

# Roatán Marine Park Newsletter

September - October 2011



## New RMP Director



We would like to introduce you to our new Executive Director, Andres Alegria. Originally from Tegucigalpa, Andres has *been involved in protected area's management, focusing primarily on biological monitoring and surveillance programs since 2004. He hopes to bring the skills he's learnt over his years on the mainland to Roatan and the RMP.*

## Lionfish derby and cook off



Over the weekend of October 8<sup>th</sup>, the RMP hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final lionfish derby of the year and over 500 fish were brought in. The team comprised of Benson and Ebanks won most fish, 139 lionfish, as well as largest specimen at 38.1cm. Coconut Tree Restaurant once again was crowned best restaurant in the cook off. Congratulations to all those that participated in both events.

## New Recycling bins available



Throughout West End and West Bay, dive shops and businesses now have recycling receptacles for drink cans and plastic bottles. The 20 receptacles were sponsored by Blue Ocean insect repellent so please start using them.

## Plastics and a cautionary tale



Roatan has seen a huge influx in marine debris these past months and while these floating mats spell doom for species that mistakenly eat the trash, it also provides shelter for many others. Therefore please be careful when removing the waste.

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## Introduction



*Once again our staffing has faced a change with the departure of our Director of Education, Wendy Naira, and the South Side Director Arlene Rodriguez who both left to work in La Ceiba. However we would like to welcome our new Executive Director, Andrés Alegría, to the team. Andrés is a Honduran born biologist and since 2004 has been involved in protected area's management, focusing primarily on biological monitoring & surveillance programs aimed to develop an adaptive management approach towards conservation efforts, i.e. science based conservation. He has worked in much of Honduras's natural ecosystems, from the high altitude primary cloud forests to the submerged colorful coral reefs. Although he is certainly fascinated with the great diversity found on the mainland, coral reefs have proved to be his passion.*

*Involvement with marine conservation efforts started for him as he searched for hands on experience to complement his undergraduate studies in Tegucigalpa. He has volunteered for several reef survey efforts such as Coral Cay Conservation (CCC), Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System (SAM) and the Atlantic and Gulf Rapid Reef Assessment (AGRRA). While working at the National Forestry Conservation Institute (ICF) as a government official dedicated to biological monitoring efforts within protected areas, he was able to promote well needed reef conservation awareness among policy makers in Tegucigalpa. Now he currently represents a fresh face in front of the RMP where he is setting important goals towards integrated conservation, community involvement and financial sustainability. He considers passion, creativity, professionalism and hard team work, as being the key drives to achieving his goals.*

## Patrol

### Sandy Bay West End Marine Park Patrols

There were 8 incidents in September and as per usual, the majority of them occurred in Sandy Bay east of Anthony's Key Resort. This area is a hot spot for poaching as the iron shore islands permits snorkelers to hide from view from our Park Rangers. In total 67 live conchs were confiscated, along with 64 dead lobster, 24 fish, 8 dead conch, 6 masks, 3 spears, 2 sets of fins, 2 live lobster, 2 Cayucos and a torch. From the 8 incidents, 5 men were sent to jail, 3 kids were made to collect trash from the beaches and 2 individuals evaded capture, however their product and gear were confiscated after they fled the scenes. Fortunately not all the confiscated product was dead so our Rangers were able to re-release over 60 conch and some lobster. This however is not always the case as it is often easier to apprehend people as they come ashore than try and confront them while on the water where they can hide or drop their catch as the boat approaches.



Confiscated conch, lobster and fish



29 lobster found inside the dory

One of our more depressing confiscations this year took place late one night around 2am. With no operational boats and a limited number of Police available, our Park Rangers had to use whatever resources possible to apprehend those involved. Rangers from both the RMP and BICA waited on the beach in Sandy Bay while a boat was organized and Policemen collected. While waiting, those on the beach could hear the resonating sound of conch shells being loaded into a dory. Once a boat and police were finally organized, they were unsure the exact location of the poachers and unfortunately those involved fled the scene or hid in the water. Their dory was found and inside were 59 live conch and 29 dead lobster. This incident highlights the amount of damage to marine life one

or two individuals can do in just one evening and proof that even with Police, its never easy to apprehend culprits. Between sunset and sunrise, we hear of numerous reports of poaching and are trying our best to put a stop to it. If you do see lights in the water after dive boats are back from their night dives, 8pm onwards, please do contact us at that moment or make a report the following day so we can plan

## South Side Patrols

While the RMP will travel to the far ends of Roatan in an effort to protect our marine life, this month it appears that we became involved in a turf war over fishing grounds. When our office received several calls about a lobster boat from Guanaja fishing off Helene, we went to investigate. After several mornings of disorganization we finally left Oak Ridge to locate the vessel. We eventually found the boat by Pigeon Cay and along with Municipal and National Police, boarded the vessel. After much argument and after the captain spoke to the Mayor of Santos Guardiola, it was agreed that the vessel would go to Oak Ridge the following day to discuss the matter. Several days later, Magenta Moore from the fisheries department on Guanaja contacted the RMP and informed us that the boat has a permit to catch the lobster and was actually part of a fisheries study to investigate lobster stocks in the area. The crew were documenting all the catch and releasing undersized lobster according to the law. They also commented that they'd been catching lionfish in their traps and would be interested in becoming a supplier for West End. From now on we will be more cautious before getting involved turf wars beyond our boundaries.



