

Roatán Marine Park Newsletter

September 2010 Highlights



International Cleanup Day



Dive shops, school kids, volunteers and many more participants took part in this year's International Cleanup Day which was held on the Monday after Independence Day. We would like to thank all those that participated & made it a success.

Marine Infrastructure Update



Several dive mooring on the north shore and on the western end of the island were renovated this month. Also, new mooring at Mary's Place and near Key Hole Bay were installed to accommodate for bad weather.

Education



This month, RMP staff focused on the Toribio Bustillo School in Mud Hole. 65 kids of all ages received lectures on the reef and other pressing topics. The kids were also taken to go on the glass bottom boat in West Bay to see the reef first hand and participated in a cleanup around Mud Hole.

Roatan's first catch and release tournament



We would like to congratulate the organizers of this year's annual fishing tournament which was for the first time catch and release for billfish. All 14 marlins caught were safely re-released.

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Introduction

Roatan has had an unusual month weather-wise, first with the close call of Tropical Storm Matthew followed immediately by the early onset of rainy season. Lucky for us, things at the Marine Park have been running as smoothly as usual. Our Park Rangers and policemen have been tirelessly patrolling while Grazzia has been busy with beach cleanups and school visits. Nick and Licario, meanwhile, has been busy installing new yacht and dive moorings and renovating existing ones on the Southside to prepare for onslaught of dive boats during rainy season. And just in the nick of time! We hope everyone had a great Independence Day. Enjoy the RMP September Newsletter.

Patrols

Sandy Bay West End Marine Park Patrols

September was a relatively quiet month with only 3 incidents resulting in the arrest of 2 individuals. Another person was forced to collect trash around Half Moon Bay due to lack of substantial evidence. All the incidents involved conch, and half of the confiscated conch were released back into the ocean unharmed. Another incident occurred on the evening of Tropical Storm Matthew's impending arrival. The RMP office received a radio call from a sailboat with engine trouble in need of a tow. With the storm looming, the patrol boat was dispatched to tow the stranded sailboat over 7 miles back to the safety of Roatan. We would like to Reef Gliders which also sent a boat to assist us in the rescue.



The conch that we confiscated and rereleased

South Side Chapter Patrols



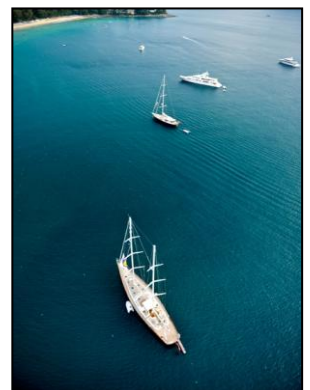
Confiscated masks from suspected poachers

Despite rainy season's early arrival, the patrols have been out on the water the majority of the month, only missing a few days. Even though we made no arrests this month, the patrols remained busy. During one instance, police confiscated 5 masks, 1 pair of fins, and 2 snorkels from a group of people standing on the reef, with spears in hand, looking for conch. The police also cut several anchor line from fishing boats found anchored on the reef. Our patrols struggle to monitor such a large area with just one boat. To combat this, the patrolling area is broken up into smaller sections and assigned priority ranking. The sections are from Coxen Hole to Brick Bay, from Brick Bay to Parrot Tree, from Parrot Tree to Calabash Bight and Port Royal.

Infrastructure

Renovation of marine infrastructure

The Marine Park staff and volunteers were busy in September installing new yacht and dive moorings and renovating existing ones. The most time consuming project was the installation of a new yacht mooring to accommodate large vessels in calm weather in West End. The mooring consists of a 7 foot, double wedged sand screw and a partially buried 1500 pound concrete block. The mooring line is connected to a chain that runs to the block and then the sand screw, making it safe for large vessels. Many dive sites on the Southside, including Sponge Garden and Caribe Point, were renovated for rainy season. We will also be installing several new moorings on the Southside in the coming month. As more shops are diving on to the Southside to avoid the bad weather, we ask you to please report any damaged or missing mooring you might encounter.



Yachts using moorings

New mooring at Mary's Place

Mary's Place is probably the most famous and most popular dive site on Roatan. A management plan was established in 1997 to protect this unique dive site. As part of the plan, a limit of one dive per diver per vacation was established though rarely enforced, making Mary's Place one of the most crowded dive sites on Roatan. As many as six dive boats at a time can be found at Mary's Place, especially when the weather is unfavorable on the north side. To ease the congestion, the RMP installed another mooring approximately 300 feet away from the first buoy. This will allow 2 dive boats with a maximum of 15 divers each to enter the site every 20 minutes. This should hopefully alleviate some of the overcrowding at this site.



