

# TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL  
RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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## MAKE EVERY DAY "EARTH DAY"

*If you are not part of the solution,  
you are part of the problem.*

At one time or another each of us complains about situations that trouble us here in the Virgin Islands, like litter, the loss of natural habitats, or increased development. Or we may fuss about issues such as global warming or the depletion of the ozone layer.

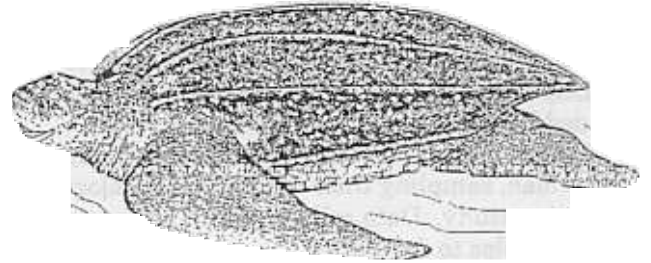
Invariably, we comment that "They should do something about it." Well, guess what - They is WE.

Around the world this month, celebrations will be held to honor the planet, and to educate its inhabitants on the need to restore, preserve, and protect the earth.

Unfortunately, simply celebrating for a day, and talking about the problems are not going to be enough to turn things around. Now is a time when each of us must make the resolve to do our part to make changes in our habits. It may not always be easy, but it is vitally necessary.

The Earth Works Group's handbook "Fifty Simple Things You Can Do To Save The Earth" offers the following suggestions:

1. Stop junk mail. About 100 million trees a year could be saved if we reduced the amount of unwanted mail we receive.
2. Snip Six-pack rings. These are a hazard to fish, birds, and other wildlife.
3. Use a clean detergent. Choose phosphate free products, and use a little less detergent than the manufacturers recommend.
4. Aerate your faucets. Aerators reduce the water volume but increase the pressure. Install a displacement bag in your toilet tank to conserve water.
5. Support recycling in your community. Buy recycled products, and bring recyclable materials to a redemption center.
6. Maintain your car. Make sure your tires are properly inflated - it will make them last longer. Keep fuel filters clean, and keep your car tuned up. This helps reduce gasoline consumption by up to 9%.
7. Switch to rechargeable batteries. When disposable batteries decay, they release heavy metals such as mercury and cadmium into the soil.
8. Choose paper products over styrofoam.
9. Reuse your shopping bags.



## THE LEATHERBACKS ARE BACK

Nature has incredible timing. The cycles of birth, life, and death in some species of the animal world have long been a mystery to man. Leatherback turtles offer no exception.

Somehow, some of the same female leatherback turtles have been returning to St. Croix's Sandy Point for many years from the north Atlantic to lay their eggs on the same beach.

The Leatherback Recovery Project was started in 1981 by the Division of Fish & Wildlife. In 1984 Sandy Point became part of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge System. There are only 13 significant leatherback turtle nesting beaches worldwide.

Currently, the Division has collected some of the most comprehensive data on leatherback turtle nesting biology of any project in the world.

Nesting activity begins in March and continues through July each year. Volunteers from Earthwatch help with nightly patrols to prevent poaching and assist in data collection. Leatherback turtles are on the Federal Endangered Species list.

Visits to Sandy Point are available only by reservation and can be arranged through St. Croix's Rotary West by calling 772-1528.

## ENVIRO-NOTE

According to The Green Consumer, "A leaking toilet can waste 200 gallons of water a day without making a sound."

Check toilets and sinks for leaks or drips...and save water!

## PROFILE - RUTH GOMEZ



"Gone Fishing."

If you saw this message posted at your office, you'd assume that your co-worker had taken the rest of the day off to relax.

At the Division of Fish & Wildlife office, it is what Ruth "Gomie" Gomez and other mem-

bers of the Fisheries Bureau actually do for a living!

As an Environmental Specialist II, Ruth is the Principal Investigator on several research projects funded by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Part of her job includes working closely with local fishermen, sampling their catches for a biological port sampling study. Data collected from examining their catches helps to determine the state of the marine resources around our islands.

She also heads a study of parrotfish populations. With the decline of grouper and snapper, parrotfish have become the next target species. Information must be obtained to determine the present status of this species, so that management techniques may be put into place in the future should they become necessary.

The Southeast Area Monitoring & Assessment Program (SEAMAP) involves fishing using baited traps and handlines. Different fishing techniques, mesh sizes, and other data is being studied.

Ruth is also involved in a joint study of the marine resources in the Virgin Islands National Park. As a former National Park Service ranger, she is familiar with the waters around St. John.

After graduating from All Saints Cathedral School, Ruth attended the University of Maryland. Her hobbies include boating, sports, and limin' with friends.

## THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY?

In 1917, at the time the United States purchased the Danish West Indies, a census was taken. This included the first known attempt to collect statistics of these islands. It is interesting to compare the fishing industry of 1917 to what it is today.

The most striking difference is the amount of fishing effort it now takes to catch fish with pots. In 1917, a little more than 350 unbaited pots were set and hauled daily. Today, approximately 6,000 pots are set in waters surrounding St. Thomas/St. John. They are usually hauled once a week.

With 350 pots in 1917, more than 350,000 lbs. of fish were caught. With 6,000 pots in 1990, about 550,000 lbs. of fish were caught. This would mean a yield of almost 10,000 lbs. per pot in 1917, and less than 100 lbs. per pot in 1990. And in 1917, without motorboats, fishermen did not venture as far from shore.

Fishermen are noted for their salty tales about "the one that got away", but these figures would indicate that today's fishermen are catching only about one tenth the fish that were harvested just a few generations ago. At this rate, we must begin to consider what will be left for generations to come.



### QUOTE

"Man shapes himself through decisions that shape his environment."

- Rene Dubos



*Trees were saved by printing on recycled paper*



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GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
OF THE UNITED STATES

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