



Roatán Marine Park Newsletter

February 2012



Turtle rescued from near Paya Bay

After receiving a call from the east end, our Park Rangers, accompanied by Police, made their way to Paya Bay where they confiscated 2 turtle nets and managed to rescue a large female green turtle which was later released in Half Moon Bay.



New school in education program

Our Director of Education, visited the Christian Learning Center in French Key where she taught 60 pre-kinder, 30 5th graders, and 30 6th graders about the dangers of plastics and the importance of recycling. We hope these new environmentalists spread the good word and become advocates of the program.



Fishermen meet to discuss future

The RMP met with over 30 fishermen from around the island to establish a direct relationship with them and identify leaders. The goal is to build alliances with these stakeholders and find out more about their needs and how they see fishing in the future.



New lionfish record at last

Day after day, Reno Jackson from West End's newest dive shop has been visiting the RMP office to measure his catch. Finally he can claim to have beaten Caroline Power's record of 38.5cm by almost 1cm with a fish totaling 29.4cm or 15.5 inches.



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Introduction

During the past two months, 2012 has given us a very good head start for participatory community based conservation. Just during this brief period, the RMP along with many other institutional allies has had remarkable achievements in the social area, especially while working in the organization of fishermen from the South and Northeast sides of the island. Our reefs resources are limited, and future generations depend on our ability to work side by side towards common goals.

Patrol Program

West End poachers finally caught for the first time



While several of the conch had already been popped, the majority were still alive and relocated

Our staff is very aware of certain individuals who poach as a past time, collecting conch and lobster when ever they feel the urge. Parking their boats at the end of West End, these fishermen line fish legally the majority of the time, however other times they're in the water taking what they can find. For years we've received reports of early morning or dusk expeditions which result in a new mound of conch shells or lobster whips and finally we caught 2 in the act. After a tip off from the "Host Vessel" from the mooring field in West End, our Rangers found 2 individuals with 13 broad leaf conch and a lobster. With the new regulations in place, the guilty party had their gear confiscated and were given a warning with the understanding that if caught again, they would face some real jail time rather than a meager 24 hours up on the hill in

Coxen Hole. Thanks to the Host Vessel who called in the report.

Turtle rescued from net near Paya Bay

Every now and then the RMP office receives phone calls from concerned locals on the east end of Roatan reporting people using lobster pots and fish traps, cutting down mangroves, setting nets, catching turtle, even rogue crocodiles terrorizing pets. If possible, our Park Rangers accompanied by any Police available at that moment, rush off to the location hoping to confiscate illegal items and prevent further environmental damage. Sadly on numerous occasions, lack of reliable information, people misinterpreting the regulations and falsely reporting incidents, distance to the sites from the office, or inability to find police, we either arrive too late or are unable to respond to the calls. Fortunately, when things do work out and we make it there on time, we definitely have a feel good factor about our achievements. Fortunately, this incident is one of those times that we managed to respond in time and rescue the animal in need.



Large female green turtle trapped in net



Turtle after being engraved

After receiving a call from Jimmy who runs La Sirena in Camp Bay about a large turtle caught in a net near Paya Bay, our Park Rangers and Police mobilized and headed that way in the work car. After making several calls, we managed to secure a boat with a captain at Paya Bay Resort so now it was a waiting game to see whether we could reach the site before the fishermen returned. As our Rangers arrived at Paya Bay, our office received a call from Mike who runs Camp Bay Adventure Lodge saying that he had pulled a turtle net from the water while kayaking. Assuming this was the same net which the turtle had been trapped in, we told the Rangers to hold off until we clarified the details.

Remarkably, the turtle was trapped in another net to the west of Paya Bay and was still struggling on the surface when the boat reached the scene. After carefully untangling the turtle, it, along with the two turtle nets were brought back to our office. The turtle was a large mature female green, with a carapace measuring 60cm by 54cm. She appeared very healthy and after taking photos, engraving the numbers 01-02-12, the 01 relating to turtles released that month and the other representing the month and the year, she was released in Half Moon Bay. A huge crowd gathered on the beach to watch the turtle make a few sluggish crawls to the water's edge before disappearing quickly into the Bay. Hopefully she'll stay down this end where we are able to provide better protection for marine life. To see more photos of the incident, please visit our [facebook](#) page.



Accompanied by Park Rangers and Police, Nic releases the turtle in Half Moon Bay

Education

School trip the Christian Learning Center

On February 21, Christi visited the Christian Learning Center in French Key along with Alida Lemieux (RMP volunteer extraordinaire) and Mike and Katie Garrett (Value of Volunteering) to teach students about the dangers of plastic. During the trip we chatted with 60 pre-kinder, 30 5th graders, and 30 6th graders. The kids learned the importance of plastic, the hazards they pose to the ocean environment and how to recycle here on Roatan.

