

TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL
RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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WHO CARES ABOUT MANGROVES?

Why should we care about some smelly trees that trap lots of garbage and take up valuable shoreline which could be used as marinas? There are actually many good reasons, some of which may indirectly affect each and every one of us.

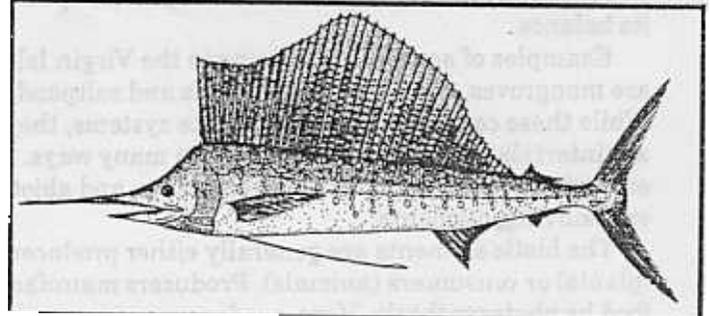
To begin with, mangroves are trees that are adapted to live in soil often flooded by water. In the V.I. we have three species of mangroves; red, black and white, each adapted to a different amount of salt and water they can live in. Red mangroves actually live in seawater, with their roots supporting the trees over the water. Black mangroves live behind them in saturated soils where the trees "breathe" using roots that project out of the soil like snorkels (also called pneumatophores). White mangroves are found landward of the black mangroves and are often found growing around low salinity saltponds.

All of these trees play vital roles in reef fish production, keeping our waters clean, maintaining the health of other nearshore habitats and protecting our shorelines from erosion.

The red mangrove roots are extremely important in providing refuge for juvenile coral reef fish. Nearly every fish we see on the coral reef spent some portion of its life history in the mangroves where it found refuge from predation and nutrient rich food sources. By destroying this nursery habitat we threaten the existence of our reef fisheries. These roots also trap sediment washed from our hillsides during heavy rainfall. This keeps our ocean water clear and protects our reefs and seagrass beds. The leaf litter and debris that fall into the roots decay and serve as a nutrient source for other nearby marine habitats and the basis for many marine food chains. Red mangroves also form islands where many species of wildlife can roost or nest, safe from predation by rats or mongoose.

Black mangrove pneumatophores are important in filtering sediment from runoff and keeping our waters clear. It is also believed that these structures may remove chemicals from the water and prevent them from reaching the sea, thus reducing pollution.

By losing our mangroves we are losing wildlife habitat, our fisheries, protection for our reefs and seagrasses and many other values that affect us all. Other countries have lost theirs through lack of foresight and proper management. Let us here in the Virgin Islands show care and understanding of the value of mangroves and work together to protect and enhance them. Our future depends on it!



The sailfish, *Istiophorus albicans*, is a popular sportfish sought by fishermen for its fighting abilities. This fish is caught using a variety of lures and live bait from November to March with the peak season in December and January. Remember, this species is not allowed to be caught except with rod and reel and may not be landed if less than 57 inches (from tip of lower jaw to fork of tail). It is primarily caught beyond the shelf edge at the surface over deep water.

This species is highly migratory, with individuals probably ranging over large portions of the Atlantic Ocean. Sailfish are believed to feed on a variety of fishes, crustaceans (crabs and shrimp) and cephalopods (squid, etc.).

LEAST TERNS ARE HERE

Least Terns have returned to St. Croix for their annual nesting. The smallest species of tern, they spend the winter feeding at sea in the Caribbean and Atlantic and return to St. Croix every April where they engage in aerial courtship prior to nesting. Egg laying begins in early May and continues into July. Incubation is around 23 days with the chicks flying about 20 days later. The birds nest on dry pond beds, beaches and at Hess Oil near the storage tanks; open areas safe from predation.

The US population of this species is protected under the Endangered Species Act. Locally, they are protected under the Indigenous Species Act. Disturbing the birds can result in egg or chick mortality when the parents leave to defend the nest. Anyone seen taking eggs or harassing the birds should be reported to DPNR Enforcement at 773-5774 or the Division at 772-1955.

COMING SOON

- > VIRGIN ISLANDS FOOD CHAINS
- > WHAT IS A SALTPOND?
- > LEATHERBACK NEWS

