

Roatán Marine Park Newsletter

March 2011



Patrol summary



There was only one incident in the SBWEMR, however our Patrol Boat from Barfeoot Cay travelled all the way to Little Pigeon Key in search of fishermen from the mainland. They confiscated a net but didn't find the guilty parties.

Lionfish Update



New record for the longest lionfish is 36.2cm, caught in just 45ft at El Aguila by Joshua Alpert from Native Sons. Also, Adam from Luna Beach reported witnessing a moray hunt a lionfish in a hole and coming out with the fish in his mouth. We have definitely noticed declines in numbers since the derby.

Education



Over 300 kids from different schools throughout Roatan's south shores learnt all about recycling and reef conservation this month. With our Director of Education returning next month, we look forward to a busy next few months with the kids.

Clean ups



There were 10 individual cleanups which took place this month, meaning that dozens of bag loads of trash were removed from communities from all around the island. Thanks to all that took part and please contact us for those wishing to participate in cleanups after Semana Santa.

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Introduction

Every once in a while our staff are approached by the general public and congratulated on our efforts. It's certainly not as often as we'd hope but we're not in this conservation game for the recognition. This month we were told by a yachtie who sails around the region that the SBWEMR is the only place she's visited in recent years where you can actually see the improvements in marine life abundance and coral cover. Whether its conch, lobster or large fish, she noted that the RMP has actually made a difference to the area. We hope that our readers also notice all our hard work and appreciate the results themselves.

Patrol

Sandy Bay West End Marine Park Patrols



Masks, lobster and a speared fish

There was only one noteworthy incident in the SBWEMR in March, with 2 individuals apprehended in Sandy Bay with lobster and a speared fish. The two had been reported poaching from a dory the evening before but our patrols had missed them by literally minutes. The next afternoon, they were out on the water again and it was a simple process of apprehending them. The men had moved from Oak Ridge to Sandy Bay that week and denied knowing that spearing or taking lobster and conch was illegal. They had borrowed the dory from a Sandy Bay resident and were simply trying to feed themselves. After explaining the rules and regulations and informing them if they're caught again they would spend 24 hours in jail, they were sent on their way but without their gear or catch. While most people caught by our Patrols deny knowing the rules, we felt that these two genuinely didn't have a clue.

The dory was finally collected by its owner two weeks later after being informed that if he didn't collect it immediately, it would promptly be cut up and turned into a planter for the shop front.



RMP Ranger on board the BICA boat with their captain

As mentioned in February's newsletter, our Rangers are now operating alongside BICA in a joint effort to patrol Sandy Bay. To increase efficiency, as well as decrease fuel consumption, the RMP boats are spending more time between Gibson Bight and West Bay, while the BICA boat has been assigned Sandy Bay. This has resulted in an increased presence in West Bay during cruise ship days and a reduction in incidents in Sandy Bay. With only one incident mentioned this month, several possible incidents were averted due to individuals calling in and the patrols reaching before anything could be removed. With the RMP boats spending

more time in West Bay, we were able to begin preparing for Semana Santa with boats being registered, abiding to regulations and not speeding. If we can get all the water taxis, dive boats, fishermen and charter tours on the same page, we can hopefully prevent any unnecessary incidents this Easter.

South Side Patrols

After receiving a report that fishermen from the mainland were living on Little Pigeon Key, fishing out everything in the vicinity, we sent our patrols to Roatan's far east to apprehend those involved. With choppy seas, it took Richard over 2 hours to reach the Key from Cocoview Resort. Accompanied by police from Oak Ridge, they searched the island and found a large campsite the fishermen had inhabited for the past week. Water bottles, Dramamine pills, cooking stoves, old refrigerators used for sleeping quarters, hammocks, even the remains of a shark, the key was full of evidence but sadly no fishermen. With restricted gas, they were unable to search for the 4 fishing boats which apparently set nets all around Barabareta, however they were able to confiscate a gill net which they found at the camp.



Policeman searching the fishermen's camp site on Little Pigeon Key

For the next few days our patrol boat attempted to check the key but due to weather they were never able to. The following week the cold front arrived and the heavy rains removed any chance of catching the culprits. After talking to several tour operators, we found out that this wasn't the first time that fishing boats from the mainland have camped on the key and killed all the conch, fish, turtles, sharks and other marine life. We hope that the next time these fishermen return to Roatan, we can coordinate apprehending them with the assistance of the seaplane and several boats and confiscate all their nets before they do further damage to this pristine area. If you do see anyone on the keys, please contact us immediately so we can stop any further killing of marine life.



