



TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL
RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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MONGOOSE ON THE LOOSE



"Once upon a time in the Virgin Islands a baby was born. A furry, cuddly, baby mongoose. He was not an ordinary mongoose, but a very special one." So begins the "Tale of the Litter Critter", a story which will be told to local kindergarten and first graders in school programs on St. Thomas

and St. John.

The Litter Critter Project is a cooperative effort between the Division, AVCO Financial Services, Coca-Cola, and the St. Thomas/St. John Chamber of Commerce. It features appearances by a larger-than-life mongoose whose goal is to educate young students on the importance of keeping the islands free of litter.

"First of all," the Critter says, "it's ugly. No one enjoys looking at it. It is also very dangerous."

"Small animals and birds can get tangled in plastic soda can holders, fishing line, and old string. Plastic bags floating in the water may be eaten by endangered sea turtles. This can cause them to get sick and die."

Local celebrities will visit schools to tell the "Litter Critter Tale" and introduce him to the children.

The program's motto is "A handshake with the Critter is a promise not to litter".

During the school visits, students will be encouraged to help give the Critter a name. One name per class may be submitted. The winning class will be the guests of honor at a party, complete with Litter Critter logo t-shirts, Coca-Cola products and other treats. The party will be covered by the local media.

Volunteers are needed to assist with the program. For information, please contact Cathy Lawlor at the Division's St. Thomas office.



FISHERIES BUREAU NEWSLETTER

The fisheries bureau has produced a newsletter devoted solely to providing local fishermen with information on recreational and commercial fishing in the territory.

The "Catch 'Em Up" Newsletter will be published quarterly and distributed to members of the local fishing community.

The newsletter will feature updates on current fisheries studies, summaries of reports that have been completed, and other information pertaining to fishing and the use of local marine resources.

Funding for the newsletter is provided in part by the Sportfish Restoration Act of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which collects excise taxes generated from the sale of sportfishing equipment.

RED HIND AREA SURVEYED

Sampling was done on the 14 sq. mile Red hind aggregation area located southwest of St. Thomas. Baited traps and handlines were used.

Evidence of spawning was indicated, as samples included sexually ripe males and females. The area remains closed to fishing throughout the remainder of February to allow spawning to take place and ensure the continuation of the species.

SEABIRD ROOKERY REPORT

Bird biologist Judy Pierce reports on a recent visit to Dutchcap Cay, northwest of St. Thomas:

* 76 Tree-nesting Red-footed Booby nests were counted. A few already have eggs and young chicks.

* Pelicans began nesting in September, and remain active with a total of 139 nests this season. Newly hatched chicks and small nestlings were observed. If baitfish remain plentiful, it should be a good year for the pelican population.

* Brown Boobies have 74 nests, most with eggs.

ENVIRO-NOTE

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

Plastic bags and other plastic waste kill up to a million sea birds, 100,000 sea mammals, and countless fish each year.

PROFILE - DR. DAVID NELLIS

Dr. David Nellis is the man who wrote the book on the cays of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Literally. Nellis, along with co-author Dr. Arthur Damman, recently published "The Natural History Atlas to the Cays of the U.S. Virgin Islands."

Nellis, Chief of the Bureau of Wildlife Programs for the Division, has authored numerous papers on the fish, mammals, and reptiles of these islands since he began working for the Virgin Islands government in 1968. He was previously the Director of Wildlife Services on St. Croix, and a wildlife biologist for what was at the time the Department of Conservation and Cultural Affairs.

Nellis received his doctorate in Wildlife from the University of Georgia in 1973. In 1990, he completed an Environmental Law degree at Vermont Law School.

His present duties include the supervision of staff biologists involved in detailed studies of the ecology and distribution of local wildlife. In addition, he prepares reports and manuscripts for publication in professional journals, and is involved in mitigation of natural resource issues for the Division.

His interest in animals does not end at work. The Nellis home hosts a menagerie of creatures, including mongoose, ferrets, red-footed tortoises, and, according to Nellis, "anything else that wanders along and needs to be cared for". Another hobby is gardening. He is currently involved in a plant demonstration project at the Division office. Common native, salt-tolerant plants will be planted on the grounds, each tagged for identification. Nellis is also reputed to be a champion pepper producer - his homemade hot pepper sauce is potent!

Nellis shares his scientific interests with his wife Rachel, who teaches biology at Eudora Kean High School. They have two children in college.

CORAL REEF EDUCATION

"Most people think of coral as rock. In fact, coral is made up of the skeletons of many small living animals, each called a polyp."

This fact, and many others, can be found in a new brochure recently produced by the Division's Environmental Education bureau. The brochure illustrates the many types of corals, and describes the formation process of coral reefs. It is simply written and informative for all age groups. Copies are available at Division offices on St. Thomas and St. Croix.

A new coral reef slide show is also available. "The Coral Reef Community", produced by Oceanwatch, comes with a script and audio tape describing the importance of the coral reef as a habitat for many other marine creatures. It is available on a loan basis. Reservations may also be made for a Division staff member to present the program.

For more "hands-on" education, groups may participate in coral reef "walkabouts". A Division staff member will lead personalized tours of rocky intertidal seashore areas, pointing out the many members of the ecosystem. Call for details and reservations.



QUOTE

"Science may have found a cure for most evils; but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all - the apathy of human beings." - Helen Keller



Trees were saved by printing on recycled paper



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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.)

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