

TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL
RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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BABY BOAS BORN !!!

A St. Thomas Tree Boa in captivity at the Toledo Ohio Zoo recently gave birth to six baby boas. These Federally Endangered species were collected on St. Thomas and are part of a captive breeding program at the Zoo. The goal of the program is to return and release boas on some of the Government owned offshore cays in the hopes of preserving the species. The species is currently facing local extinction from habitat loss and modification on St. Thomas' East End. These snakes are harmless to humans and feed on lizards and small mice.

SALT RIVER MANGROVE STUDY

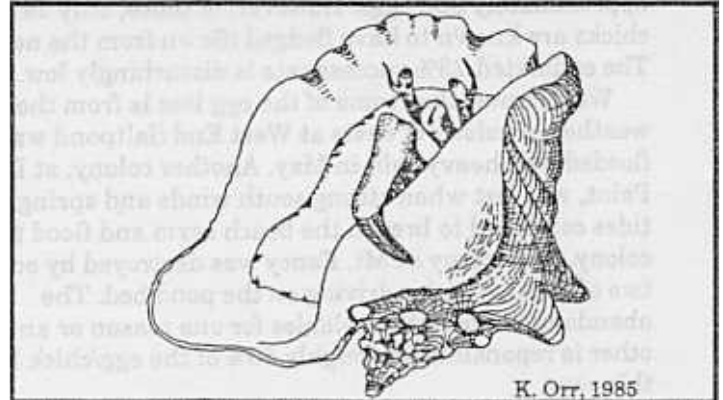
Work continues by Division personnel to determine the importance of mangroves as fish and crustacea nursery areas in the Salt River estuary on St. Croix. Results after six months of trap and release studies (288 traps hauled) have resulted in a total catch of 1,367 fish and invertebrates. Of this total, 41% were fish and 59% were invertebrates (crabs and lobsters). The most important fish species caught were juvenile snappers, mojarra and grunts.

Visual census surveys also document the importance of mangroves in providing critical habitat for numerous species of reef fish during the early stages of their life. Maintaining mangrove estuaries in pristine condition is essential to the well-being of the inshore commercial fisheries.

WEST END SALT POND

A one year study has been undertaken as a cooperative effort between the Division of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine the parameters affecting the dynamics of the West End salt pond on St. Croix. West End salt pond is a 150 acre pond located partially within the Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge.

Water quality parameters of the pond, including temperature, salinity, pond level fluctuations and dissolved oxygen levels are determined monthly at several pond locations. Pond flora and fauna will also be surveyed along with bathymetric profiles of pond depth. Plant species fringing the pond will be identified and habitat types mapped. Bird activity at the pond will also be censused.



The Queen Conch, *Strombus gigas*, is the largest of the Caribbean conchs. Eggs are laid in sand during the summer months. We first see conch after about one year of being buried in the sand (approx. 4 inches in length). The lip starts to form at about 3 years of age and this signals sexual maturity. Conchs live about 6 or 7 years and the lip becomes very worn with age ("bullet" conch). Although a conch lays many eggs, only a few actually survive to maturity. Through over-fishing our conch populations are very low. Unless enough conch are left in the sea to mate and produce new conch, all conch will disappear from our oceans. In the V.I., through a 5 year ban on taking conch (St. Thomas/St. John), size and bag limits and closed seasons (St. Croix), we hope for recovery.

FLYINGFISH/NEEDLEFISH SURVEY

Projects have been initiated on St. Croix to study the biology of the flyingfish and needlefish and their importance as baitfish resources for recreational pelagic sportfishes. Data will be collected on the seasonality, abundance, size distribution, food habits, reproductive condition and predator/prey relationship of flyingfish and needlefish around St. Croix. This information will be used to assess the condition of these stocks and explore possibilities of stock management for enhancement of recreational pelagic fisheries.

COMING SOON

- > MANGROVE BROCHURE
- > AIRPORT DISPLAYS
- > ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CURRICULA

