



# Friends of the Environment

## Abaco, Bahamas



Vol. 17, Issue 2

Environmental Activities Since 1988

Summer 2010

## Bonefish Research in Abaco, Tagging and Learning

For hundreds of years, men have been searching these seas for lost treasure, little did we know, the treasure is not lost at all...it has been staring us in the face.

Commonly called "the grey ghost", the bonefish is highly sought after worldwide, creating a lucrative industry that exists few places on the globe. Luckily, The Bahamas, known for its pristine flats and large populations of bonefish, is one of these places. However, until recently the actual impact of flats fishing to the Bahamian economy has been unknown. Fortunately The Bahamas Flats Fishing Alliance, after conducting an economic survey, found that annually, bonefishing in The Bahamas contributes \$141 million to the Bahamian economy. Anglers contribute to the economy directly and indirectly, by buying goods, renting equipment and hiring the services of local guides. This report not only highlights the importance of bonefishing as a low-impact industry for The Bahamas, but also the need to manage the fishery so that bonefish populations remain sustainable and their fragile habitat becomes a conservation focus within the country.

Despite their popularity, little is known about the bonefish, in fact, researchers are only just beginning to

understand their spawning cycles and habitat use, in order to sufficiently manage the species and the fishery, more information about the bonefish is needed. The economic study done by the Bahamas Flats Fishing Alliance has only strengthened the need for more flats conservation in The Bahamas, with numbers like \$141 million, it is imperative that The Bahamas insure that the fishery is effectively managed, sustained and not exploited.

To insure this, The Abaco Fly Fishing Guides Association is working with the Bonefish and Tarpon Trust and will be conducting a first of its kind tagging program on Abaco the week of October 17th. The goal is to have guides and anglers catch, measure, weigh and tag hundreds of bonefish with spaghetti tags. As these fish are re-caught in the near future and information about size and location changes are put into a data base we will begin to learn about the bonefish. There will also be dozens of fish implanted with sonic tags so scientists can learn about bonefish movement in relation to their spawning habits.

Learning about where Abaco's bonefish live, how quickly they grow and where they spawn will give us the information to design effective

management and conservation plans so that healthy bonefish fisheries are maintained here for years to come.

Any angler wishing to become part of history by helping to close the gaps in our knowledge about bonefish can participate in the tagging program by contacting [mick@tarbone.org](mailto:mick@tarbone.org) for information on single, three day or six day all inclusive bonefish tagging trips. In the mean time, anglers and guides can contribute to proper management by following best practices for catching and handling bonefish.



Bonefish traveling along a healthy sea grass bed in Abaco. Photo by Brian Grossenbacher

## Community Water Testing Program Begins on Elbow Cay

In 2009, Professors and students from the Water: Systems, Science and Society (WSSS) program at Tufts University, spent their Spring Break on Elbow Cay with homeowner and Tufts Alum John Foster, taking water samples to investigate levels of fecal coliform bacteria around the island.

As the students explained in the presentation they made in March, isolated testing only provides a snapshot in time of the state of our water quality. In order to truly understand what's going on in the waters around Elbow Cay samples must be taken through out the year to account for differences in temperature, the effects of the amount of people on the Cay and other factors. Therefore, this Spring, a new group of students from Tufts returned to repeat water sampling around Elbow Cay.

Through interest expressed by the community and FRIENDS, Tufts offered to help devise a long-term water monitoring program for Abaco.

The Tuft's students developed a training protocol and trained FRIENDS' Program Coordinator, Olivia Patterson, as well as several volunteers in the methods used to take the samples and to run the analysis to determine levels of fecal coliform bacteria in the water. The resulting data, which is available on the FRIENDS' website in the marine section, will be submitted to Tufts who will assist with the interpretation and

will return to Elbow Cay once more in the spring to discuss the results and continue testing as part of their WSSS program. Additional volunteer training sessions will be held this fall. If you are interested in becoming involved please contact Olivia Patterson: [olivia@friendsoftheenvironment.org](mailto:olivia@friendsoftheenvironment.org)

### Upcoming Events:

- FRIENDS Environmental Camps will be held in Cooper's Town, Marsh Harbour and Sandy Point Junior Camp: **July 13-17th**, Senior Camp: **July 19-23rd**
- **Pete's Pub Summer Camp Fundraiser Bash**—July 16th, 6pm until...
- **August 8th—Baker's Bay Sailaway!** Enjoy a great day at the beach with food and drinks while supporting Every Child Counts and FRIENDS.
- **August 21st**—Dance the night away at **Snappa's** in Marsh Harbour to benefit FRIENDS education program.
- **September** is International Coastal Cleanup Month. Join us for clean-ups, or host your own!

