



May 2008 Newsletter

Introduction

The summer is finally upon us and the temperatures have turned scorchingly hot once again (35.5°C of 96°F as we write this). As things heat up outside, we have kept constantly busy both on the water and in the office. As we await patiently our NGO status, the office staff have been visiting the schools, taking the kids on glass bottom boat and snorkel tours, writing grant applications, attending meetings and workshops, facilitating law enforcement, developing an internship program, and celebrating birthdays (congratulations to Nic and Grazzia).

Over the past month, there has been much talk on the Roatan chat group regarding our operations, or lack thereof according to the some. So this month we suggest that our subscribers forward our newsletter to anyone they think might find it interesting. Please send this to people in your mailing list who live on Roatan or care about the environment and who would benefit from finding out more about us. Benchmark

Patrol



The month of May saw a variation in our patrolling hours after requests that dawn and evening patrols once again commence full time. Our boats and moped, manned by boat captains and police, have been patrolling between the hours of 6am and 6pm, 7 days a week. We have adapted the schedule to encompass dawn, lunchtime and dusk within the patrol hours and have been rewarded with immediate results. The morning patrols have led to several confiscations of snorkel gear and one imprisonment. While 6am is early for many of us, it appears the patrols need to hit the water even earlier, around 5am to coincide with sunrise, to prevent poaching so we have shifted the hours accordingly.

With regards to our boat engines, it seems like it's been one nightmare after the other from the word go. The Yamaha 40hp is officially dead, the Evinrude 25hp shattered a cam-rod and cage bearing and is unsalvageable, the donated Mercury 50hp is having some assembly issues, and one of the Yamaha 15hp is missing a foot. We have one working engine at present which greatly limits our capabilities in successfully patrolling the Marine Park. Hopefully a grant opportunity from CORAL will enable us to purchase a new engine to ensure that our captains can effectively patrol the local waters. If you do have an engine you no longer need that is in working order, please let us know!



Terrestrial Infrastructure

As mentioned in the article in last month's newsletter entitled "Raising awareness within the Park", the framed educational posters funded by a grant from WWF are available in the office for all hotels and businesses within the Marine Park to collect. The aim of this project is to have posters displayed in all hotel rooms within the Park, a feat in itself, and one that will hopefully be completed by the end of the summer. The frames are being made in installments so please be patient if they are not in stock.

The new airport sign, pictured right, is finally in place and can be found in the international customs and immigration area. We are looking further into placing similar signs by the baggage reclaim carousels in both the national and international sections.



There has been much discussion on the Roatan chat group regarding tourists trampling the reefs and our lack of signs within the Park. Stopping people from standing on the reef has been a constant struggle. We have used volunteers, beach patrollers, kayakers, and our boat captains with megaphones to stop them but it still happens. This is usually due to rental companies failing to inform clients, especially cruise shippers, of the proper snorkeling guidelines.

To raise environmental awareness throughout the general public, Marine Parks worldwide have adopted the use of signs as their primary method. While the majority of our signs within the Sandy Bay area have been destroyed, proving to be a financial burden if we wish to replace them, there are plenty of signs in West End and West Bay. Between the sign at Banana Rama (which was paid for by the owners) and the iron shore on the western boundary of the beach, a stretch where the majority of tourists stand on the coral, there are a total of 4 large signs.

Meetings and Workshops

As a community-based organization, the RMP has attended several meetings taking place in Roatan this past month.

Safety on Roatan: Due to the security problems that have been taking place on the island, a meeting was organized with police chiefs from Roatan and the mainland to address the problems. We are all very concerned about this issue and although ours is an organization working on conservation in Roatan, we support any effort that has to be made to improve security.



ZOLITUR: The organization which began operating in the Bay Islands in December is still developing policies and procedures which will aid tourist related businesses within the Bay Islands. Still, many have questioned what benefits there are for non-profits like the Marine Park. A meeting was organized by the Island Friends Group to hear directly from ZOLITUR's sub-director Nicole Brady and lawyer Cesar Gonzalez how ZOLITUR will benefit non-profits. Unfortunately, these organizations do not qualify for regular funding but can apply for grants depending on the project objectives. We were very disappointed to hear that although the tourist tax goes directly to security and the environment, it's a long, difficult process to acquire the funds. We do, however, hope that all money raised by the new tax goes to good hands and is well invested to support Roatan's conservation efforts.

