

TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE

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UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

CLEAN UP EFFORT ON BLUEBEARDS BEACH

On Sunday, September 16, 1990, over 150 people registered to help clean up Bluebeard's Beach on the East End of St. Thomas. The group contained approximately 70 divers and 25 snorkelers so both the beach and the surrounding water were cleaned. The following is a list of material collected;

Most abundant items recorded,

- (A) 275 bottles
- (B) 575 containers
- (C) 479 bags

Other items included;

metal cans, styrofoam food containers, diapers

Miscellaneous garbage;

(galley, sewage or medical waste);

chlorox bottles

condoms

diapers

tampon applicators

hypodermic needles

pills in jars

Estimated total weight = 6 tons

VIRGIN ISLANDS WHELK SEASON REOPENED

The 1990 whelk season reopens on October 1 in the Virgin Islands, after a six month closure (March 31 to October 1). Minimum allowable size is 2 1/2 inches in diameter.

COMING SOON

EDUCATIONAL TRAYLINERS

1990 LEATHERBACK TURTLE RESULTS

SECRETARY SIGNS NEW FISHING RULES

Commerce Secretary Moshbacher recently approved Amendment 1 to the Fishery Management Plan for Shallow Water Reeffish in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

These regulations;

- (1) Prohibit the possession of Nassau grouper in Federal waters,
- (2) Close the red hind spawning bank each year from December 1 through February 28 to all trap and bottom fishing,
- (3) Increase the legal minimum mesh size from 11/2" in the smallest dimension to 2" in the smallest dimension, beginning on November 1, 1991.

Work on Amendment 2 for the same Plan has already begun. Several issues are under consideration. One would modify the legal minimum mesh requirement mentioned above. A second issue would identify the specific material to be used in closing the escape door so derelict traps would automatically release trapped fish at the end of a 10-day period. A third issue might be the closure of additional grouper and snapper spawning grounds. Gill nets and trammel nets are likely to receive Council attention as well.

ST.CROIX GROUND LIZARD

The St.Croix Ground lizard (*Ameiva polops*) is a federally listed endangered species. It has been extirpated from St.Croix and is now known to exist only on Protestant Cay and Green Cay. This past summer, Fish and Wildlife biologists trapped 11 lizards and relocated them to Ruth Cay, off the south shore near the VIALCO dock entrance.

On September 13, Fish and Wildlife biologists returned to Ruth Cay and determined that lizards still survived there. The establishment of a third population will enhance this endangered species' chances of survival.

VI FISHERMEN MEET WITH COUNCIL

VI Commercial reef fish fishermen met recently with Executive Director Miguel Rolon and three Caribbean Fisheries Management Council (CFMC) members including the Chairman, Nick Zinkowski from Culebra. Two topics were discussed in detail:

- (1) Required minimum mesh size of 2" for traps to be used in Federal Waters, and,
- (2) Possession of Nassau grouper.

Although the new mesh regulation does not become effective until October, 1991, the fishermen expressed two immediate concerns: (a) They were fearful that some desired species such as goatfish would escape too easily because of the larger mesh, and (b) That severe economic hardship would occur because since Hugo, fishermen have invested in coated wire, with a useful life of 2-3 years, and regulations rendering those traps obsolete was unacceptable. A compromise suggestion was made: That as an interim measure, a piece of 2" wire be spliced into existing traps, covering a side of the trap with the larger mesh.

The Nassau restriction raises another important issue. There is no satisfactory answer to the argument that incidentally caught fish, no matter how carefully handled, will die after they are released. The argument in support of the no-possession rule has two prongs.

The first is that "no-possession" will discourage directed fisheries toward the protected species. This argument may have some validity in a mixed species fishery, but it is not clear how effective it might be. In our case, however, the Magnuson Act - which created the councils and Federal management in the first place - is unyielding on this point. The Act says, "...management measures shall prevent overfishing..." [301(a)(1)].

FAD RESEARCH

Fishermen have known that fish are attracted to floating objects. Even today scientists are unsure why this is so, but everyone agrees that it happens.

In recent years, the Division of Fish and Wildlife has experimented with different materials, shapes and locations such as using cork mats, bamboo rafts and floating logs to catch tuna, dolphin fish and other free-swimming oceanic species. In recent years, the case of anchored fish aggregating device (FADs) have been employed to increase the harvest of pelagic fish species such as wahoo, tuna, dolphin, mackerel and marlin.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife is presently constructing FADs which will be deployed for use by fishermen around St. Thomas/St. John. These FADs will be located on the North Drop in approximately 150 fathoms of waters and on the South drop in less than 50 fathoms. They will be constructed of foam filled tires with lights, radar reflectors and daymarkers. They will be anchored to the bottom using heavy chain and engine blocks. Attractors will be placed below the surface to attract bait fish and provide shade and orientation for associated fish species. Coordinates will be issued to all fishermen once the FADs are in place and we hope feedback will be provided as to the success of these units.

GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

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NEW PROJECTS FOR 1991

The Wildlife Bureau will be researching the following projects during the next five year period if approved by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service;

- Red-billed Tropicbird Breeding
- Survey of Nesting Seabirds
- Masked Booby Translocation
- Publication of the Island Atlas
- Habitat use and nest success of the Sooty tern
- Kestrel (Sparrow Hawk) Nest Box use
- Wildlife Use of Saltwater Wetlands
- Survey of Roseate tern
- Use of Bat Detectors
- Bat Radiotracking

The Fisheries Bureau will be researching the following projects also pending USFWS approval;

- Recreational Port Sampling
- Mangroves as Nursery Grounds for Recreational Fisheries
- Investigation of Offshore Fisheries Habitat on the VI Insular Shelf
- Investigation of Billfish in the VI
- Assessment of flyingfish and needlefish resources
- Recreational live bait fishing for yellowfin tuna
- Assessment of the baitfish, Dwarf Herring, resources
- West End Salt Pond
- Cooperative Statistics Study

The Environmental Education Bureau will be organizing the following projects;

- Survey of Environmental Issues
- Environmental Issues in the VI
- Significant Plants in the VI
- Snorkel/Dive Tips
- Environmental Awareness for Boaters
- Plastics in the Environment
- VI Ecosystems - Habitats in Danger
- Project WILD in the classroom

Any suggestions from the public on future projects would be most welcome.

COLONIAL WATERBIRD CONFERENCE

A year after Hugo, information continues to be gathered on the effects the storm seemed to have on wildlife populations. Canadian biologists studying Brown Noddies (terns) in Culebra have found that fewer birds returned to the breeding colony this summer and those that did return, arrived almost two weeks later than usual. These findings were consistent with Brown Noddy population data in the Virgin Islands colonies. Sooty Terns arrived ten days earlier to the Virgin Islands than in most years to nest and benefited from the storm because more nesting habitat was made available by the wind's pruning effect on vegetation. To add even more confusion, some unknown climatic event may have mysteriously caused Roseate Terns migrating to New England colonies to arrive two weeks late.

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