## Wild and Scenic Film Festival in Abaco!

Through a grant from Patagonia FRIENDS is pleased be able to bring the Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival to The Bahamas for the first time. The is the largest environmental film festival in the United States and it is coming to Abaco via FRIENDS this November! Film maker Christopher Beaver states that "Wild and Scenic is the next Sundance."

Film is an innovative method of outreach and has the ability to translate the severity of environmental issues as well as inspire and motivate individuals to make a difference in their community. This is what FRIENDS hopes to achieve through this festival, bringing a new energy and urgency to the environmental community. There is a large list of diverse films the volunteer committee has to choose from, let us know if you would like to be involved! A film and location schedule will be coming soon!

**FRIENDS does its best to provide logistical support to visiting scientists to assist in their field research, which ultimately helps our environment.**

**FRIENDS is now looking for a new vehicle to assist our programs and which the scientists can use, as the current one is succumbing to the elements. If you, or someone you know, would like to donate an old (or new) truck to a good cause, please contact FRIENDS.**

## President's Message

Summer is here, and FRIENDS of the Environment continues to work through the summer heat to preserve Abaco's unique environment in so many ways! Staff and volunteers are busy putting the final touches on summer camp preparations. This month, camps will be held in Marsh Harbour, Cooper's Town and Sandy Point - all free for our local children! FRIENDS' education officer d'Shan Maycock continues to spread the message of "Size Matters," and her posters, buttons, bumper stickers, tape measures and pens are popping up all over the island! The support from local fishermen, industry leaders and the government officials gives us high hopes that together we may be able to conserve the economically important Bahamian crawfish population.



Our recent successes include the launching of a locally produced movie, "The Lionfish Invasion" and the hosting of our very own lionfish derby, the first in Central Abaco. Earth Day was a huge success, highlighted by a visit from Miss Earth Bahamas. It also gave FRIENDS the opportunity to launch the Size Matters Pride Campaign in the schools. Our new mascot "Spike" has visited many of the local schools and the campaign song written by d'Shan and performed by local Bahamian artist Geno D has just been released on CD!

Like many of you, FRIENDS is also keeping a watchful eye on the movement of oil from the tragic accident in the Gulf of Mexico. Volunteers are being enlisted locally, and baseline data is already being collected in the Cay Sal and Bimini areas. We pray this tragedy doesn't reach our shores, but are cognizant that we must prepare in the event that it does.

As always, we are thankful for the support of all of our members. We understand that Abaco still has not recovered fully from the worldwide recession, and it is only because of your dedication, financial support and volunteer efforts that we are able to continue educating Abaconians and visitors alike about the fragile Abaconian environment. It is the small things we each do in our daily lives, and the big things we do together that will ensure Abaco remains a fantastic island for all.

Jim Richard

## FRIENDS thanks FRIENDS

**Cruiser's Net Announcements:** Pattie Toler

**Earth Day Science Fair:** New Vision Ministries, Colina, The Ministry of Tourism, Loggerhead Productions, Sky Bahamas, Abaco Beach Resort, The Bahamas National Trust, Airgate Aviation, Our judges, and Miss Earth Bahamas—Krystle Brown.

**Recycling:** Every Child Counts, Oasis Services,

**Internal Affairs:** David Price, Attorney at Law

**Lionfish Derby:** Marsh Harbour Marina & Jib Room, Sawyers Soft Drinks, Jake Allgeier, Christina Acevedo, Lauren Yeager, Lindsey Borsz, The National Science Foundation, The Department of Marine Resources, Bobbie Lindsay, Standard Hardware

**Moorings Maintenance:** Mark Gonsalves, Tim Higgs, Froggies Out Island Adventure, Dive Guana, Baker's Bay Golf and Ocean Club, Bahamas National Trust

**Size Matters Pride Campaign:** Geno D, Colorado State University, The Nature Conservancy, Sean Heystek, Carl Archer, Elaine Martinborough, Marsh Harbour Importers and Exporters, JA Pinder, North Abaco Fishing Cooperative, The Bahamas Marine Exporters Association

**Coral Transplanting Workshop:** Disney's Animal Programs and Environmental Initiatives

**Discovery Club** Joy Chaplin, Alana Carroll

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

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.

## Pride Campaign Update

The Size Matters Pride Campaign is having huge conservation implications for the crawfishing industry throughout The Bahamas.