EFA (Education for All) Goals March: All around Honduras a campaign to motivate parents to allow their children to attend school has begun, as education is part of the Children's Convention Rights. Another purpose of this campaign is the eradication of illiteracy and promotion of environmental education. We attended this event and marched proudly with our banner as environmental education is one of our main programs.



CORAL Workshop: A two day workshop, "Conservation in Action", hosted by Rich Wilson and Jenny Myton (CORAL's new Honduran representative), took place in mid May. Attendees discussed current environmental problems within the Park and then split into groups to focus on solving these issues. CORAL, a keen supporter of our organization, intends to finance several micro projects this summer. We will deliver the grant proposals at the end of June to CORAL in the hope that our micro-projects will be chosen for funding. Our thanks go out to everyone that attended the workshop as it would not have been possible without your input.



Education

With the current succes of our school educational program within the Marine Park's boundaries, it was only a matter of time until we branched out elsewhere on the island. With this, May saw us focusing primarily on schools on the East End to broaden our reach.

Punta Gorda

In March's newsletter we informed you about a new program named "education to kids by kids" which is being developed with 9th graders from the schools in Punta Gorda and Jonesville. After taking kids from the Punta Gorda School on the Glass Bottom Boat in March, we traveled to them this month and spent an afternoon giving a presentation about coral reef ecology, watching a video about the reef, and playing games and quizzes. After the success of our visit and the children's



eagerness to assist, we are now starting a plastic recycling program with the school and the Punta Gorda Patronato.

Jonesville

Teachers from Jonesville contacted us after hearing about the education program we are developing, asking us to give a presentation about the reef to their students. As we did in Punta Gorda, we took the children on the glass bottom boat in West Bay and sent the RMP staff to visit them at the school. After all the knowledge obtained through the field trip and presentations, these kids are now able to spread the conservation message to both children and adults alike within the community.



French Harbor



Usually we look like traveling gypsies moving from school to school with all our education equipment (computer, projector, materials, and volunteers), but this month kids from grades 8 and 9 at the Children's Palace Bilingual School in French Harbor visited the Marine Park. We were able to talk to the kids about the protected area, the reef, our organization, and our day-to-day activities. Some were even witnesses to a confiscation made by our patrols. After the talks, we took the kids snorkeling, where they saw a turtle, a sea horse, and loads of other interesting organisms.

West End

Though we focused most of our attention this month on schools at the East End of the island, we couldn't leave out schools within the Sandy Bay-West End Marine Park. We continued the education program at the West End School with yet another visit from our staff. Kids from the school had a morning viewing of the popular, reef based movie Finding Nemo followed by a trip on the glass bottom boat.



Education Summary



So far, the Roatan Marine Park has worked with 12 schools around the island and reached over 1,300 kids through our education and recycling programs. We hope to continue our school visits to expand the project further. If anyone is interested in volunteering, please let us know as we're running low on man power to cover so many schools!!

Facilitating law enforcement within the Park

A major concern of ours is the development of the island. Before any new constructions within the Bay Islands are given the green light, environmental permits must be acquired from SERNA. We have attended numerous inspections with SERNA and given our independent recommendations, hoping our suggestions will be taken into consideration. Construction Laws are very clear and concise and are written to be followed, yet many people are either unaware of their existence or just don't respect them. **“No constructions are allowed within the first 25m of the coastline from the high tide mark, maximum building height within zone A is 10m, adequate sewage systems must be installed, no constructions of high environmental impacts are to be allowed within the protected area”**. These are just some of the regulations.

A permit was given by SERNA for the construction of a marina at Gibson Bight. Unfortunately, the mitigation measures established on the contract are not enough to ease the impact and added to that, no compensation measures were established. We worked together with BICA in the development of ACTUAL measures that can help to lower the impact of the construction and operation of this project.



On the other hand, sometimes developers don't abide by the guidelines of the permits issued by the municipality. A perfect example of this is a new construction in Mangrove Bight. A permit was issued to allow the building of a dock which has somehow evolved into a two story sea plane dock the size of a house. The municipality, who was oblivious to the construction, was informed by the Park but now that the dock is almost complete we can only wait and see what happens next.

In Sandy Bay, a developer was informed of the rules but chose to ignore them and started building 10 meters away from the high tide line! The foundations had been laid but fortunately we reported the illegal construction to the municipality before the development continued any further and the project has been halted.



