



Roatán Marine Park Newsletter

January 2012



Upgrading the Patrol Program

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Responsible Seafood Guide Program

While you're menu browsing please consider your choices. Your choices may help us sustain our seafood for generations to come.



We urge to expand our Recycling Program. Help needed!

Be on the lookout for the new **GREEN** recycling bins! We want to refresh and refurbish the old recycling program by fixing up the old bins and putting out 15 new ones!



Who is who in the Roatan Marine Park?

Find out who is behind the Roatan Marine Park and its conservation activities while reading a brief profile of each of our core Staff members...



Better expectations for fishermen from Punta Gorda

For two centuries the people from Punta Gorda have had a direct dependence fishing and the artisanal fishermen are now finding it harder and harder to fish sufficient amounts to actually make a decent living. Read more to find out what the RMP is doing to help this community.



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Introduction

Who's who in the Roatan Marine Park?

The Roatan Marine Park is a dynamic organization that while being settled in West End, manages conservation activities throughout the island with a particular focus on the West and South side. This huge task is assumed by a core team that is continuously in contact with the public. Here is a brief profile of the RMP Staff, please feel free to contact us regarding reef conservation:

Director: Andrés Alegría is ultimately responsible for overseeing all of the organization activities and for ensuring that the yearly work plan is being successfully implemented and that the required funds are available for it. He also acts as central liaison between the general public and government, especially with legal authorities in order to consolidate the legal framework upon which the organization administers the Marine Park. (contact: andresalegria@roatanmarinepark).

Marine Infrastructure Program and Public Relations Coordinator, Nicholas Bach is in charge of the installation and maintenance of all marine infrastructure (dive, yacht and fishing moorings, as well as channel markers and any other demarcation markers) within the Marine Park. Over the past 6 years, Nick has become the public face of the Marine Park. He is the one everyone knows, the one everyone calls when there is a problem. Part of his job is to talk to the community, to visit the dive shops and get feedback about the Marine Park. He also organizes Marine Park events such as the incredibly successful fundraisers at Banana Rama and the Lionfish Derbies. (contact: nic.bach@roatanmarinepark).

Community Development Program Coordinator: Christi Etches is our newest member of the RMP team and is responsible for running the organization's educational programs and awareness campaigns in order to create environmental consciousness in the island's next generation, local community and visitors. (contact: christy.etches@roatanmarinepark).

Patrol Program Coordinator: Barie Jackson ensures that the patrols operate to an adequate standard in order to minimize pressures to the reef coming from inadequate usage of the resource. Barie coordinates the joint activities between Park Rangers and Police Officers. (**Patrol Hotline: 3349-4138**).

Park Rangers: Ernie James & Edison Bodden along with their coordinator are the RMP's eyes and hands on the sea. They are our tough guys, constantly watching the reef and keeping the marine life safe.

Eco-shop Sales: Tasha Jackson is our sales girl in the eco-shop. She will kindly attend you when you visit our store and will also assist you if renting snorkeler gear or finding out more about the island.



Patrol Program

The RMP's Patrol Program back on a 4 x 4 track

After several setbacks with the patrol boats due to problems with engines, the RMP has started this year with twice as much patrolling capacity as 2011. With a grant from the Ocean Fund, we recently acquired a 26 ft panga with a 75hp engine and also purchased a new engine for the 21 ft boat that has been out of the water for almost a year. They are being assigned for the West Side and another for the South Side respectively. This equals to 4 boats and 4 Park Rangers, almost twice the effort we had ending 2011. Our final goal is to have 4 fully functioning boats to monitor over 30 miles of Roatan's coastline.



Re-incident poachers, be aware for the full weight of the law

It has been more than 5 years that the RMP Patrol has managed to stop poachers from depleting marine life within the protected areas. Unfortunately, the degree of re-incident is high and we've had cases of people being sent to the authorities multiple times and still only spending 24 hours in jail.

Throughout January 6 different poachers were apprehended while conducting illegal activities. One person was caught near Man of War Key with 92 live conchs. Fortunately they were all safely relocated to waters which are more routinely monitored by our patrols. Unfortunately, one small hawksbill turtle couldn't be rescued. Starting this month, we have defined a more efficient flow of procedures.