The Bahamas is one of the top four producers of crawfish in the world, having exported approximately five million pounds of crawfish in 2008. However, as the global community shifts its emphasis towards establishing sustainable fisheries around the world, a international certification called the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) has been established and certification requirements state that a country must become certified for each species that is exports internationally. As it stands, The Bahamas must become certified in order to export lobster or we will lose our place in the international market.

When FRIENDS designed the Pride campaign we were unaware of this national and international initiative. However, we are now working with

the Bahamian government, industry leaders and national and international NGO's to implement some of the necessary steps to gain this international certification. To date FRIENDS has held meetings with fishermen in south, central and north Abaco, making them aware of what is happening in their industry and what will now be required of them as fishermen to help sustain this very important species.

In addition to working with the local fishermen the campaign has been reaching out to the younger generations, visiting schools throughout the mainland and cays. FRIENDS is extremely proud to see the difference we are making in sustaining the crawfish industry as well as the lives of the local fishermen in Abaco.



## Abaco's Blue Holes Park Proposal Moves Closer to Submission

The Abaco Blue Holes Park Proposal has been on the road. Thus far community meetings have been held in Cherokee (twice), Casuarina, Sandy Point (twice), Marsh Harbour, Treasure Cay and Nassau. An additional community meeting is planned for Crossing Rocks.

Written by expert cave diver Brian Kakuk, the proposal seeks to protect an area in south Abaco where a number of blue holes, including Dan's Cave, Ralph's Cave, Nancy's Cave, and Sawmill Sink are located. These blue holes are part of an underground network that became famous when bones of animals that no longer exist in Abaco - crocodiles, tortoises and several types of birds - were recovered from their depths. National Geographic recently made a visit and will feature Abaco's blue holes in the August edition of their magazine.

FRIENDS, The Bahamas Cave Foundation and Antiquities Monuments and Museum Corporation, hope to submit the Park Proposal to The Bahamas National Trust this summer. The BNT will then review the proposal before they submit it to Government. Thus far the proposal has not been met with any opposition. One gentleman, who was born in Sandy Point and has lived there for 62 years said, "There is no benefit to destroying it (the blue hole area). I don't see why the community would oppose it. Abaco has so much land to use and back there is mangroves and should be protected anyway!"

## Central Abaco Lionfish Derby Results

Thank you to all who participated in and supported the Marsh Harbour Lionfish Derby. It was a great success towards the goal of reducing the number of lionfish in the Sea of Abaco! Nine boats participated and 685 lionfish were caught.

### Winners:

#### Most Lionfish Caught:

**1st Place-** Sea Tiger (Jody Albury, Amos Weatherford, Tim Blakely) with 206 fish

**2nd Place-** Yellow Bird (Keith Stratton, Garrett Russell, Gavin Russell) with 196 fish,

**3rd Place**—Dundas Town (Barry, Mark and Owen) with 95 fish.

**Largest Lionfish** at 11.5 inches was caught by Yellow Bird, and the **Smallest Lionfish** at 2 inches was caught by Explorer (Justin Higgs, Mark Mclean, Chris Gorman, Bill Butler).



Contenders for the smallest lionfish category.



# What's New with the Education Program?

It's been a busy Spring for the Education program! Our Education Officer, d'Shan Maycock, has been traveling all over Abaco to spread the message of our spiny lobster pride campaign, Earth Day saw an attendance of over 400 students and teachers, Discovery Clubbers earned Weather and Endangered Species badges and the students of Cyber Learning Center and Forest Heights Academy learned to transplant corals from scientists working with the Disney Wildlife Program!



Central Abaco Primary had a very elaborate Earth Day project. The students even sang a song!



Guest Speaker, Miss Earth Bahamas, with students of Central Abaco Primary.



Cyber Learning Center's project discussed ideas for a sustainable trap. At left is Carl Archer Jr., one of FRIENDS' Junior Board members.



Spike, our pride campaign mascot visited Moore's Island All Age School, along with FRIENDS and representatives from Rare.

**It's all about the crawfish!**  
As a component of FRIENDS "Size Matters" campaign the education program is focusing on crawfish in 2010. This year's Earth Day Science Fair theme was *Conserving Abaco's Spiny Lobster Population, now and for the future.*



Students were provided with measuring tapes so they can make sure their crawfish dinner measures up to the legal size of 5.5 inches or greater. *Size Matters!*



Discovery Club Explorers shared what they learned at an open house this May.



In May 2010 Disney's Animal Programs assisted with a coral transplanting workshop where high school students got a hands on experience with some of Disney's top scientists.



