

TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL
RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

December 1992

Volume 5 Number 3

LATE GREAT PLANET EARTH?



Is it too late to save the planet? Almost. This opinion was expressed recently by an international panel of more than 1,500 scientists from around the world.

The scientists, including more than 100 Nobel prize winners, met to issue a public appeal regarding the future of life on this planet. The appeal came in the form of a four-page "Warning to Humanity".

"No more than a few decades remain before the chance to avert the threats we now confront will be lost and the prospects for humanity immeasurably diminished," according to the scientists.

The statement was coordinated by Henry Kendall, an American who received the Nobel prize for physics in 1990. Kendall now heads the Union of Concerned Scientists, a private advocacy group.

The appeal, which is being sent to world leaders, calls for action to:

- * **Control activities that damage the environment, such as the use of oil and coal, deforestation, and bad farming practices.**
- * **Use energy, water, and other resources more efficiently.**
- * **Stabilize the world's population.**
- * **Reduce and eventually eliminate poverty.**
- * **Bring equality to women, including assuring their right to abortions.**
- * **Reduce violence and end wars.**

THE HUMPBACKS ARE BACK

Humpback whales are commonly sighted in Caribbean waters from January through April. The whales apparently travel from the Atlantic to the Caribbean this time of year to give birth in warmer waters.

Last year, 81 humpback sightings were reported, mostly in waters north of St. Thomas and St. John, in the British Virgin Islands.

While the whales are a spectacular sight to encounter, they are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Law, and it is a federal offense to harrass or otherwise disturb them. Whale watchers are warned to avoid approaching the animals too closely.

The Division collects information on marine mammal activity in local waters. Please report all sightings to our offices on St. Thomas or St. Croix.

COASTWEEKS DATA

Results of the 1992 International Coastweeks cleanup have been tabulated. The cleanup, held during September and October of this year, received support from many different organizations and businesses: the Lions Club, UVI Marine Science Center and UVI Dive Club, DIVE IN!, Joe Vogel Dive Center, Grand Palazzo Watersports Center. Patricia Mortenson, Dept. of Education's Environmental Education coordinator, led numerous field trips for students to local beaches.

A total of 267 participants helped comb an estimated 4 miles of beach, collecting over 2,000 pounds of debris.

Thanks to all volunteers who helped in the cleanup. For more information on how to participate in the 1993 campaign, please contact Cathy C. Lawlor, Regional Coastweeks Coordinator at 775-6762.

FISHERIES PROJECTS

BENTHIC MAPPING ... Modifications to a towed sled which houses an underwater video system have proven unsuccessful. Trial runs have been terminated until a new sled can be obtained through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

SEAMAP ... A study is underway to learn more about the distribution of fish species in this region. To date, six study areas around St. Thomas/St. John have been sampled using traps and handlines. Red hind, coney, queen triggerfish and ocean triggerfish appear to be the dominant species. Two Nassau groupers were captured and released.

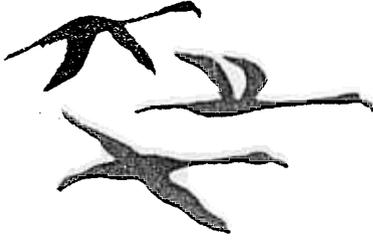
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PORT SAMPLING... Information is needed to aid in a study of catch reports inside or outside NPS waters off St. John. Fishermen are asked to contact Ruth Gomez, Environmental Specialist, to share information on their catches.

ENVIRO-NOTE

An estimated 14 billion pounds of trash are dumped into the sea every year.

Every hour of the day, 3,000 acres of rainforest are destroyed.

ACCIDENTAL TOURISTS



On December 3, 12 Great Frigatebirds appeared at St. Croix's West Salt Pond. Although the birds may have once resided in the Virgin Islands, they are now considered to be accidental

visitors. Accidental visitors are birds that are rarely found in a region.

In some cases, such as with the Eskimo Curlew on St. Croix, there is only one known record for the species in the region. Accidentals can be juveniles dispersing from their birthplace in search of an area where they can establish their own breeding territory. This can result in the species establishing itself in a new region. Some think this is how the Cattle Egret (an African species) established itself in the Caribbean and North America. Accidentals also show up after major storms have blown the birds off course. The Frigatebirds, which inhabit Cuba and Hispaniola, may have ended up here as a result of a recent cold front that brought rain and westerly winds to St. Croix.

Sightings of accidental species most often occur during the spring and fall migrations. Because the Virgin Islands are located near major migration routes, and hurricane season coincides with the fall migration, it is common to have sightings of one or two accidental species each year.

Other accidental species observed in the Virgin Islands in recent years include the White-winged Dove, Marbled Godwit, Hudsonian Godwit, Reddish Egret and Pomarine Jaeger.

If you witness what appears to be a species not commonly found in our area, please contact the Division offices on St. Croix or St. Thomas.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

On any given day, he might conduct a field trip for local school students learning about the importance of mangrove lagoons. Or he may rescue an injured sea turtle, then rush off to a Coastal Zone Management meeting. For Ralf Boulon, Chief of Environmental Education and Endangered Species Coordinator, the job description, and the "daily routine", is varied.

Ralf, a native Virgin Islander, attended the College of the Virgin Islands and the University of Puerto Rico, and has a Masters degree in Biological Oceanography. He is an eleven year veteran of the Division.

He serves on the CZM Major Permit Review Team, the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council, and the NOAA South Atlantic Marine Research Planning Board.

In addition, Ralf has directed the Sandy Point Leatherback Project since its beginning in 1981. Sandy Point on St. Croix is a National Wildlife Refuge for endangered Leatherback turtles. Boulon, along with scientists and volunteers from Earthwatch, patrols the beach at night, documenting nesting activity.

In his spare time, Rafe enjoys carpentry, gardening and beekeeping, and is an active participant in the KATS program. He and his wife Kimberly and sons Devon and Revel are building their home on St. John.

QUOTE

"In nature, there are neither rewards nor punishments, only consequences."

- Robert Ingersoll

Trees were saved by printing on recycled paper



This newsletter was funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration Acts, the Caribbean Fishery Management Council and the Government of the VI.

GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

Department of Planning and Natural Resources
Division of Fish and Wildlife
101 Estate Nazareth
St. Thomas, USVI 00802
(809)775-6762 (ST.T.) (809)772-1955 (ST.X.)

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
CHARLOTTE AMALIE, V.
PERMIT NO. 35

Address Correction Requested