*Manana One with lobster traps on board*



*Dive gear confiscated near Parrot Tree*

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, our South-Side Park Ranger Richard Alvarez, was alerted by one of our vigilant stakeholders in the area of Parrot Tree about a boat full of suspects that looked to be diving for lobsters. Upon arrival at the scene, our team discovered a group of men in possession of an assortment of lobsters and gastropod shells. The men that had been diving were equipped with nothing more than tank, back plate, mask and a single regulator; no depth gauge, no pressure gauge, no BCD and no back up regulator. Of course, none of the divers possessed the appropriate permits and as a result Richard confiscated all the gear as well as the catch. Our investigation into the enabler of these individuals continues; however we are very concerned not only about the damage that they did to the lobster population at this site but also about the

welfare of the divers themselves. We were instantly reminded of the high occurrence of paralysis and “bends” victims that plague the Moskitia Coast and hope that this incident isn’t an indication of future careless and irresponsible activities of this nature here in the islands.

## Infrastructure

### Renovating marine infrastructure around the island

Nic and Greg spent several days on the south side as well as up at Turquoise Bay renovating existing channel markers and dive moorings along with installing new ones. The channel markers at the entrance to French Cay were in complete disarray, with the majority of them either missing or in completely the wrong place. A total of 4 additional markers were installed and 3 were repositioned. The yacht moorings which had been installed in French Cay several years ago and had been missing for quite some time were relocated and replaced in time for the new yacht season. They also visited the Cordelia Banks and resurfaced several fishing moorings that had sunk either by natural causes or intentional sabotage. These fishing moorings were placed at sites located away from dive mooring and were installed in an effort to reduce the chronic anchor damage of this amazing reef. With all the bad weather there were numerous other moorings and markers around the island that needed to be replaced. Fortunately, many of the moorings which floated into shore were retrieved and given back to the RMP. If you do find any buoys or markers washing up anywhere, we would very much appreciate you contacting us so we can collect and reinstall them.



*Preparing to relocate the missing fishing moorings*

## Education

### Mangrove tour with kids



Students in Gibson Bight looking at mangroves

In September a group of students from the Santos Guardiola School in Coxen Hole were taken on a field trip to Gibson Bight. The students have been working hard caring for a mangrove nursery they built at their school which now contains hundreds of thriving samplings. On this excursion the students were collecting the seeds of all 4 mangrove species we have on Roatan, all of which can be found in Gibson Bight. They also collected vegetative samples for a herbarium that they are developing at the school. Below is a photo of the leaves from the 4 species of mangroves found here on Roatan.

The different species are the black mangrove, buttonwood, the white mangrove and finally the red mangrove. All 4 species are shown below so maybe next time you take a walk by some mangroves, you'll actually be able to identify the species.



A. Black mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*); B. Buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*); C. White mangrove (*Laguncularia racemosa*); D. Red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*).

## Meetings and workshops

### Re-establishment of the South Side

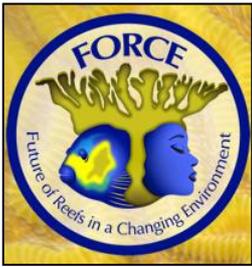


Greg presenting to dive shop owners and participants

After a 4 year intermission in Europe, Greg Puncher returned to Roatan in September to help out with the management of the South-Side Chapter. He began by contacting stakeholders currently working with the RMP and re-familiarizing himself with the issues that are of highest concern. He quickly recognized a need for increased communication between the RMP and each establishment and made that issue a top priority. Additional concerns were the ever present threat of illegal fishing activities, unchecked coastal development and of course the overwhelming mass of plastics that choked our waterways. After these brief personal consultations, a General Assembly involving dive shops,

resorts and tourist attraction operators was organized to address common concerns and communicate our efforts and accomplishments on the south side. At the meeting Greg delivered a presentation that reminded everyone of our mission and vision for the south-side and detailed the finances involved. Within this discussion it was clearly shown that finances are equitably distributed between both centers of operation, as are our educational resources. It was felt that the meeting breathed new life into our south-side efforts and we hope to see revitalized participation and communication between the attendees and the RMP. Patty Grier from Dockside Dive Center recently announced that after 4 years of being on the Board of Directors she has chosen to step down and allow someone else the position in the decision making process. Therefore at the meeting we officially announced that we were seeking representation from the south-side for the Board of Directors at the General Assembly elections in January.

