

June 2008 Newsletter



Introduction

In June, the community of Roatan really showed its true colors by raising over \$7500 for our friend in need, Lidia Salinas. She was involved in a hit-and-run accident which left her with a compound fracture of the femur, a shattered lower leg, and a serious infection. We would like to say a huge thank you everyone that helped raise these funds! Check our website for full details of the incident and the fundraising efforts.

Patrols



We were surprised that there were no arrests this month, even with morning, lunchtime and evening patrols. This is either an indication that the patrols are acting as a deterrent or poachers have adapted and become less conspicuous in their actions. Either way, with both engines now running smoothly, allowing the boats to make their patrols, we hope that our captains will continue to make a difference out on the water.

Every month the Marine Park office receives numerous calls from concerned residents regarding suspects performing illegal activities on the water. It is reassuring that people believe in our cause and find it their duty to report misdemeanors. This being said, it is important that the Marine Park rules are explained to avoid unnecessary alerts. The Bay Islands have general rules and regulations to help conserve the environment but failure to enforce these laws has sadly meant that unsustainable practices have been occurring. To combat over-fishing, a major problem throughout the islands, laws have been established in an attempt to revive fish, turtle, lobster, and conch stocks. Listed below are these laws:

- Within the Park and throughout the Bay Islands, it is completely illegal to harvest conch. Four boats do have special "research" licenses to collect conch from the Roatan Banks, meaning that unless a restaurant has purchased their conch from these authorized suppliers, the conch on your plate is illegally harvested. Across is a photo of a conch graveyard on Roatan.



- Lobster season is between July 1st and February 28th, and only those that have permits can collect legal sized lobster (tail length greater than 14.5 cm) from the Roatan Banks. Restaurants are permitted to sell lobster of legal size only during season. Sadly, restaurants here only stock undersized tails as all legal sized lobsters are exported to the US market.



- The use of spearguns, harpoons, and nets is prohibited throughout the Bay Islands. Cast nets, though technically illegal, are permitted as they pose a limited threat to the coral and fish.

- Line fishing is permitted throughout the Marine Park and can be done from the shore, docks, and boats. We do discourage line fishing from shore and within the lagoon as it removes both juvenile and adult reef dwelling species.



We always appreciate people calling the office to report misdemeanors, so here is what to look for when looking out on the water for suspected poachers:

- People walking into the water with bags, spears, spearguns, or gaffs;
- People snorkeling not only during dawn and dusk but throughout the day who repeatedly duck dive to collect organisms;
- People setting nets, and generally people who are acting suspicious.

When you do see something out of the ordinary, please call the office on channel 16 or 445-4206/08, immediately so we can respond in order to catch the culprit(s).

Meetings and Workshops

Each month the RMP staff is invited to attend a variety of meetings and workshops which focus on marine protected areas and species management, coral reefs, and environmental legislation, to name a few.

Nature Conservancy Workshop:

A workshop concerning reef resilience, the ability of coral reefs to absorb, resist or recover from disturbances or to adapt to change, was sponsored by The Nature Conservancy. During the workshop it was agreed that it was essential to establish Alert Groups within Roatan's dive shops to identify coral bleaching.



A simple monitoring protocol will be introduced to dive shops so they can identify bleaching events. Divers will be in charge of monitoring coral health and the information gathered will be transferred to an Early Response Team



through the RMP. Coral reefs that have been able to recover after experiencing a stressful event such as bleaching will also be identified by the Early Response Team. In addition, resistant reefs, or reefs that remain relatively unchanged in the face of a major disturbance or bleaching event, will be identified. Adjacent is an example of an *Agaricia* coral colony, with the photo on left

showing the colony bleached while the photo on the right shows the coral almost recovered.

Sea Turtle Conservation Workshop:

There are no longer any nesting beaches for sea turtles within the Marine Park due to all the constructions and artificial lights on the beach. Luckily, sea turtles still nest on numerous beaches in Honduras, especially Barbareta and Utila in the Bay Islands, La Moskitia, Tela, and several beaches along the Pacific Coast. A workshop sponsored by the Cayos Cochinos Foundation was organized with the intent of establishing a national network so conservation groups can exchange experiences and discuss different issues regarding sea turtles. The RMP was able to present all the work currently regarding sea turtles, including education of school children, raising public awareness, confiscations and releases, and a compilation of sightings.



Turtle Release



In April's newsletter we discussed the confiscation of a Hawksbill turtle that had been kept as a pet in a 55 gallon drum in Coxen Hole for approximately four years. The turtle was initially relocated to Blue Ocean Reef under the supervision of Dr. Baird Flemming, but was then transferred to the Iguana Farm where Sherman Arch kept a watchful eye on it.

After two months of rehabilitation, the turtle appeared stronger and healthier and was ready for its release. It was deemed safest for the turtle to be released within the Sandy Bay West End Marine Park, so after spending an evening in the salt water pool at Land's End, it was time for the turtle to return to

the wild. Before his release, the turtle had a thorough visual inspection, scrubbed clean, and then using a file, was marked on the shell for future identification.

With a small crowd gathering on the beach and support snorkelers in the water, it was finally time for the turtle to taste freedom, something that would not have been possible if we hadn't been tipped off by an un-named source in the community and through the co-operation of the Municipal Police. We ask that if anyone else sees any animals illegally held in captivity, please contact our office and we will do all that is physically possible for their release.



Education

World Environment Day took place on June 5th and the Marine Park used this occasion to reach out to the children in the local community by hosting a variety of events throughout the week. This was the first time we have celebrated World Environment Day at the Park and hope next years' will be bigger and better.

