



Friends of the Environment

Abaco, Bahamas



Vol. 16, Issue 1

Environmental Activities Since 1988

Winter 2009

New RARE Conservation Campaign

Friends of the Environment, in partnership with RARE Conservation, an international NGO, is about to launch a 24 month intense social marketing campaign that will focus on sustaining the country's largest commercial export, crawfish. The RARE Pride campaign will focus on: discouraging illegal fishing practices, encouraging sustainable alternatives, and creating support for Marine Protected Areas throughout Abaco, with the goal of having at least 5 marine parks declared by October 2010.

Pride Campaigns are no stranger to The Bahamas, it was a Pride Campaign centered around the Abaco Parrot that helped to establish the Abaco National Park in the early 1990's. RARE focuses on building conservation support on a local level by engaging all community sectors, from every day citizens to government officials and everyone in between. RARE has successfully implemented over 125 campaigns on four continents from Africa to the South Pacific. By signing on to the campaign RARE will bring \$125,000 to the project; providing training, mentorship and promotional materials.

As a full time campaign manager is required, d'Shan Maycock, FRIENDS' education officer, will be executing the campaign. Over the next 24 months Mrs. Maycock will spend 17 weeks in Washington DC for the University phase of the program. There she will learn how to properly implement a successful campaign. Afterwards she will spend a minimum of 84 weeks on the campaign in the field. Upon completion of the program Mrs. Maycock will receive a Master's in Communication focusing on basic ecology, conservation law, learning theory and social marketing.

The crawfish is an important economic commodity in The Bahamas as well as an animal of cultural significance to both locals and visitors. This proactive campaign will help to combat two of the species biggest threats: habitat destruction and illegal fishing practices.

The blatant violations of taking undersized, pregnant, or out of season crawfish cannot be remedied solely by enforcement in islands that are as far spread as the Abaco's. It is our

responsibility to take a vested interest in the marine environment. It is only through education and awareness that the mindset and behaviors of individuals can be changed.

As crawfish inhabit mangroves, coral reefs and deeper waters throughout their life cycle, the campaign will focus on the importance of each of these aspects of the marine environment and the need for public support of marine protected areas to ensure the continued survival of crawfish and other marine life. With 3 marine parks already existing in Abaco, another awaiting final approval from the Bahamas Government and the East Abaco Creeks Proposal underway, not to mention The Bahamas' new goal to protect 20% coastal and marine habitat, Abaco is on track to have at least 5 marine parks declared by 2010. Increased community involvement in conservation efforts in Abaco as a result of the Pride Campaign will be a major asset in achieving this goal. The Campaign's education component will also help with increasing respect for these marine protected areas and their regulations.

A Pride Campaign will have an everlasting effect on the Abaco community and will take a great stride in ensuring a sustainable future for generations of Bahamians to come.



These spawning crawfish tails confiscated by The Department of Marine Resources are an example of unsustainable fishing practices that are damaging the crawfish population.



Inside this issue:

<i>FRIENDS: updates and President's message</i>	2
<i>Kid's Corner</i>	3
<i>Why Birds Matter</i>	4
<i>Coconut Tree Bay</i>	4
<i>Ways You Can Help the Environment</i>	5
<i>Protecting Abaco's Creeks</i>	6

Upcoming Events:

- January 17th—Marsh Harbour Plant Fair
- February 21st—Hope Town Plant Fair
- March 7th—Reef Ball
- April 15th—Sustainable Development Workshop
- April 24th—Earth Day: "Marine Resources" Venue: New Vision Ministries

DID YOU KNOW????

The spiny lobster is responsible for 95% of Bahamian seafood exports

Sustainable Development Committee Created

In response to the increase in development planned for Abaco, the Board of FRIENDS has created a new Sustainable Development committee.

The committee was formed with several purposes in mind: to be a resource to the Government, residents and developers about sustainable development; pro-actively contact developers early in their design process; and educate key stakeholders about current laws and environmentally friendly practices and alternatives.

