



TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

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BILLFISH REGULATIONS

The fishery management plan for Atlantic Billfish went into effect on October 28, 1988. This plan applies to all billfish (except Swordfish) along the East and Gulf coasts of the U.S. and territorial seas in the Caribbean. The rules outline the following provisions:

- 1) prohibit the sale of billfish in the United States unless accompanied by documentation that it was caught outside the management area (effective December 27, 1988)
- 2) prohibits the possession of billfish in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by pelagic longline and drift net vessels
- 3) Possession or retention of billfish in the U.S. EEZ only allowed by rod & reel.
- 4) Establish minimum sizes for possession of billfish in EEZ

Blue marlin - 86 inches
 White marlin - 62 inches
 Sailfish - 57 inches
 Longbill spearfish - no minimum size

Violation of these regulations may result in confiscation of fishing vessel and gear and/or a civil penalty up to \$25,000.00.

NOAA SHIP ARRIVES

The R/V Deleware II arrived November 22 at Mayaguez, Puerto Rico for a 3-week research cruise in Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Island waters. Fishery scientists from both islands will participate in the studies.

CARIBBEAN FISHERIES MANAGEMENT MINIMUM SIZE REGULATIONS

The Caribbean Fisheries Management Council (CFMC) has established minimum size limits for the following species in the Caribbean:

- 1) Nassau Grouper = 15" total length from 22 Sept. 1988 to 21 Sep 1989 increasing one inch per year up to 24 inches
- 2) Yellowtail Snapper = 12" total length
- 3) Caribbean Spiny Lobster = 3.5" total carapace length and 5.5" total tail length

GULF & CARIBBEAN FISHERIES INSTITUTE CONFERENCE

The 41st annual meeting of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) was held in St. Thomas from November 6-11 at the Virgin Isle Hotel. Approximately 160 people attended. Representatives from Central and Latin America countries were present.

Topics discussed included habitat concerns, conch and lobster culture, aquaculture and fishery management techniques.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Currently considered a Federally Endangered Species, the Brown Pelican population in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, appears to be stable and may soon be considered for de-listing to Threatened status. They are a difficult species to study due to their tree-nesting in some of the more rugged areas. They are also in various phases of nesting during this month.

MARINE POLLUTION ACT TO BE ENFORCED

As of Dec 31, the U.S. Coast Guard will help enforce rules against garbage disposal at sea. They prohibit dumping of:

- Plastics, including synthetic ropes, fishing nets and plastic bags.
 - Floating dunnage (padding), lining and packing material, less than 25 miles from the nearest land.
 - Paper, rags, glass, metal, bottles, crockery and similiar refuse, less than 12 miles from nearest land.
- Paper, rags, glass, metal, bottles, crockery and similiar refuse that is not small enough to pass through a one-inch screen mesh, less than 3 miles from nearest land.
- Food waste not pulverized, less than 12 miles from nearest land.
- Pulverized food waste, less than 3 miles from nearest land.

The rules will apply to all vessels in U.S. waters and waters within the nation's 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone, Regardless of flag, and to U.S. ships wherever they are located.

SEABIRD RESEARCH

Three types of boobies are also currently being surveyed on their breeding islands. These are the Brown Booby, the most commonly seen in this area, the Masked Booby, and the Red-footed Booby. All three species are in various stages of nesting during November. Banding of adults and chicks continues as a way of determining distribution, longevity and mortality rates.

MARINE NURSERY VALUE OF MANGROVE LAGOONS

Mangrove lagoon areas on St. Thomas and St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, have been sampled on a monthly basis to determine habitat use and nursery importance for fish and invertebrates. Three study sites of varying degrees of degradation were chosen for study, the Mangrove lagoon, Vessup Bay and Hurricane Hole.

Results have demonstrated a significant difference in species diversity, composition and abundance of fishes between the degraded and natural sites. These differences appear to be directly related to the degree of pollution. Primary differences between sites appear to be related more to water quality than to structural complexity of the habitats.

WETLANDS PROJECT

The Division of Fish and Wildlife is conducting a five year study to document the use of Virgin Islands wetlands by wildlife. Wildlife observations are currently being conducted at 10 study sites on St. Thomas/St. John. Observations on St. Croix will commence in the near future. Although birds are the primary wetlands animals, use has also been noted by deer, mongoose, burros and iguanas. Wetland bird species include waders, such as herons and egrets; sandpipers and other probing shorebirds; ducks, rails and gallinules; and arboreal birds, such as warblers, thrashers and bananaquits. Many of the birds using VI wetlands are migrants. However, the list also includes VI residents, some of which use mangrove wetlands exclusively.

BUSINESS LICENSES REQUIRED IF YOU wholesale fish to supermarkets or restaurants according to Commissioner Mathes of Consumer Services.