Four dive boats at Mary's place, highlighting overcrowding

Education

Mud Hole School



Kids from Mud Hole on the glass bottom boat

In September, a total of 65 children took part in the RMP education program. The RMP, with the help of Duane and Barb from Upachaya, contacted the principal of the Mud Hole School and planned our first visit in several years. Our fun yet educational activities taught the kids about reef



The RMPs first visit to the school for several years

conservation, the three Rs (reduce, reuse, and recycle), proper garbage disposal, and a host of other relevant topics. After the school visit, the children were taken to West Bay to go on the glass bottom boat. The kids were extremely lucky to go out on the water and see the reef when then did as that Monday was the beginning of a seemingly endless northerly which we have been experiencing. Now that we are in contact with the school, we hope to visit them more in the future.

Meetings and Workshops

Cordelia Banks



Huge stands of acropora at the Cordelia Banks

We are extremely happy to see that an initiative that started several years ago is finally taking shape. Located off the south coast of Roatan, adjacent to the airport, is the Cordelia Banks, a sanctuary for the coral species *Acropora cervicornis* and other important reef species such as the shark *Carcharhinus perezii*. In 2009, documents were presented to the appropriate authorities requesting that the Cordelia Banks be declared a Marine Protected Area. Several talks and meetings have been held with different organizations and governmental entities since 2009 to establish formal management of this treasure. This month the RMP has continued talks with DIGEPESCA, WWF, and CORAL to discuss other issues including organizing meetings with fishermen and other community members,

as well as the zonation and demarcation of the Cordelia Banks.

Roatan Fishing Tournament 2010

CONGRATULATIONS FOR ORGANIZING THE FIRST
BILLFISH CATCH AND RELEASE FISHING TOURNAMENT ON ROATÁN

This tournament was a significant step forward in conserving these species and raising public awareness about the importance of SUSTAINABLE FISHING PRACTICES.

Not only does this place Roatán on the conservation map, but it also creates an open invitation for international catch and release fishing tournament recognition.

We wish to express our sincere congratulations to all parties involved, especially the Municipality of Roatán, the Fisherman's Association of Roatán, the board of directors of the fishing tournament and all other participants and volunteers.













As mentioned in last month's newsletter, the eleventh annual Fishing Tournament took place on Roatan. This year, however, was very different from previous years as, for the first time ever, Catch and Release was implemented for all billfish. Of the 14 marlins caught, we are happy to say that all were released safely. Together with all the other organizations involved, we would like to thank all of those who made this possible and hope next year is even more successful.

Public Awareness

Cleanup of Creek in Mud Hole



Kids working on removing trash from the creek

RMP representatives and the children of Toribio Bustillo School in Mud Hole had a busy day on September 25th, International Cleanup Day, tidying the creek in Mud Hole. The children were separated into teams and bag loads of garbage were removed from the creek. Having been taught about the problems caused by trash on the reef, this was a great first-hand lesson for them to see the impacts of poor waste management. The clean up highlighted two important facts: trash can accumulate water that provides mosquito breeding grounds which can lead to dengue and malaria and also that clearing trash is a difficult job so it's best not to litter in the first place. We would like to thank Barbara Wastart from Upachaya for making this activity possible and for donating all the school supplies given to the children as rewards for their good work in the cleanup.

Plastic Bottle Collection



Bag loads of plastic bottles collected in the schools

Though the Recycling Micro business is still not up and running, the RMP continues to encourage kids to separate their garbage at school. For the past few months we have been promoting plastic bottle recycling at Arobia Welcome in Los Fuertes and Instituto Santos Guardiola in Coxen Hole. Once a week the kids are responsible for collecting and separating the PET



Serrano truck collecting bottles from West End

bottles which are then transported by truck to the Municipal dump. We would like to thank **Ramirez Water** and **Insular Water** for donating the plastic bags and **Serrano Industrial** for their continuous support every Thursday in the collection and transportation of the plastic bottles from the schools to the Municipal dump.

International Cleanup Day

Every year, the RMP holds a beach and underwater cleanup coinciding with the International Cleanup day promoted by PADI Project AWARE. Here on Roatan we organize our Cleanup day after the festivities of Independence Day and the Fishing Tournament as so much trash is left behind. This year, in addition to the dive shops, we included 32 kids from the Instituto Santos Guardiola in Coxen Hole to help clean West Bay. We would like to say a huge thanks to all the dive shops, staff, and volunteers that participated. Thanks also to Henry Morgan, Mayan Princess, and Mayan Divers which provided materials, equipment, and refreshments for the kids.