Then what's going on with the hawksbill turtle case? Well, everything started on January 18th, just before sunset when Barie Jackson, our Patrol Coordinator was about to call it a day when he received a call from a local informant. He quickly jumped back in the boat and arrived to the scene accompanied by two police officers. Four guys were caught near Mud Hole with dozens of fish, 5 lobster, many conch, and a butchered turtle. Though they were supposed to be detained in jail for 3 days, the police released them within 24 hours. We are pressing the case though and there will be a court hearing in February. The men face a maximum penalty of a L 50,000 fine or 300 days in prison for butchering the turtle.



Confiscated seafood including a small Hawksbill turtle.

Upgrading the RMP's Patrol Program

In November 2011, we received the results of a study conducted by FORCE. The study evaluated the perception that people living in West End have observed in a historical point of view. We are proud to know that a significant consensus was defined for the fact that an increase in the numbers of marine turtles has been gradually observed, and that the community attributes this increase to RMP's Program. Word on the street is that it's more common on a dive within the Reserve to see a turtle or multiple turtles rather than not seeing any at all.

With the mission of bringing back and maintaining as much marine life, the RMP's Patrol Program has been upgraded with better instruments. With the support of the Coral Reefs Alliance (CORAL) through consultant Greg Puncher (former RMP employee), the RMP managed to produce a series of instruments designed to promote a proper enforcement of Roatan's environmental legislation. The Patroller's Manual is a reviewed and edited compilation of all environmental laws protecting coral reefs and associated habitats around the island. It also includes illustrated concepts such as legal sizes of cast nets and lobster tails.



Educational material to be distributed to the general public and particularly to fishermen has also been produced, recognizing that education and enforcement need to go along.

Our boats are also being upgraded from February on will be patrolling with a new night-stealthy look.



Our 18ft vessel recently painted and with the new banners and logos

Infrastructure

Yacht moorings filling up



Mooring field between West End and West Bay almost at capacity with over 20 vessels residing here

With the yacht season in full swing, the mooring field in West End has been pretty much at capacity since the beginning of the year. New mooring/docking fees around French Cay have meant that many vessels have moved over to this side of the island which spells good news for the RMP and local businesses. While there is a definite stigma associated with yachties, with many locals wrongly assuming that they don't contribute to the local economy, we can guarantee that they aren't as bad as people think and generate money for local businesses. While there may be the odd bag egg who dive for conch and lobster and bring nothing positive to the community, all the others still need to eat, drink, wash clothes, and shop. If you didn't already know, the RMP charges a mandatory mooring fee which helps maintain the yacht moorings and patrols, with a proportion of money raised going to fund projects chosen by the West End Patronato.

Dive moorings

For everyone on the island, especially those in the diving community, we hope that rainy season is finally at an end and the sunshine is eventually returning to Roatan. With the possible end to the storms, it's now time for staff at the RMP to reinstall and maintain our extensive array of marine infrastructure around the island. The RMP manages over 150 dive, yacht and fishing moorings, dozens of channel markers and several swim zones, so once the bad weather abates, it's our job to get out on the water and replace what's missing. With current limited staffing, it's been left up to Nic to manage this daunting task. Fortunately, several dive shops take it upon themselves in these renovations, particularly those outside the Reserve including Dockside Dive Center, Reef House, Subway Watersports and Palmetto Bay.



Mooring buoys used around the island

Meetings and workshops

Better expectations for fishermen from the East of Roatan.

Nearly 200 years ago, the first Garifuna people arrived to Honduras, landing on the north east of Roatan in a village now known as Punta Gorda. If you get a chance to visit this relaxing beach front town and visit any of their restaurants, you'll appreciate a culinary tradition based on fish, conch, and lobster and of course coconut. One of their main dishes is called *mashuka*, and it's a type of dense seafood soup with *yucca*. Although it's been more than two centuries that its people have had a direct dependence on local fishing activities, the artisanal fishermen are now finding it harder and harder to fish sufficient amounts to actually make a decent living out of fishing.



A young fisherman from Punta Gorda proudly exhibits his catch of lionfish, a new alternative for local consumption.

The challenge is considerable. It is well known to most people in Roatan that stocks around Punta Gorda are practically depleted. This month, while walking in the main street of Punta Gorda we were surprised to see not only older fishermen, but a group of 4 small kids, all probably under 8, each caring its own hand made spear gun, ready to take the catch of the day.

The good news is that Punta Gorda community is well organized and has genuine leaders looking out for the best interest of their people. One of their leaders and president of the local *patronato*, Alex Avila, contact the RMP searching for advice on how to enhance and protect their fisheries.