Discovery Clubbers stand proudly with their new badges.

## Camp Abaco Creek Restoration

In April of 2006, FRIENDS partnered with Dr. Craig Layman and his team from Florida International University and conducted a community-based restoration project for the wetland system in Cross Harbour Sound, Abaco. The project consisted of restoring natural tidal flow by installing culverts under the existing causeway, then selectively removing mangroves that had encroached into the historic tidal channel. From both a community outreach and scientific perspective, the project was a resounding success. Almost 300 students and community members were directly involved with the restoration and monitoring which brought forth a significant increase of diversity and abundance of algae, invertebrates and also fish within the area. Most notably, the project used cutting edge acoustic telemetry technology to directly document that the fish that were previously "blocked" on the upstream side of the wetland had since moved to the ocean environment. Overall the restoration project was incredibly successful both from an education and scientific perspective.

FRIENDS and Dr. Layman are now planning another restoration project for October 2010, this time the restoration will occur in the creeks that surround Camp Abaco. The creeks on the eastern side of Abaco are highly productive juvenile habitats for native marine life, so much so that FRIENDS and The Bahamas National Trust have



submitted a proposal to designate these areas as a national park. The creek system at Camp Abaco is directly tied to those creeks featured in the East Abaco Creeks Proposal (Snake Cay, The Bight of Old Robinson and Cherokee Creeks) and this restoration project will help to expand these habitats and increase their productivity. The restoration will be conducted in the same manner as the Cross Harbour project and will involve school children from Abaco and Nassau as well as members of the community. If you are interested in learning more or volunteering please contact us. Updates about the upcoming restoration will also be sent out in the FRIENDS monthly email newsletter.

**We encourage you to renew your membership by sending in the enclosed membership envelope. Thank you in advance for your support – the work of FRIENDS could not be done without you!**

## FRIENDS Financials 2009

INCOME	
Membership	\$26,046.63
Donations	\$52,407.00
The Reef Ball	\$58,965.39
RARE	\$22,055.46
Other Events	\$11,875.82
Merchandise	\$7,998.06
Admin. Services	\$1,595.00
Interest from the CD	\$608.34
Rentals	\$23,460.00
Foundations	\$47,855.00
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$252,866.70</b>
EXPENSES	
Education Center	
Salaries	\$34,167.02
Rent	\$21,600.00
BEC Electric	\$5,691.75
Communications	\$2,913.07
Office Supplies	\$3,605.62
Office Maintenance	\$2,533.92
Transportation	\$897.00
Bank Charges	\$2,756.62
Depreciation	\$3,699.48
Meetings/Conferences	\$1,629.22
Insurance for Office	\$1,726.36
Programs	
Marine	\$17,138.12
Terrestrial (ANP & Invasives)	\$10,691.20
Recycling	\$15,887.62
Environmental Education	\$45,641.32
Pride Campaign	\$33,074.04
Sustainable Development	\$2,808.24
Development	\$36,489.50
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$242,950.10</b>
<b>Revenue</b>	<b>\$9,916.60</b>

**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:** Justin Higgs, Diane Claridge, Laura Davis, Tim Higgs, Bernadette Hall, David Knowles, Anne Albury, Reg Patterson, David Price, Jody Albury, Chovez McBride

### Staff:

*Executive Director*, Kristin Williams  
*Office Manager*, Anita Knowles  
*Education Officer, Pride Campaign Manager*, d'Shan Maycock  
*Program Coordinator*, Olivia Patterson

### Committee Heads:

*Education*, Laura-lee Davis, Justin Higgs

*Internal Affairs*, Jim Richard

*Marine Parks & Preservation*, Cha Boyce

*Data Coordinator*, Nan Kenyon

*Waste Reduction*, Bernadette Hall

*Reef Ball*, Cha Boyce

*Terrestrial Parks & Preservation*, Anita Knowles & David Knowles

*Website*, Robert Bethel

*Sustainable Development*, Charlotte Dunn, Lindsey McCoy

### FRIENDS' Contact Information

Education Center:

#2 Conservation Lane  
 Marsh Harbour, Abaco

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

e-mail: [info@friendsoftheenvironment.org](mailto:info@friendsoftheenvironment.org)

website: [www.friendsoftheenvironment.org](http://www.friendsoftheenvironment.org)

Mailing Address:

PO Box AB-20755  
 Marsh Harbour, Abaco, Bahamas

**FRIENDS is a not for profit Society incorporated under the Bahamas Companies Act of 1991.**