- **Drawing contest:**

The first Annual Environmental Drawing Contest was held between children from the Public and Alternative Schools in Sandy Bay and the West End School. The kids had lots of fun expressing their thoughts about the environment as did the visitors we had at the Marine Park Shop who served as the judges. There were over 100 entrants from all age groups which provided us with some great pictures. Congratulations to all the winners and we look forward to next year's competition when hopefully more schools will participate.



- **Mangrove transplantation:**



Although Tree Day was on May 30th, we decided that it would be fitting to plant the mangrove seedlings which had been potted outside the office last year on World Environment Day. Using the children from the West End School, the seedlings were planted in front of Ocean Connections Dive Shop in West End. Firstly the kids were taught at school about the

benefits and functions mangroves and the importance of protecting them and then taken to the site to clean up the area and plant the seedlings. Unfortunately we were very disappointed to find out two days later that someone had maliciously ripped out the majority of the newly planted seedlings!

- **Sandy Bay Alternative School**

Also taking place on World Environment day was a presentation for the kids at the Sandy Bay School. After the children were informed of the importance of the coral reef, recycling, and the mangroves, they were then taken on a guided snorkel tour of Half Moon Bay.

- **Camp Bay School:**

As mentioned in previous newsletters, our school's education program has expanded to incorporate schools on the other end of the island. On June 4th, we were visited by the children from Camp Bay who we took on the Glass Bottom Boat. Even though 95% of the kids from this school are native islanders, most of them had never seen a coral reef



before. Even though the ride was a bit bumpy, the kids still enjoyed and learned a lot from their visit. We will like to thank Jimmy from Las Sirenas in Camp Bay, Anna from Marble Hill Farms and all the parents for making this visit possible.

Inspections



Park staff attended a total of 11 inspections this month with eight focusing on permits for new developments while three were answering complaints from the public. The first complaint involved a new cell phone company from El Salvador that is about to start operating in Honduras. It was noted that they chopped down several trees near Crawfish Rock in order to install an antenna without having any

permits. On the other side of the island in Politilly Bight, it has been reported that lots of mangroves were being cut down and the wetland was being filled-in. Several months ago BICA presented this complaint to SERNA and the Fiscalia, yet nothing has been done regarding the matter. Only time



can tell how this matter will be resolved and whether the offending parties are fined. Finally, there has been talk that the developers of Pristine Bay Beach Resort near Crawfish Rock have commenced construction of a marina, even though they had not been awarded a permit. Upon inspection, there were no signs of a marina under construction and it has been made very clear to the developer that they are not allowed to build one.

Regarding the environmental licenses for new developments, inspections were made in Sandy Bay, West Bay and Santos Guardiola. Recommendations and mitigation measures were presented to SERNA by the Roatan Marine Park and the rest of the SINEIA (Environmental Impact Assessment National System) team.

IDAMHO visit:

Over recent years we have sadly discovered that environmental crimes are hard to address using local means. Due to this reason, we have made alliances with other organizations to address these problems. More than eight months have passed since several complaints were presented to the Fiscalía for mangrove clearings, so it was deemed necessary that a member of



IDAMHO (Honduran Institute of Environmental Legislation), ELAW's (Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide) branch in Honduras, visited the island. He was here to make an inspection to the different sites that have been disturbed. These places include the mangrove clearings at Mud Hole, Flowers Bay and Caribe Point in Santos Guardiola. By involving new organizations with more political power, hopefully these crimes can no longer continue unpunished.

Roatan Marine Park Southside Chapter

Patrols:

The RMPSC patrol boat is back in the water after its recent paintjob and can be seen patrolling each day between Dixon Cove and the Cordelia Banks, all the way to Oak Ridge. Recent confiscations have involved people using spear guns and Hawaiian slings, and persons collecting conch and lobster. As yet no one has been jailed as they are trying to raise awareness throughout the community before arresting culprits.



They are currently warning people, but after the first caution repeat offenders will be sent to jail for 24 hours. If you do see any suspicious actions occurring in and

around the reef, please contact Licario Zepeda on 3260-8370, or the boat captains on 9712-0693.

SAND

The mooring project has yet to commence as we've received no response from the people from S.A.N.D. (Strong Alliance for Native Development). We are however looking for other options for financing the moorings through private sector companies. For now we have started to monitor the current moorings to see which need maintenance or replacement.

Turtle Project

The RMPSC is starting a new project with Dr. Stephen G. Dunbar, director and founder of the non-profit organization: Protective Turtle Ecology Center for Training, Outreach, and Research (ProTECTOR). This group has been working with turtles in the Bay Islands for 3 years and is coordinating a turtle monitoring program with



dive operators around the island and the RMP. The program will compile reported sightings of turtles from dive operators and also include the capture and tagging of adult turtles. "We don't know anything about where turtles are coming from to mate here in the waters of the Bay Islands, and we don't know where they go when mating and nesting season is finished. To find out, we plan to tag some of the adults with satellite tags and follow their movements over time," says Dunbar. "The satellite tracking will help us understand areas that are critical to the turtles that nest in Roatan, and where these areas intersect with fisheries. This is important information for the management and conservation of turtles throughout the waters of Honduras". Please visit ProTECTOR's website at www.turtleprotector.org/TAPS/TAPS.htm for more information.

Wrapping things up

Well that's pretty much it for this month. Please keep depositing your plastics and aluminium (that is how it is meant to be spelt, check the Periodic Table) cans in the collectors for recycling, as in June we received over 330lbs. Special thanks go to Barry Pope from Reef Gliders who so generously donated us his Mercury 4 stroke 50hp which is now working superbly. Lastly a huge thank you to everyone that made financial donations, donated prizes, bought raffle tickets and attended the fundraisers to help pay for Lidia's operation. After weeks of infection they have finally been able to clean the wound and set the leg. Now she is now on the long road to recovery and we wish her all the best.