Dot indicating the location of Little Pigeon Key all the way to the east of Roatan, just to the south of Barbareta

Infrastructure

Yacht moorings in West End



Yacht mooring field between West End and West Bay with over 20 visiting vessels moored up

The yacht mooring field in front of Luna Beach has been running close to 90% capacity for the past few months, with boats sometimes having to anchor in allotted sandy areas during really busy periods. To simplify the process of informing new vessels on mooring fees and checking people have paid, we've employed the services of a Host Vessel to be responsible of these chores in return for free anchorage. This year we've been accumulating the money generated from the mandatory mooring fee and after meeting with the West End Patronato, we've finally decided what to spend the funds on. Other than the obvious maintenance of the yacht moorings which is a necessity to ensure the sustainability of the project, it was decided that the school in West End should be provided with a photocopying machine, the swim zone in Half Moon Bay be constructed, and that the Patronato should be officially registered under the Municipality. We hope for the rest of the season it will remain as busy so we can accomplish other projects needed to be addressed in West End.

Education

Science Fair at ESBIR in Coxen Hole

Like every year in March, an exhibition of science projects was carried out by children of the ESBIR School. The topics for the projects varied between biology, environmental science, chemistry, physics, health, microbiology and more. The RMP was asked to be a judge at the Fair and evaluate the projects from the 3rd grade. We would like to congratulate all those that competed and to this year's 3rd grade winning projects which were Roatan's endemic Iguana and the making of compost.



School groups from ESBIR

Schools from the South Side learn about reef conservation

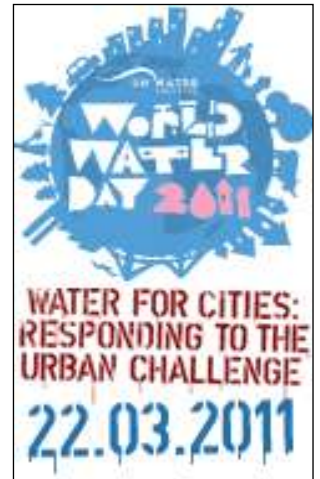


Kids from the Punta Gorda School

Because environmental education should reach children not only within the SBWEMR but all around the island, several visits were made to schools in Punta Gorda, French Harbor, Brick Bay and Oak Ridge this past month. Reef conservation and recycling were the main topics taught and hopefully the kids learnt a lot from our staff and volunteers. With our Director of Education, returning next month, our education program will return with more force.

World Water Day Roatan Youth Debate

Each year on March 22nd, United Nations World Water Day aims to increase public engagement in addressing water-quality issues and the conservation of water resources. On behalf of this important day, Key Hole Bay/ACME Sanitation organized a Model United Nations Youth Debate in Roatan coinciding with the day. The debate took place at Infinity Bay Conference Room and had the participation of several local 8-11 grade students and local experts who informed students about current water issues. Students were divided into four topic-based groups and special presentations were made by the experts. The RMP was invited to attend the event and Grazzia presented on the topic *Pollution and the Marine Environment*. Students from this group made an excellent debate on the importance of this topic and proposed good solutions to a panel of judges. As a result, this was the highest scoring team and won.



Career Day at the Sandy Bay Alternative School



In order to inspire the children of the Sandy Bay Alternative School on what to become when they're older, the school organized Career Day where students learnt about different job choices. Grazzia attended and made a presentation about her work with the RMP and talked about everything from a typical day at work, to responsibilities and which school subjects were important for this job. Hopefully this will encourage students to get involved with marine conservation in the future.

Meetings and Workshops

MAR Leadership Workshop

The Mesoamerican Reef Leadership Program (MAR Leadership) is a joint initiative run by the Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature with support from the Summit Foundation. The Program strengthens local leaders capable of developing projects that bring solutions to the main threats facing the coastal-marine ecosystems of the region. Around 24 leaders from the whole Mesoamerican region along with special guests were in Roatán this past month. An important point in the agenda of the workshop was a presentation about the importance of the Cordelia Banks and what the RMP has achieved in regards to this. A field trip was made to the site followed by a visit to Punta Gorda and of course the whole group was delighted by the beauty of the reefs in Cordelia.