Education has been and will remain the central focus of

FRIENDS. As Abaco continues to grow at such a rapid pace we must take necessary measures to ensure a sustainable future. Through this new committee we will focus on educating the greater public on the crucial challenges that Abaco's environment is facing and will look at sustainable solutions to these challenges.

The committee has already met with - and made recommendations to - several Abaco developments, assisted Hope Town in finding an independent person to help conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment on the Joe's Cay

project, and is planning a workshop to provide information on development related issues.

The day-long workshop is scheduled for Wednesday April 15th and will feature Keynote Speaker, Minister of The Environment Earl Deveaux. The Director of BEST and representatives from the Department of Physical Planning will outline existing regulations, sustainable sessions will feature speakers from Tiamo, the Andros Ecolodge, and The Island School in Eleuthera, and interactive sessions will be held to encourage discussion about workshop topics.



The eastern coast of South Abaco.

President's Message



As I begin my second year as President of FRIENDS we find ourselves in difficult financial times, both here in the Bahamas and indeed internationally. As an organization we are stronger than ever, with five full time employees, an excellent new education center, strong local, national and international partners and very dedicated members and supporters. While times may be tough, our resolve to preserve and protect Abaco remains strong.

FRIENDS remains focused on many activities which we believe will help to keep Abaco environmentally sustainable for generations to come. We continue to lead the way in placing and repairing moorings for locals and tourists alike to use on the reefs. We have expanded our education program to include town meetings, church services, school assemblies as well as traditional classroom presentations and student field trips. We now have regularly scheduled bird watching trips for the community, reef check dives which monitor and record the health of our reefs, and a committee that meets with developers to discuss sustainable practices relevant in Abaco. Working with a local businessman we have expanded recycling from aluminum cans to numerous other products including batteries, bottles, and scrap metal.

FRIENDS continues to expand its programs throughout Abaco, recently partnering with the Murphy Town Committee on a clean-up of Coconut Tree Bay. With the help of visiting students from Rollins College the area is now well on its way to being a community park, and much of the mangrove wetland there has been cleaned up.

As we enter a new year with so many economical and environmental challenges for our island, nation and world, we look forward to working with you our members and indeed the community of Abaco as we continue to expand programs that will enhance awareness of conservation issues on our island. Your membership is an integral part of our work here on Abaco.

Happy New Year,

Jim Richard
President

A Special Thank You

FRIENDS would like to extend a special Thank You to **Jo-Ann Bradley, Elaine Martinborough** and **Ann Bootle**, our out-going Board members. Their help and advice over the past years have been greatly appreciated.



A long time Board Member, Jo-Ann brought a wealth of human relations experience, artistic talent and creative energy to FRIENDS. A resident of Cherokee, she started recycling in the community and will remain an important part the recycling committee. Although Elaine only joined the Board last year her duties to the community are already pulling her away. She will remain an informative, energetic and helpful addition to FRIENDS. Ann has been instrumental in bringing FRIENDS activities to Treasure Cay, especially involving the Treasure Cay Primary School in our education programs. We look forward to continuing to work with her to provide educational opportunities to all of Abaco. Thank you so much for all of your hard work and best of luck for the future ladies!

FRIENDS Welcomes New Additions



Enzil Cooper is a trained educator that has been working in Abaco for over three and a half years. He has brought energy and contagious enthusiasm to FRIENDS' Education Program and is a constant fount of new ideas. This year, Mr. Cooper will be leading field trips and the Discovery Club while d'Shan is coordinating the RARE Campaign.

Congratulations to new Board Members **Justin Higgs, Reg Patterson, Della Kelly** and **Ann Albury**. Justin Higgs is a teacher at the Hope Town Primary School and has served on FRIENDS' Education Committee. Reg Patterson is a local surveyor and expert birder who will be involved with FRIENDS' terrestrial committee. Della Kelly is an integral part of the Sandy Point Beautification committee. With Della's help, we hope to bring more of our programs to South Abaco. Recently retired, Ann Albury lives in Treasure Cay and will be helping FRIENDS coordinate more programs for northern Abaco communities.