## Results from the FORCE meetings and workshops



Back in June, the Bay Islands were visited by representatives from FORCE, a team of researchers from 20 organizations from the Caribbean, Europe, the US and Australia who are funded by the UN to conduct a 5 year study on the future of reefs in a changing environment. The project will address important questions about how changes will affect coastal communities and livelihoods such as fisheries and tourism and provide recommendations on how stakeholders can protect the reefs. Key issues they addressed during their stay was reef health, livelihoods, management of the reef, diving, and fishing. Some interesting points that people brought up about the RMP were “the RMP is doing the best it can with the resources available, and overall is a positive organization. However several people expressed concerns about illegal fishing in the Park and suggested more resources are necessary for increased patrolling”. Another issue was that “many people recognized that the RMP are trying to involve the community through education, awareness building and providing information and people commented that the community is more aware now of the importance of protecting the reefs. However, some people also thought that there should be more local people involved in the RMP”.

## Inspections

### West End Road



*Massive hole in front of Casa Calico in W.E.*

As much as common sense warns us not to mix hole digging, and bulldozing with rainy season, the work being done on the West End road is a reality. Fortunately for us the director of DECA, the Government agency responsible of issuing and follow up of environmental licenses, was on the island. RMP staff invited Mr. Julio Eguigure to observe firsthand the impacts that the construction on the road is causing. We were fortunate to have Mr. Eguigure on the island and he was indeed very unimpressed by the situation, especially after observing the constantly growing hole on the road leading from Half Moon Bay to Casa Calico. Mr. Eguigure assured us that he will be sending an inspection team in the very short term to make a full assessment of the situation. We'll keep you posted on this.

Mean while, Andrés Alegría made a visit to the engineer team in charge of the road work who meet every Tuesday at their base station in front of West End's gas station. The main coordinator, Mr. Concepcion Vallecio, accepted some advice for mitigating runoff and assured that they will make all efforts to minimize impacts on the reefs. The next day, we could appreciate that at least the big bulks of mud that line the road near the old ball field had been covered with plastic. Fingers crossed that they can continue mitigating.

## Conservation in action

### New Recycling bins available

If you live on Roatan, you may have noticed the new, ugly, metallic organic and inorganic receptacles/signs dotted along the road side at the most inconvenient places possible. This we can assure you wasn't made by us, however the ones adjacent in the photo were. The owner of Blue Ocean insect repellent, Bill Williams, choose to sponsor the production of 25 of these recycling bins. Made from wood and confiscated fishing nets, the receptacles for the collection of PET1 plastic bottles and aluminum drink cans will be distributed to businesses and schools around the island. The bins will hopefully provide an easy drop off point for people wishing to recycle, and will also make it safer and easier for those collecting the cans and bottles.



*Three of our colorful recycling receptacles*

There are still several receptacles left so please contact us if you are interested in taking responsibility of one.

## Lionfish Derby and cook off

Once again the RMP hosted a lionfish derby to promote the eradication of this invasive species. This was the third derby held this year and the turnout wasn't overly impressive, but those that competed had a great time. Over the weekend of October 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, teams from around the island competed to be crowned the best at killing lionfish. Divers and snorkelers searched Roatan's shores and managed to kill over 500 specimens. Medals were given to the teams who caught the most, as well as those that killed the smallest and largest fish. Chris Benson and Kent Ebanks won the prize for killing the most lionfish, 139, and the runners up were Nic Bach and Caroline Power with 106. Benson and Ebanks also caught the largest specimen at 38.1cm from closed mouth to tip of the tail while the smallest specimen was caught by team "A team" from Subway Water sports. The following Monday, a lionfish cook off was held at Coconut Tree Restaurant. Four local restaurants, Lighthouse Restaurant, Eagle Rays, Cannibal Café and Coconut Tree, fought it out to be crowned best chef which Coconut Tree eventually won with Vince's fish cakes. We would like to thank all those that competed in the derby and the cook off and for those who attended the cook off which was a great success.



Over 320 lionfish caught by 3 teams on 1 boat

## Raising awareness

### Plastics and a cautionary tale



Variety of fish found in the floating mass

Many of us were shocked last month by the massive loads of mysterious plastics that washed up on our beaches, choked up our waterways, messed with our engines and horrified our visitors. Those on the south-side stared straight into the ugly eye of marine pollution as the shoreline from east to west were repeatedly inundated with a flotilla of plastics. Unfortunately due to the sheer volume and extent of the pollution we had a hard time finding a solution. Like many resorts, the staff at Barefoot Cay were forced to remove the waste from the sea by hand. During one such event we noticed a plethora of juvenile fish flapping about amongst the garbage. Upon closer inspection we discovered scrouled filefish, triggerfish, pipefish, triple tails, puffers, a seahorse and a dead sea turtle hatchling. Fortunately we were able to separate the majority of these fish from the garbage and set them free amongst the mangroves nearby. It seems that this community of juveniles were using the floating mats of garbage as cover from predators and a scavenging site for crustaceans. Consequently we would like to warn any and all that take it upon themselves to remove garbage from the sea to check for juveniles that have adopted our waste as a new home.

### Wrapping things up



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](http://www.roatanlife.com) and [www.roatanlifelvacationrentals.com](http://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](mailto:info@roatanmarinepark.net). For more information, please visit our [website](http://www.roatanmarinepark.net) or stop by our offices in Half Moon Bay and Barefoot Cay.*

Andres, Nic, Greg and Cesy