Upon Alex's call, we looked for advisors on this subject which is relatively new to us. Quick response came from the Utila Center for Marine Ecology (UCME). The UCME has had very positive results while organizing fishermen from Utila, la Moskitia and even from the Honduran Pacific side.

All ready, Nic and Andrés from the RMP, accompanied by Steve Box from the UCME and we all went to assess the situation. And so, we all met in a local community center with Alex and a few other fishermen, young and veteran. After listing to their concerns and interchanging information, we all came up with a plan for defining specific zones in front of their 5 km front bay.

It's a long road toward the recovery of their fish stocks, but with well organized people like those in Punta Gorda, we hope to see fish coming back in less than two years. To begin with, the RMP is installing demarcation buoys for no take spaces. The fishermen in Punta Gorda are being exposed to the alternatives with lionfish, for local consumption as well as potential market. A lobster housing project is the biggest goal.

Punta Gorda seems to have the proper conditions for this activity, which will allow for certified lobster market – we hope to see in two years time, the first restaurant with an aquarium exhibiting live lobsters, guaranteeing not only the freshest menu, but also promoting a responsible and sustainable lobster market.

Raising Awareness

Global Warming urges Local Action

Day by day global environmental changes such as Global Warming, keep on adding inevitable pressure to Roatán's coral reefs. Although these fragile banks of biodiversity are sensitive to this pressure, nature has the ability to adapt, just as coral reefs have already survived long past changes. The difference to what we have presenced during the last few decades is the fact that the accelerated demographical growth has spiked the demands over fishery resources around the world.

Fishermen, divers, locals and tourists have all witnessed a decrease in the abundance and size of fish around many parts of the island. This change may be attributed to distinct factors that increase pressure to the coral reefs, being the most evident: excess input of nutrients and sedimentation from runoff, overfishing, and of course unsupervised snorkelers/divers kicking and touching marine life.

The sum of the factors previously stated, result in a direct decrease in the ecosystems resilience. This concept if fairly employed in business when referring to a company's ability to adapt and recover from financial crises. In this sense, coral reefs may stand in the long term a fair amount of pressure and end up adapting, but only when the reef has high resilience.

High resilience for the reefs of Roatan depends on our ability as community members, to gently participate with an individual commitment to make better use of our collective resources. Day by day environmental friendly attitudes can make a huge difference. If you feel that you are able of doing a bit more, we invite you to get involved in the Programs that the RMP promotes.



Responsible Seafood Guide Program

The Responsible Seafood Program is starting up again. The goal is to get all West End restaurants serving responsible choices. What are responsible choices you say? Tuna, Cero, Kingfish, Spanish mackerel, Wahoo, Jacks, Mahi-mahi, Yellowtail snapper, lionfish and squid are all really good choices. The reason behind this is because they produce lots of eggs, have a high rate of population increase, grow fast and reach maturity at an early age, and are mostly pelagic species.



What we would like to avoid is restaurants serving and consumers ordering seafood from our 'avoid' list. Things to avoid are Grouper, Reef Snappers, Parrotfish, Sharks, Triggerfish and Turtles. These choices are either critically endangered, protected by Honduran law or vital to overall health of the reef.

Some other things to consider as you're purchasing are: Lobster season is only open from July- February. Legal tail size during this time is 5.5"/14cm. Barracuda season is all year round but fish sizes must be 36"/91cm or bigger. Conch is only legal as a byproduct and there is only one legally registered processing company on the island. While you're menu browsing please consider your choices. Your choices may help us sustain our seafood for generations to come.

We are expanding our Recycling Program!

Be on the lookout for the new **GREEN** recycling bins! We want to refresh and refurbish the old recycling program by fixing up the old bins and putting out 15 new ones! The bins you see today will remain in the same location and will have the same design. We at the Marine Park are striving to make the Recycling program more recognizable and effective. We believe that this will lead to a greater volume of recyclable plastics and cans being collected, which will reduce the amount of damage done to our Marine wildlife. Help us to spread the word of these new **GREEN** bins and why it is important that we recycle to protect the health of Roatan's diverse ecosystems.



Wrapping things up...

Roatan Hospital needs help: The Roatan Women are on a Mission. A group of local women is organizing a fundraiser repair the women recovery room and build two new bathrooms in the Roatan Hospital. Everyone is invited to support this initiative by donating to collection bottles that will be out in the streets on February 18th. If you wish to get more involved, please contact Emely Flowers at 9838-2046.



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.

Best wishes to all,

from the RMP Staff!