Abaco Moorings

This fall moorings at North Guana Reef and Fowl Cay Reef were maintained and new moorings were added at Sandy Cay Reef. These moorings are rated for boats up to 25ft. Ultimately, you are responsible for your boats and passengers. We recommend that you dive the mooring to make sure it is sound before leaving your boat.

Please report damaged moorings to FRIENDS.

Thanks to **SAME** members for their support of the moorings!

Friends of the Environment is pleased to announce that it has qualified for its own 501(c)3. That means gifts to FRIENDS are tax deductible in the United States.

FRIENDS will continue its wonderful relationship with PERC, and will also be accepting donations made through that organization.



Reef Ball

Saturday, March 7, 2009

Mark your calendar. Bring your dancing shoes!

Tickets (\$100) available online, from FRIENDS Board and staff, or at Java Café in Marsh Harbour.

You can also reserve a table for up to 8 people (\$850).

Each year at the Reef Ball FRIENDS presents the Annual Environmental Awards to a person or business in the community that has benefited Abaco's environment in some way.

To submit your nominations for the Environmental Awards send the name and address of your nominee, along with the reasons you think the nominee deserves to be recognized to:
Anita Knowles, (242) 367-2721 info@friendsoftheenvironment.org



Look what's going on at the FRIENDS Education Center!

Summer Camps Successful!, Discovery Club concludes another session, Teacher's workshop, Abaco students visit the FRIENDS' nature trail...



North Abaco Discovery Clubbers make bird nests using love vine as part of the bird badge series.



Teachers attending the Treasures in the Sea Workshop proudly display their certificates.



Cyber Learning Center students assist in creating the nature trail.



Volunteer Joy Chaplin explains the different parts of the egg to Marsh Harbour Discovery Clubbers.

Things are busy these days at FRIENDS! Over the last year we have been creating a new nature trail with a lot of help from Abaco students. Students from Cyber Learning Center and Every Child Counts found clearing the trails therapeutic!

The trail will be used as an education tool for students to learn about the terrestrial environment first hand. Several school groups have already come to walk the trail and it was an important part of the Discovery Club bird badge series.

Summer camps were also a fun time for students. Students engaged in arts and crafts, snorkeling, mangrove scavenging and bird watching field trips. At the end of the junior camp, campers spent the day in Hope Town, visiting the museum, having lunch and enjoying the beach. Senior campers had a one day excursion on a 40ft catamaran. They enjoyed snorkeling at Fowl Cay and roasted hot dogs on the beach.

Listen up for information on summer camp 2009, it will be lots of fun!

FRIENDS' new Discovery Club will be focusing on Bugs for their spring session. The Club operates in South, Central and Northern Abaco. To register your children or to volunteer with the program contact FRIENDS.



Marsh Harbour campers work together to make a marine habitat poster.



Man-O-War students visit the nature trail.



Campers in Sandy Point explore their beautiful home environment.

"Our greatest natural resource is the minds of our children"—Walt Disney

Why Birds Matter by Elwood D. Bracey, MD

Our planet has been taken over and is now run by humans, often with little regard for other forms of life. Birds are a good index of how the natural world is doing and how healthy our environment is or is not. Often human decisions about how to run our world are not only bad for birds, but for people as well.

Pollution of the air we breathe and the water we drink is equally bad for all living things. Bird populations are impacted long before our numbers are affected by environmental changes like oil spills and global warming, so doing annual bird counts lets us know in advance where we are headed.

Traditionally, men held bird shoots over the Christmas Holidays to see how many kinds of birds they could kill. Conservationists came up with the idea of doing Christmas bird counts, replacing guns with

binoculars, to see how many birds could be identified during that same time of year and to stop the slaughter that had been going on for years.

Already the Great Auk, Heath Hen and the Passenger Pigeon had gone extinct and the Carolina Parakeet, Bachman's Warbler, the California Condor and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker were on their way.

Now over 2000 Christmas Bird Counts are sponsored by the Audubon Society each year, the North and South Abaco Counts among them. This helps environmental awareness and gets people involved in bird identification and conservation.