Kids and volunteers collect trash in West Bay

Dive regulations for the south side

After meeting in August with dive operation representatives from Coco View Resort, Fantasy Island Beach Resort, Barefoot Divers, and Anthony's Blue Lagoon, the RMP was able to construct a list of dive regulations for the south coast of Roatan. Here in the list:



Divers at Mary's Place

- All boats must have a VHF radio and inform the RMP on which VHF channel they are on.
- Boats or persons that wish to dive in the area that are not dive operators must use a dive operator.
- Under no circumstances will a dive boat abandon their divers at sea.
- Do not cut across the stern of trawling or fishing vessels.
- No other vessel should come within 300 ft of a vessel flying a "Divers Down" flag and 300ft from reef without:
 - Contacting the captain of the vessel on the mooring and obtaining permission to enter the area;
 - Establishing if / where divers are in the water, so they can be avoided by the approaching vessel;
 - Ensuring that the vessel's propellers are disengaged.
- Don't tie directly to the mooring line. Leave enough scope, depending on weather conditions and location.
- There must be no more than one vessel tied to a single mooring. Having more than one vessel on a mooring jeopardizes its stability and poses a threat to divers in the water.
- If a vessel is approaching a site where another dive boat is preparing to leave, the arriving vessel must wait until the last diver is out of the water before approaching. Only after the vessel has disengaged from the mooring line can the arriving vessel tie up to the mooring. If someone is waiting and a 3rd boat arrives, it must wait in line for the 2nd boat or find another dive site.
- A limit of 1:30h time on each site per boat or dive operation on every site.
- In a drift dive the boat has to be outside of the wall following bubbles or surface marker buoys, the captain has to be focused on following the divers at all time.
- Always use surface marker buoys when doing drift dives.
- Only experienced dive guides can lead a dive.
- Guides must give dive briefings about all the possible hazards on the dive site.
- Guest may not use gloves while diving, just for safety stop, or wreck dive. You can keep the gloves or knife in pockets if needed. Dive guides may use gloves and Hawaiian slings for killing lionfish.
- A maximum of 15 divers, including the dive guides, are allowed per boat in Mary's Place.
- A maximum of 30 divers in Mary's Place using the 2 dive moorings.
- Wait 20 min after the first boat drops in Mary's Place.
- Don't dive the cracks at Mary's Place at night.
- The dive guides make the final decision on who enters the cracks at Mary's Place.

Please make sure your dive shop owner/manager is informed of these new regulations !!!

Honduras and Palau ban shark fishing

The presidents of Honduras and the Pacific island nation of Palau signed a declaration which calls on the other countries of the world to ban shark finning. President Johnson Toribiong of Palau declared his nation's waters as the first sanctuary for sharks last year while Honduran President Porfirio Lobo Sosa banned shark fishing in February 2010. Toribiong and Lobo called on other countries to establish shark sanctuaries and ban shark finning, the practice of cutting off the fin and returning the shark to the water to die. Scientists estimated that up to 100 million sharks are killed annually for a globally unregulated and unsustainable shark-fin trade worth up to \$1 billion per year. Despite the dramatic decline in shark populations, the member nations of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) voted against a proposal in March to protect several species of sharks.



Reef shark at Cara Cara on Roatan's south shore



Meeting to discuss plight of the shark

The World Conservation Union lists 50 out of the 400 species of sharks as vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered though the actual number is estimated to be closer to 100 species. Most of these shark species are so overexploited that their long-term survival can no longer be guaranteed. Wildlife experts say there are now fewer than 3,500 great whites left in the oceans, making them rarer than tigers. The USA has recently outlawed shark finning but a full ban on all shark fishing is needed from all countries if populations are to recover. While a moratorium may be in place in Honduras, fishermen must be informed of the ban and the penalties enforced.

Coral Reef Leadership Network

The CRLN program is still continuing, with the intention of visiting every dive operation that dives within the Reserve in the next few months. The project focuses on introducing dive shop owners, managers, instructors and dive masters to diving, snorkeling and boating voluntary standards established by CORAL. It is to ensure that all dive shops are on the same page regarding standards, etiquette etc and that their customers are informed sufficiently about the Marine Park and its activities. The program also offers a free environmental walk through if owners care to know how environmentally friendly their shop is.



CRLN meeting at a dive shop to discuss standards

Wrapping things up



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 2,900 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.roatanlifelvacationrentals.com or +504-445-3130 or from the U.S. at +1-970-300-4078.

Grazia, Nic, Cesy and Licario