Roatan Marine Park Southside Chapter



The RMPSC office, located in the new building on the shoreline by Barefoot Cay, is now officially open to the public. Opening hours are between 8:30am and 5:30pm, Monday to Saturday, with RMP merchandise available inside. Licario, the new manager, has been busy putting projects together, as well as getting dive shops to sell the \$10 annual diver user fees. Here are some of the things he has been working on this month:

SAND (Strong Alliance for Native Development) is a private group that facilitates the dispersal of finances from the private sector to environmental organizations. We hope to acquire funding for a project to improve the current infrastructure in the RMPSC through the installation of dive mooring,

yacht moorings, and channel markers. If the project does occur as planned, moorings will be distributed throughout the region and all the major channels will be remarked, probably with the logo “TIGO” on them. Though it is possibly shameless advertising for the communications conglomerate, it’s a price worth paying for progress.

Patrols: The RMPSC recently purchased a 28ft boat with a 40hp engine to better equip the patrols for Roatan’s rough southern seas. The boat has been out of the water recently to receive a new paint job, but patrols should be up and running any day. If the patrols are to succeed, it is imperative that every dive shop, marina, hotel, resort, etc support the cause financially as to ensure the RMPSC is as effective as the Sandy Bay and West End Marine Park.



Our thanks to CocoView Resort, Dockside Dive Center, Barefoot Cay, Subway Water sports, Fantasy Island, Reef House, Waihuka Adventures, La Sirena de Camp Bay and Marble Hills Farm, for your support. For more details, contact Licario on 9846-3248 or 3260-8370 or Email: liczepeda@yahoo.com.

Recycling program



The plastic bottle recycling program in West End has been running as smoothly as can be, with over 500lbs of bottles collected this month. The collectors are currently located opposite Woody’s supermarket, Coconut Tree Dive Shop, the Marine Park office, and West End Inn, while there are others at the Sandy Bay School, the Sandy Bay Alternative School, and the school in La Colonia Balfate. Our main problem with this project is the lack of infrastructure, i.e. a vehicle which we could use to transport the bottles back to our office and additional collectors that could be distributed in more locations throughout the Park.

A van provided by Vegas Electrics delivers the sorted bottles to the compactor, but with no transport of our own, the process of emptying the collectors becomes a task in itself. The Cervecería Hondureña purchased a vehicle for this very purpose earlier this year, but the vehicle is too large and therefore unable to access many of the collector locations. We would like to expand this project throughout the whole Park, but due to these limitations, are unable to do so. We have however started distributing large plastic bags provided by the Cervecería Hondureña to the communities who collect the recyclables within the municipal dump.

Here’s some food for thought for those that don’t know decomposition times of typical household waste: fruit peel and paper napkins take 3 months to decay, cigarette butts 2 years, chewing gum 5 years, plastic bags and bottles between 200 and 450 years, tin cans between 100 and 5000 years, and for glass bottles it takes an undetermined amount of time.



The Marine Park in the media

This month the Marine Park has appeared in both an article in a popular online magazine and a book. The article appears in Slate Magazine, www.slate.com, a daily general-interest publication offering analysis and commentary about politics, news, and culture. The article, written by Elizabeth Eaves, is a 5 part exposé on Honduras. The Park is mentioned in the first article entitled “Eco-touring in Honduras” which discusses the pros and cons of eco-tourism and how it can mold a community. For those that live on Roatan, all five articles give an interesting insight into life in Honduras and definitely is a must read.

The book, published by Vintage, is titled “Disappearing Destinations, 37 places in peril and what can be done to help save them”. A whole chapter in the book is dedicated to Roatan, focusing primarily on the Sandy Bay West End Marine Park. Even more impressive, on a map of Central America and the Caribbean printed in the book, our name is one of two others in the whole region marked. The book gives a raw insight into development not only here but else where in the world. A copy is available in the office if you'd like to come by and glance over it.



Scanned from Lisagor K & Hansen H (2008) “Disappearing Destinations” *Vintage* page 146

Wrapping things up

I hope you found this month's newsletter interesting and informative. Please visit our website, www.roatanmarinepark.com, to view past newsletters and read up on how our organization has evolved since April 2006, when we first started writing the updates.

We would like to say thank you to all our supporters, especially those that donate their time, effort, and equipment. This month special thanks go to Native Sons for the use their flatbed truck, Ocean Connections for use of the “pancake” on numerous occasions and West End Divers for their dry dock. See website for complete list of members.

Till next time!

Nic, Grazzia & James