion areas, and others tying onto the lines. Most of these have since been resolved. Having survived several storms in recent weeks, the RMP feels confident that with routine checking and maintenance and additional holding blocks placed along the perimeter, the swim zone will stand the test of time.

Yacht Mooring Program

In March, the RMP received funding from PADI Project AWARE to assist in the renovation of the yacht moorings in the lagoon between West End and West Bay. The project will incorporate the installation of twenty, double sand screw moorings, and the introduction of a mandatory fee which visiting yachts must pay. Through the support of the Municipality, the RMP will introduce a mandatory fee of \$15 per day or \$70 per week which must be paid by the cruisers. In addition to this, new by-laws state that yachties must surrender all spearguns to the RMP for the duration of their stay, dye tablets be placed in holding tanks to ensure no illegal sewage dumping or leaks, and no anchoring is permitted. The additional revenue from the fees will not only provide the funds to employ a Park Ranger to patrol the yachts and West Bay 7 days a week, but also ensure sustainability of the project. After several meetings with the West End Patronato, it was agreed that 50% of gross earnings, once salaries, fuel and maintenance have been covered, will be donated to West End. Projects which are to be funded by this include renovation of the trash receptacles, assisting in the construction of a new school, and much more. Finally the residents of West End will feel that the yachties are truly giving back to the community.



Yacht using a buoy in the mooring field near Luna Beach

Education

Visiting the schools



1st grade students all wishing to answer the question posed by our volunteer Krissia

We are pleased that with every passing day, people on the island are becoming more concerned about the environment and how to protect it. That's why the staff at the RMP has taken it upon themselves to teach first graders from around Roatan the importance of coral reefs.

The continued interest in environmental education, especially among the teachers and students, has inspired us to continue our classes to students between the 1st and 6th grade. The main topics are the 3Rs (recycle, reduce and reuse), the importance of the reefs, and garbage disposal and pollution. We also plan to hold a beach cleanup with the seniors as part of their social work.

Meetings and Workshops

Meetings in Tegucigalpa



Meeting with ICF to present our cases

In February, our Southside Director traveled to Tegucigalpa to meet with ICF who are responsible for Protected Areas in Honduras. He met with Eula Dominguez (Chief of the Department of Protected Areas) and Andres Alegria (Monitoring and Biological Investigation) to try and declare Banco Cordelia a Protected Area and proposed for the RMP to acquire co-management. The declaration is pending as the ICF want to address other protected areas first, and then address the Cordelia Banks. He also met with Gabriela Pineda (Executive Director of DIGEPESCA) and Eloisa Espinoza (Director of the Department of Investigation and Technology) to review the Lionfish agreement, the Patrols and Research Agreement, and the Shark Legacy Project on Roatan. The

Minister of The SAG is expected to sign the Lionfish agreement as well as the patrols and research agreement with DIGEPESCA in coming weeks.

The founders of the Shark Legacy Project (SLP), in conjunction with the RMP, attended a meeting at the Institute of Tourism. Other attendees included Nelly de Ochoa (Director of Planning and Product Development), Juan Meza (Director of Strategic Planning and Sectorial Politics) and Gilda Ordoñez (Official of Environmental Management in Coastal Marine Spaces). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the SLP and the advances they have made so far. The Honduran Institute of Tourism is very interested in supporting this initiative to protect sharks through valorization and sustainable use practices.



Licario meeting with the Institute of Tourism

Inspections

Inspection in Dixon Cove channel



Diver inspecting dredged site

One morning the office received several phone calls from people saying they heard explosions that must have come from Mahogany Bay. The rumor was that the cruise line was expanding the channel using dynamite and that something needed to be done immediately to stop them. Several phone calls later, we found out that it had been nothing more than a rumor, however to make sure, an inspection was held. Divers saw no signs of detonation, just the dredged area proposed in the Mitigation Measures. Though we do not agree with what has been done, we did not find anything that was not in the original environmental license.

Community Awareness

CORAL Reef Leadership Network

The joint initiative between the RMP and CORAL is striving onwards, having trained over 300 tour guides and taxi drivers about coral reef ecology and Roatán island history since September. In an effort to lessen the impact of massive tourism, the guides and drivers are informed that in comparison to the rest of the Meso-American Barrier Reef System, Roatán is one of the healthier reefs in our region and is something to be proud of and worth protecting. In addition, the project has taught people first aid.



First aid course for CRLN leaders

Public Awareness

Manatee spotted within the Reserve

In mid March, the RMP received a report from West End Divers of a manatee sighted near Gibson Bight. The following days it was spotted again in front of Mangrove Bight and in the lagoon to the west of Half Moon Bay. Hampered by bad weather, the whereabouts of the approximately 8ft adult were unknown until the following week when divers from CocoView Resort spotted it near the French Cay banks. The most recent report has placed the manatee back within the Reserve near Anthony's Key Resort, but once again bad weather has prevented the RMP Park Rangers locating the animal.