Grazzia presenting about the Cordelia Banks at the MAR workshop

Inspections

Inspection in Barbareta



Marina illegally constructed on Barbareta

Not only are resorts, marinas and cruise ship docks within Roatan and Santos Guardiola visited by SERNA for environmental licenses, but also projects located further afield. After two years of having requested their environmental license, the marina in Barbareta was visited by SERNA along with the members of the local SINEIA (National System of Environmental Impact Assessment), integrated by representatives from RMP, BICA, ZOLITUR and environmental unit from the Municipality of Roatan. An inspection was conducted around the island and the results: mangrove cuts, wildlife in captivity, wall on the beach, dredging, fillings in the wetland and sea and a road around the island, all with no permits. Fines look likely for these infringements but who knows?

Joint inspection with ZOLITUR to the North and South bands

With the purpose of documenting the state of the ecosystems on the coastline of the north and south bands of the island, a joint inspection was made by the RMP and ZOLITUR on board our patrol boats. The main findings were new mangrove chops close to the area of Mud Hole, stealing of sand from Camp Bay and a boat grounding near Jonesville. All these cases were forwarded to the authorities and as always, all we can do is wait and see what happens.



Boat aground near Jonesville

Conservation

Volunteers helping with beach clean-ups

As we've always said, work at the Marine Park is endless, therefore volunteers are always welcome with open arms and a big smile. We should probably name March the official month of volunteers and clean-ups as this month over 10 island wide clean-ups were organized all thanks to the help of more than 45 volunteers from Minnesota, University of North Carolina, Mesoamerican Reef Leadership Program, Janita Sluurman and Eric from Native Sons, Donna Pieracini, Heather Sawyer, Jerry Argueta and last but not least, Alejandro López.



Volunteers from University of North Carolina



Trash was removed from Sandy Bay, Gravel Bay, Flowers Bay, beach between West End and West Bay, El Berrinche, Punta Gorda and Oak Ridge.

Construction of Eco Conservation Center



Stacks of sand filled plastic bottles constructed to replace concrete blocks

For many years a group of women from the community of Gravel Bay have been working on the construction of an Eco Conservation Center out of plastic bottles. The plan is to build a center that can be used to give trainings. Due to lack of both human and financial resources, this has been a dream for the community, however, thanks to the support from the volunteer group from the University of North Carolina this is closer to being achieved.



Volunteers collecting sand

Crime Scene Investigation workshop held on Roatan



While many have seen the tv shows, few know that coral reef CSI is an important feature in legal cases regarding environmental incidents such as boat grounding, anchor damage, and spills involving oil or other pollutants. Biologists and conversationalists from around the Mesoamerican region traveled to Roatan to learn about this new and exciting course. While biologists are great at collecting data, few know the legally correct method in collecting and documenting evidence. This course taught attendees this and much more and hopefully with this new found knowledge, environmental incidents can be correctly documented and the guilty parties prosecuted for their crimes.

Public Awareness

Earth Hour 2011 in Punta Gorda



Drumming with the community of Punta Gorda

Punta dance, selling of crafts, bonfire, fire dance and lots of eco tips were part of the celebration of Earth Hour in Punta Gorda on March 26th. Turn the lights off, turn on the planet, was the phrase for this year. Several candles were turned on at the beach for one hour with kids from the community. Singing and dancing of traditional songs, were the best things to do to



Local handicrafts made in Punta Gorda

celebrate this day! As part of the event, a crafts workshop was organized with the kindly support of Yula.

Water Taxis Association

As a follow-up to the grant received from CORAL for the strengthening of the Water Taxi association, the RMP provided a sign to the association this month. Now that Semana Santa is around the corner, they will get more business and should have a sign to go with their new uniforms. In addition to this, a meeting was held between our coordinator of patrols, Barie, and members of the association to discuss important issues regarding speed limits. Fines have already been imposed and we hope fewer problems will be presented this year during busy Semana Santa.



New sign at the water taxi dock in W.E.

Wrapping things up



Win a week of diving at Anthony's Key Resort

[Anthony's Key Resort](#) has kindly donated a "Diving Package for One" to the Roatan Marine Park which includes 1 week hotel accommodation, 3 meals a day, 3 single tank boat dives per day and much more. Tickets are only \$50 each with all money going to the RMP. To find out more, please visit our [website](#).



Become our fan on Facebook

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 3,630 fans. Recommend us to your friends and let's break that 3,750 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.roatanlifelvacationrentals.com or +504-2445-3130 or from the U.S. at +1-970-300-4078.

As always, we would like to thank all our supporters and volunteers for the help they've given us in the past month. If you have any comments or suggestions, feel free to email us at info@roatanmarinepark.net. For more information, please visit our [website](#) or stop by our offices in Half Moon Bay and Barefoot Cay.

Grazzia, Nic,
Arlene and Cesy