They were so receptive to us and our message that they will be recipients of one of our recycling bins and help reduce plastic waste in Roatan's dumps!



Kids at the Christian Learning Center

Here are a few unknown facts about plastic and the ocean:

- ❖ On average every sea bird has 30 pieces of plastic in their stomachs.
- ❖ Did you know that for every one pound of algae there is 6 pounds of plastic in the ocean.
- ❖ And that only 20% of plastic fell off boats, the rest is washed in from land.

With that in mind, just remember that no matter if you throw trash directly in the water, due to the nature of our land (island) it will eventually end in the water. Please do your part by reducing what you use and recycle what you do, and don't be afraid to be an example to our younger generation while you do it.

Meetings and workshops

Kick-off for an efficient Fisheries Management



Local fishermen at the meeting at Club Natale

For years the RMP has done its best in protecting the reef from poaching, but the truth is that according to Honduran law, anyone can fish anywhere with hook and line. This fact has driven the RMP to come up with an efficient management strategy to avoid any "legal" overfishing to happen. The effectiveness of the Patrol Program is good in the short term, but on the long term we must provide real alternatives for the people and not limit our efforts to enforcement alone. Key steps to accomplish good management have already been taken, such as the development of a periodic biomass monitoring system through which we may identify trends. Other less sophisticated but challenging actions are to be taken in the short term, such as the definition of proper fishing waters and other areas of more restrict measures; the registration of artisanal fishing boats and the registration and licensing of artisanal fishermen. With all the pieces in place, we may then engage in adaptive management of the resources.

The approach requires much socialization with the parties involved, from the fishermen themselves, to the local authorities such as DIGEPESCA (Fisheries Department). On February 28th, the RMP team with sponsorship from the Port of Roatan organized a successful meeting with 30+ artisanal fishermen from around the island. Representatives from DIGEPESCA, Municipal and Police authorities were also present. The purpose of the meeting was to establish a direct relationship with the fishermen and identify leaders with whom we will progressively execute future projects. It is important to try and persuade this sector of the population in more than one way for the compliance of fishing regulations.



Andres introducing the Police to the fishermen



RMP staff serving lionfish to the attendees

During the meeting we were very satisfied to see the positive reaction from the people. The audience consisted of fishermen from around the island and even some that had been previously arrested and imprisoned by the RMP for poaching. During our 3 hour meeting we identified leaders, and we also came to know about organization initiatives that they'd already started. We are already getting ready to begin the registration of boats and fishermen, commencing with the Southside fishermen who are relatively well organized. At the end of the meeting a meal was cooked by one of the fisherman's mothers consisting of lionfish caught by fishermen from Punta Gorda. Many had never tried lionfish before so hopefully this event will help them overcome the stigma which lionfish have received from locals. The successful kick-off

event of this month was supported by multiple institutional friends that are interested in the conservation of our reefs. Special gratitude goes to Port of Roatan and Club Natale.

Coral Reef Legislation Training for National Police Officers



Police officers being addressed at Hobbies Hideaway

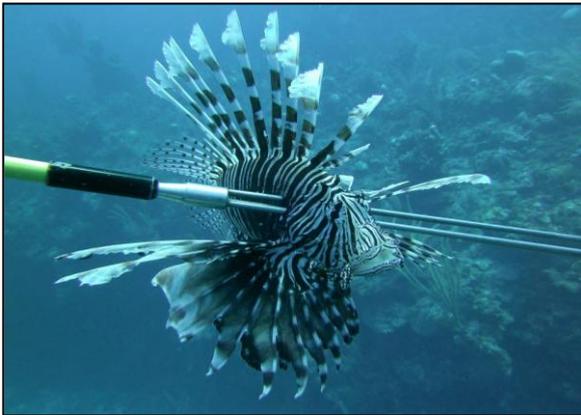
It has been a bit more than 6 years since the RMP and the National Police started working together in reef conservation patrols. This collaboration has been an essential part of our mission statement, as the RMP is here to "facilitate the enforcement of Honduran environmental protection laws and create a sense of environmental responsibility through education of residents and visitors..."

Keeping up with our mission and progressing into a more professional conservation scenario, the RMP has started providing periodical trainings to National Police officers. On February 23th, we conducted the first Environmental Legislation Workshop directed to officials from the National Police. During this first workshop, 15 Policemen and Policewomen were introduced to a series of topics including basic 1-0-1 coral reef ecology, Marine Protected Area Management and of course an updated review of the most pertinent legislation instruments that protect coastal-marine resources. The workshop facilitated by our Director Andrés was certainly a success, as its development was very interactive between Police officers and the RMP Staff.