Photo of the manatee taken by Mickey Charteris



Propeller scars along the back of an adult manatee

A debate about what to do with the animal has started between local divers and conversationalists. Some consider this as an indication that manatees could be returning to Roatán, while others feel that the animal is disorientated and possibly starving and must be relocated to the mainland. Many years ago, manatees did exist around Roatán, however with the destruction of a vast majority of mangrove and brackish areas, the island no longer offers suitable habitats to accommodate these animals. Steve Box from the Utila Center for Marine Ecology has indicated that sightings of manatees off Utila are rare but not unheard of. The geography of Utila with vast areas of brackish waters and mangroves is by far more suited to manatees than Roatán. In

addition, Utila is only half the distance from the mainland than Roatán, so traveling the 20 miles may be more manageable. What we are most concerned about is the possibility of the manatee being hit by a boat, especially during high traffic times like Semana Santa and cruise ship days.

The majority of manatees found in Honduras are located at the Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge, located 33km from La Ceiba. The Refuge was named after the two rivers, Cuero and Salado, that come together to form a large estuary on the Caribbean Coast. It was created to protect the endangered manatee population and claims to accommodate 10% of the entire world population of manatees. Other wildlife present include jaguars, ocelots, boas, alligators, howler and white-faced monkeys, 198 different species of birds, and an abundance of fish life. We can only assume that the manatee came from the Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge, and with breeding season currently underway, it should be returned to its origin.



Map indicating location of the Refuge



Photo of a healthy, rotund manatee

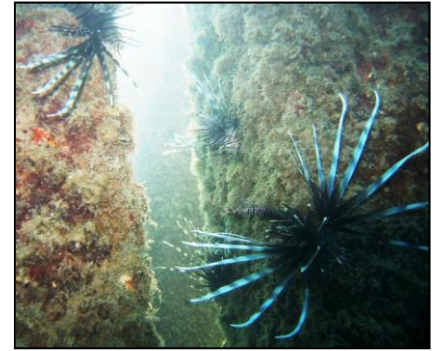
The RMP has been in contact with Dr. Baird Flemming, a local animal specialist, who in turn contacted Dr. Robert Bonde, a biologist at the [Southeast Ecological Science Center](#) where they conducts long-term, detailed studies on the life history, population dynamics, and ecological requirements of the West Indian manatee. He stated that manatees are historically rare in Roatán as the habitat is not very good for long-term support. He suggested collecting the animal and sending it to an appropriate site with good habitat and protection. He requested that if caught, we collect a small piece of skin and perhaps some blood to extract DNA from, in addition to placing a radio tag on the manatee before release. All we can do now is stay vigilant and hope we can find

and relocate the animal before it is hurt or starves. Please contact us immediately if you see this or any other manatees!

Lionfish developments

The Roatan Marine Park has continued its Invasive Lionfish Control Program throughout February and March, receiving a total of 367 lionfish reports, of which 287 were killed. Coconut Tree Divers had the most reported kills within the Reserve with 49, followed closely by Native Sons with 42. Many dive shops around the island are participating in the program but many fail to log their sightings and kills. Subway Water sports in Turquoise Bay haven't kept details but estimate that they've killed over 80 in the past month, with their dive masters spearing up to 6 fish per dive.

After speaking with dive shop members, most agree that since the implementation of the spears, there has been a reduction in frequency of lionfish sightings at many dive sites. This is great news and we are optimistic that our control program is working in areas frequented by divers. The RMP has continued to expand the program to other regions of the island to hopefully control the lionfish population in the less visited lagoons. In addition to running our lionfish program here on Roatan we have also had inquiries from several NGO's including one in Tela who requested information about our program in hopes of implementing a similar strategy to help control lionfish along the coast. The Utila Center for Marine Ecology on Utila has also begun a similar control program.



Lionfish congregating in Brick Bay



Peter's swollen hand after his 25th lionfish fought back

The RMP would like to remind all dive shops participating in our program to please be properly prepared in case of accidental stings. There have been several incidents in which divers have been stung by lionfish in recent weeks. Depending on individual physiology and amount of venom released, personal levels of reaction vary. The worst to date is Peter Coyne, who while attempting the triple (3 fish on one spear) was stung and didn't receive treatment for over 2 hours. This is a reminder that dive shops should carry proper first aid treatment including aspirin based pain killers, not Tylenol, as well as hot water to immerse the inflicted body part. A simple solution to acquiring hot water is to place a wet rag or towel on the boat engine or use the engine cooling return water on outboards.

Wrapping things up

Fundraiser

After the screaming success of the fundraiser in August, we decided the best way celebrate the RMP's 5th birthday was to do it all again. Hosted by BananaRama resort in West Bay, we had a Birthday Beach Bash complete with food, games, auction, raffle, and lots of booze. With your help, we managed to raise over \$5000. A big thanks go out to BananaRama, all those that donated to the raffle and auction, and lastly to those who attended. We couldn't have done it without you!



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.roatanlifelvacationrentals.com or +504-445-3130 or from the U.S. at +1-970-300-4078.

Nic, Wendy, Matt and Licario