On January 3rd Friends of the Environment conducted the 2nd annual North Abaco Christmas bird count with over 20 participants identifying over 100 different species. 92 were identified on count day and 102 during

count week, which is excellent for our little island in mid-winter. That compares favorably with the 101 species found last year. In time population trends will be evident and the health of our environment monitored.

The South Abaco count was established in the area of the Abaco National Park mainly to track the numbers of Abaco Parrots. This was its 5th year. So far, the parrots are doing well but there is fear that the raccoons introduced on Abaco will reduce or even wipe out our ground nesting signature bird. Feral cats, habitat loss, and excessive hunting have already reduced the numbers of some species.

Just like the Canary in the mines, birds do tell us when our surroundings are developing problems so that we might fix things before it's too late!



Crescent-eyed Pewee. Credit: A.C. Hepburn

FRIENDS Bird Walks

Marsh Harbour

3rd Saturday of each month, starting at the new FRIENDS' Nature Trail. If you can't make the walks, come visit the Nature Trail any weekday to see the birds!

Treasure Cay

1st Saturday of each month

Contact Anita for details: 367-2721 or anita@friendsoftheenvironment.org

Coconut Tree Bay Restoration Project Moves Forward



Before: Stands of Casuarinas lined the edge of the mangroves, hiding the wetland and the



After: Casuarinas were pulled out with an excavator revealing a healthy, and thanks to volunteers, cleaner coastal wetland system.

Coconut Tree Bay in Murphy Town has a new face lift! Over the past year, the Education Committee of FRIENDS has been diligently working with the Murphy Town Local Government Committee on the beautification and restoration of Coconut Tree Bay.

Coconut Tree Bay is a coastal park in Murphy Town that was in great need of attention. On the south side, it is bounded by a healthy wetland and on the north side by the coast that opens to the Sea of Abaco.

The area is used for community gatherings and as a boat launch for the local fisherman. However the area's vegetation was densely populated with invasive Australian Pine (Casuarina). There were also signs of negative activity in the area such as indiscriminate dumping of household waste and conch shells.

In September 2007, the local government committee placed a 20ft dumpster at the site and volunteers filled it up with trash and debris found in the area. FRIENDS partnered with the Murphy Town Committee by engaging volunteer groups such as civic youth groups,

school groups and volunteer groups in the community to clean up the area.

In December 2008, Rollins College, a liberal arts college in Orlando Florida, also volunteered their time by bringing a group of 21 first year students as part of a service learning class. The students spent four days busily combing the area, removing trash and debris such as aluminum cans, plastic bottles and even a tub! They also planted native trees and chopped down invasive Casuarina.

FRIENDS received a grant of \$2,000 from the Nature Conservancy that was used to

remove over three hundred feet of invasive Casuarina and to plant native trees.

The Murphy Town Committee has committed to purchasing additional native trees to plant in the area. Their plan is to continue the beautification and restoration of the area so that families in the community can use the park.

Today Coconut Tree Bay is open and the beauty of the mangroves have been revealed for all to see. Restoration efforts will continue as will FRIENDS' partnership with the local community. Together, we are making a difference!

ABACO NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN IS COMPLETE!

Copies will be available at the FRIENDS Education Center and the new Bahamas National Trust Office in Marsh Harbour.

Meetings to discuss the management plan will soon be arranged by FRIENDS and the Bahamas National Trust's new Abaco warden, David Knowles.