One of the main goals of this initiative is to sensitize authorities and create a stronger bond between them and the resources that we protect together. Of the 15 officers present, only one had had the opportunity of going underwater. Based on this, a second phase of the workshop planned for April is a Discover Scuba Diving Course for these men and women of the law. We plan in conducting this workshop every three months with different Police officers, as their rotation speed is pretty high; we need to brief the new comers accordingly. The RMP gratefully appreciates the support provided by John and Sue in Hobbies Hide-Away (Sandy-Bay), who provided us with the perfect space, delicious amenities and warm attention.

Raising Awareness

Lionfish program developed for the future



A clean head shot is the most efficient way of catching lionfish

Since their arrival to Roatan in May 2009, the Roatan Marine Park has taken a proactive stance on the invasive lionfish. Through support from the Honduran Fisheries Department, Digepesca, we were able to issue licenses to enable people to hunt lionfish using Hawaiian slings. Initially only Dive Masters and Instructors were permitted to have these licenses, however as the years have gone by, it appears that by limiting ourselves to just these individuals we are fighting a losing battle. As more people became aware of the lionfish problem, it was inevitable that locals and tourists wanted to participate in the eradication program. With a coastline of over 80 miles consisting of lagoons, bays, mangroves and coral reef, the waters around Roatan have been inundated with this extremely destructive and invasive

species. It was therefore decided to broaden the program and involve more of the community. Both divers and snorkelers have been issued with licenses, however some people have grown concerned about the number of unskilled people using the slings and asked the RMP to reassess the program.

Starting in March, the RMP will require ALL licensed lionfish hunters to visit the RMP office in Half Moon Bay and reregister. Every licensed diver and snorkeler will be subjected to a test to prove they meet the new requirements showing controlled buoyancy and use of the sling. The test will enable RMP staff to see that those involved are competent. While the removal of the lionfish is a priority of this program, ensuring that the reef is not subjected to direct and indirect diver damage is our precedence. The program will also be made available to visitors who wish to participate.

For the month of March, we will be holding a 3 times a week buoyancy and spear checks to try and get people officially observed, re-registered and issued with new licenses. After March, workshops will be held twice a week. Every person who has been or wishes to be involved in hunting lionfish **must** contact the RMP office to book their place in the buoyancy and sling workshop.

New lionfish record



Reno and Wilf with their new record fish

Day after day, Reno Jackson from West End's newest dive shop has been visiting the RMP office to measure his catch. Having spent his time hunting lionfish with his divers and looking for "that big one", he can finally claim to have beaten Caroline Power's record of 38.5cm by almost



The new record, a 15.5inch lionfish

1cm with a fish totaling 29.4cm or 15.5 inches. The fish was found in deep water near Seaquest and apparently didn't put up much of a fight after it was speared. This catch resulted in a dinner plate sized fish along with a very happy man. Congratulation again and we would like to remind divers, if you catch a huge lionfish which you think

worthy of measuring, please bring your catch to our office so we can officially measure it. Length we use if from the very tip of the tail to the end of the snout when the mouth is closed. Happy hunting!

Volunteering with the RMP

February was a great month for volunteering. We have had 2 full time volunteers, one part time volunteer and a brother/sister team of volunteer documentary filmmakers.

Campbell Howe - came to help out from Washington D.C.. She not only volunteered with the RMP but also with CORAL and Healthy Reefs. She was a huge help in restarting our Responsible Seafood Guide, as well as jumpstarting our recycling program. It's Campbell's design that was used in making the new signs for the bins.

Alida Lemieux - Alida came from Ontario, Canada. On vacation she needed something to do with her time and we were very happy to oblige. Alida helped out and built more than half of our 15 new recycling bins. Her love for kids shone through as well as she helped with the distribution of school invitations and when she stepped up to give a presentation to the students of the Christian Learning Center in French Key.



Cindy Schmidt - Cindy is still here and going strong. Cindy is currently here with her husband. She has been helping us put the finishing touches on our recycling bins. Hopefully she will continue to help us as she's a pretty good painter! We have good feelings about Cindy doing her openwater course and hope she'll still have some time for us after she falls in love with the reef.



Micheal and Katie Garrett - These guys are currently on a mission. They are on a mission to show the world the value of volunteering in Central America. They are travelling through the region and documenting their experiences while volunteering with 14 different organizations. They spent 5 days here with us and helped with many projects. They were the first snorkellers to go through our new lionfish workshop, assisted in school trips and painted recycling bins. Look them up at www.valueofvolunteering.org

Thank you guys for all your hard work and everything you've done... We really appreciate it!!

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 4,650 fans. Recommend us to your friends and let's break that 4,750 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.roatanlifelifevacationrentals.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 office in Half Moon Bay.

Best wishes to all, from the RMP Staff!

