

TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL
RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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OUR FRAGILE REEFS

Coral reefs are one of the most complex assemblages of plants and animals in the world. The reef structure is primarily made up of reef-forming corals which are small polyp-type animals that secrete calcium carbonate skeletons which form large masses. Living in and among the corals on a reef are sponges, gorgonians (sea fans), algae (sea weed), fish and many, many smaller animals (invertebrates) such as crabs, shells, anemones, shrimp, lobsters, etc.. Each one of these plants and animals shares a role in supporting the total reef community. Too many or not enough of any one of these organisms can lead to a system out of balance, and the overall health of the reef can decline. This can happen through physical damage (either manmade or natural - hurricanes), pollution, sediment runoff and over fishing.

Coral reefs are important in protecting our shorelines from wave erosion, producing sand for our beaches, providing homes for most of the fish that we eat and for attracting tourists from around the world to support our economy. Without these reefs we could lose many of our beaches, our fisheries could decline to nothing, our waters could become turbid and unsuitable for other forms of marine life and we could lose many of the things that tourists come to the Virgin Islands to see.

Here are some things that **YOU** can do to protect and preserve our coral reefs. Only if we each take some care of our reefs will they be here for generations to come.

* When anchoring a boat, place your anchor in sand, not in coral (or seagrass).

* Don't walk on reefs, corals are very fragile and break easily. This also destroys habitat and animals that live on it.

* Don't take live or dead coral from the ocean. If everyone visiting our islands took a piece of coral, in a few years we would have no reefs.

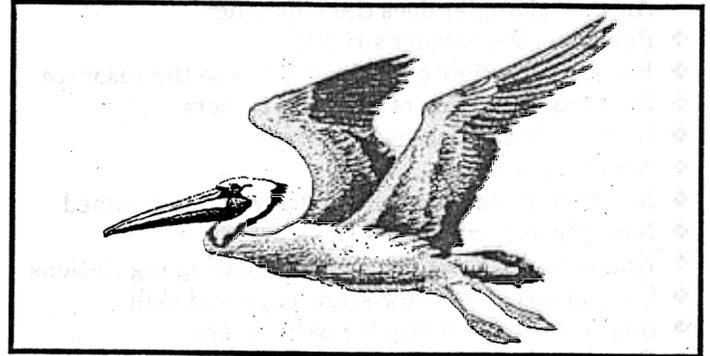
* Don't throw trash or petroleum products in the ocean; it can foul our reefs and kill the corals and other animals that live there.

* Operate your boat responsibly; know where the reefs are and stay away from them. A single boat grounding can destroy hundreds of square meters of reef which can take hundreds of years to regrow, if at all.

* When snorkeling or diving, be careful not to break corals with your fins or gear. Check your buoyancy.

* Do your part in educating others about reefs, including the problems associated with sediment runoff, pollution and sewage discharge into the ocean.

* Report violations to the appropriate agencies:
DPNR - Bureau of Environmental Enforcement, Division of Fish and Wildlife.



The Brown Pelican, *Pelecanus occidentalis*, is a common sight in the Virgin Islands. Because of population declines in the SE US due to pesticides this species was listed as endangered. Our VI populations have appeared to be relatively healthy in recent years. The main nesting sites are on Congo Cay, Dutchcap Cay, Whistling Cay, Mary's Point, St. John and Buck Island, St. Croix.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife performs annual surveys of all seabirds in the VI and has found pelicans to be increasing in recent years.

However, in the past couple of weeks, a number of pelicans have been found in very lethargic states, unable to fly. Quite a few pelicans have also been found exhibiting similar symptoms in Florida but it is not known if there is any relationship. Samples from a pelican that died have been sent to the States for analysis.

Anyone observing a pelican that can't fly is requested to call the Division or Andy Williamson (775-3240).

ENVIRONMENTAL DISPLAYS

The Division of Fish and Wildlife is requesting assistance in disseminating environmental information. We can put together packages of brochures, etc., along with a display sign for your business, school or community center. This will help us increase people's awareness of environmental issues and information. We hope, by increasing awareness, to cause changes in behavior that will protect and preserve our natural environment.

If you are interested, please contact us.

COMING SOON

- > EARTHDAY ACTIVITIES
- > WHAT IS A SEAGRASS?
- > WHO LIVES IN WETLANDS?

ETHICAL ANGLING

Angling is fishing for recreational enjoyment. Although anglers often share their catch with others, an angler does not sell his/her catch. Many anglers choose to practice catch and release fishing, returning their catch unharmed as soon as it is caught. As an angler you have a large responsibility. Your actions will allow many other people to enjoy fishing in the future.

An ethical angler does the following:

- ❖ Respects other angler's rights
- ❖ Respects the rights of others who use the resource
- ❖ Respects the rights of property owners
- ❖ Keeps only the fish he/she wants
- ❖ Never wastes fish
- ❖ Releases unwanted fish carefully and unharmed
- ❖ Never litters or pollutes the waters
- ❖ Knows and follows angling and boating regulations
- ❖ Continually seeks new knowledge and skill
- ❖ Shares his/her knowledge with others
- ❖ Doesn't release live bait or non-native fish into waters
- ❖ Promotes the sport of fishing and supports resource enhancement activities

Having respect for other people means treating them as you would like to be treated. Having respect for the environment means treating it so future generations may enjoy it.

Fishing laws are meant to protect the resource and ensure that fishing can be shared by everyone. It is your responsibility to report violators to the agency responsible for protecting our natural resources (St.T./St.J. - 774-3320, St.X. - 773-3450).

REMEMBER THAT EARTHDAY IS
COMING UP ON APRIL 22!

Trees were saved by printing on recycled paper

A PELICAN STORY

"Popeye" the pelican was first found swimming in the Stouffer Grand swimming pool on St. Thomas in November 1990. He was taken to a vet where he was found to be very hungry and weak but otherwise healthy. He was released a few days later near Hans Lollick island where other pelicans gather. A few months later he was found at the beach near the Beef Island Guest House on Trellis Bay, Beef Island, BVI. He would show up every morning for a breakfast of mackerel at the hotel.

Several months later he was found at Caneel Bay, St. John covered with oil and wandering the beach. After cleaning and being fed he was taken to Water Island and cared for by volunteers. One day he flew away, but showed up back at Beef Island five days later, begging breakfast. "Popeye" has since been seen at Sugar Bay, St. Thomas, back on Beef Island and in Red Hook, St. Thomas. Recently, we were saddened to learn that "Popeye" was found dead on the beach at Trellis Bay, apparently due to people having killed him.

In general, we do not condone feeding of wild animals, however, when sick or injured and unable to feed themselves, it may enable them to return to health.

QUOTE

"They who know the truth are not equal to those who love it, and they who love it are not equal to those who delight in it."

Confucius



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