10 Easy Things You Can Do to Help the Environment:

1. **Use Green Bags**—other re-useable bags work too. The idea is to reduce the amount of new plastic bags brought to Abaco and decrease the amount of garbage that ends up in our landfills and on our streets.
2. **Buy local**—not only does this support Abaco's economy, but it helps us keep a smaller carbon footprint too! Imported items often take truck, plane *and* boat rides before they reach us in Abaco...that's a lot of fuel!
3. **Carpool**—Going out to lunch with friends? If everyone jumps in the same car you'll save money on gas, plus help reduce air pollution and fuel consumption. (Remember to take turns though!)
4. **Respect closed seasons**—and encourage restaurants and fishermen to do so as well by choosing an alternative for your lunch when Nassau grouper and crawfish seasons are closed.
5. **CFL's**—Compact fluorescent light bulbs may cost more initially, but they last longer and are more efficient, saving you money in the long run and using less electricity (2/3rds less energy than a regular incandescent bulb!)
6. **Recycle**—Also, consider crushing your cans. This allows us to transport more cans per shipment for recycling and reduces the amount of fuel needed for transport.
7. **Buy in Bulk**—this reduces the amount of packaging needed for your items *and* reduces the number of times you need to visit the grocery store (i.e. less gas for your vehicle).
8. **Shut down**—Leaving your office for a while? Shut down your computer and turn off the monitor. This can really add up!
9. **Lights out**—Turn off the lights and fan when you leave a room. Fans cool you off by evaporating sweat on your body. If your body isn't there, then the fan is only wasting energy.
10. **Have a candlelight dinner**—Turn off the overheads and light some candles... The rest is up to you! What a great way to save electricity!

DR
A
COY
K
W
?

Lionfish is Edible! ...mmm mmm good!



Lionfish is not poisonous as rumors have it, however there is venom in the spines (see photo). To clean, remove the spines, then filet and scale as usual (gloves are recommended).

First Aid: If you are poked, pour hot water (as hot as you can stand) over the wound. Heat breaks down the toxins. Then see a Doctor for follow up.
Consider lionfish as an alternative when Nassau Grouper season is closed.

Report lionfish sightings at: www.bahamas.gov.bs

FRIENDS Thanks Friends

Internal Affairs: David Price, Attorney at Law

Moorings Maintenance: Mark and Patti Gonsalves, Karl Syfrett, Thomas Holman, Froggies Out Island Adventure, Dive Guana

Recycling: Hope Town Association, Danny Trembley, Peggy Brawley, Junior Maynard, Lawrence & Val McPhee, Ric Symmes

Reef Ball Invitations and Publications: Joann Feinstein and the Nouveau Collective, Airgate Aviation

Cruiser's Net Announcements: Patti Toler

Cocktails for a Cause: The Milesi's, The Pleydell-Bouverie's, The Dowty's, Tupp's

Invasive Species Brochure: Joanne Feinstein and the Nouveau Collective

Native Plant Fairs: Blaine Sweeting, Michael Parotti, Murphy Town Township Committee, S.C. Bootle High school

Nature Trail: Stephen Knowles, Every Child Counts, and Cyber Learning Center

Christmas Bird Count: Tony White, A.C. (Tony) Hepburn, and all participants who helped make the event a success.

Wish List Donors: Lee McCoy, Bahamas Marine Mammal Research Organisation

Please check FRIENDS' website to see those **BUSINESS DONORS** who have so generously given their support this year.

Adopt-A-Dolphin

A new program launched by FRIENDS and the Bahamas Marine Mammal Research Organisation



Adoption Package (\$49/yr):
Adoption certificate
Dolphin Biography
Cool dolphin photo
Marine Mammals of The Bahamas DVD
FRIENDS sticker

*Makes a perfect gift!
Proceeds go directly to wild dolphin conservation & research in Abaco!*

BMMRO has been studying dolphins in Abaco for over 15 years and is able to monitor any potential changes or threats to this population. Dolphins are a top marine predator and an excellent indicator of the health of our oceans. By monitoring the status of dolphins in Abaco, we are essentially monitoring the condition of our marine environment and a healthy marine environment is important to everyone in Abaco!

The main objective of the Abaco Adopt-A-Dolphin program is to generate sustainable funds to support continued dolphin research and outreach work in Abaco.

BMMRO is based in Sandy Point, Abaco. There is a full-time staff of two which is supported by numerous part-time staff and volunteers throughout the year. Each summer, FRIENDS provides a scholarship for an Abaco high school student to attend a 10 day EarthWatch session at the BMMRO Research Centre, where they learn about BMMRO's work and participate in field research. To adopt a dolphin or for more information contact FRIENDS or visit: www.bahamaswhales.org.

Protecting the Creeks of East Abaco for Future Generations

Friends of the Environment and The Bahamas National Trust are collaborating on a proposal to protect the creeks of East Abaco, namely Snake Cay Creeks (a.k.a. Angel Cays), The Bight of Old Robinson and Cherokee Sound. The main goal of the proposal is to protect valuable mangrove nursery habitat while still allowing cultural activities, such as fishing, to take place.

This proposal is being designed with the community in mind and through public consultation. These creeks have been used by Bahamians for generations for fishing and recreation. In more recent years, many visitors have come to know and love the area as well. When asked, many people cite the untouched beauty and natural history of the area as reasons for visiting.

When a development was proposed for the area north of the Snake Cay Creeks, concern about their protection heightened and Friends of the Environment felt the timing was right to start a conversation with the community about creek conservation.

The proposal is being developed through community consultation including a survey and comments from attendees at community meetings in Marsh Harbour and Cherokee Sound. Future meetings are planned for Little Harbour and Casuarina Point.

These creeks encompass a variety of habitats including mangroves, seagrass and algae beds,

blue holes and coppice. The mangroves and seagrass beds are particularly important as they serve as nursery habitat for juvenile fish and crawfish – animals that grow up to be the mainstays of our fishing industry, providing many of us with food for our table.

The East Abaco Creeks hold the highest density of blue holes in Abaco, and are one of the most densely packed blue hole areas in The Bahamas. Interesting to note, these creeks are connected underground by the blue hole system. This is one of the main reasons that these particular areas are being proposed. What may affect one creek could affect the other. This is a particular concern with pollution and siltation.

The purpose of the proposal is to lobby for designation of the area as a national park. After designation, the normal procedure in this process is to return to the community for discussion on a management plan. The management plan would outline specific guidelines for the use of the park (education, enforcement, income generation strategies, etc) and also include potential plans for the future. Additionally, bylaws would be created to guide management of the park. Any bylaws that are formed would be additional to existing Bahamian laws and regulations.

Fairly recently, Abaco went through the management planning process for the Abaco National

Park. Many of you may have been involved in the round table discussions which formed that plan. Similarly, all steps of the East Abaco Creeks Proposal process will not be completed without community consultation.

Foremost, designation of this park will help to sustain biodiversity and habitat in the creeks which will allow us to continue our recreational and subsistence use of the creeks.



Visit our Blog!

friendsoftheenvironmentabaco.blogspot.com

The blog is a chance to share up to date news and for the community to become more involved in our activities.

FRIENDS' Mission: To preserve and protect Abaco's terrestrial and marine environments in order to achieve sustainable living for the wildlife and people of Abaco, Bahamas.

Officers:

President, Jim Richard

Vice President, Cha Boyce

Secretary, Cha Boyce

Treasurer, Charlotte Dunn

Directors: Diane Claridge, Laura Davis, Tim Higgs, Bernadette Hall, David Price, David Knowles, Ann Pleydell-Bouverie, Justin Higgs, Reg Patterson, Della Kelly, Ann Albury.

Staff:

Executive Director, Kristin Williams

Office Manager, Anita Knowles

Education Officers, d'Shan Maycock and Enzil Cooper

Program Coordinator, Olivia Patterson

Special Projects Coordinator, Lindsey McCoy

Committee Heads:

Education, Laura-lee Davis

Internal Affairs, Jim Richard

Marine Parks & Preservation, Cha Boyce

Newsletter/Data, Nan Kenyon

Recycling, Bernadette Hall

Reef Ball, Cha Boyce

Terrestrial Parks & Preservation,

Anita Knowles & David Knowles

Website, Kent LeBoutillier

FRIENDS is a not for profit Society incorporated under the Bahamas

Companies Act of 1991.

FRIENDS' Contact Information

Education Center:

#2 Conservation Drive

Marsh Harbour, Abaco

Tel: (242) 367-2721 Fax: (242) 367-0722

e-mail: info@friendsoftheenvironment.org

website: www.friendsoftheenvironment.org

Mailing Address:

PO Box AB-20755

Marsh Harbour, Abaco, Bahamas



**Be A FRIEND -
Plant Native**

