

# BNT Currents

## AGM SPECIAL ISSUE

*Following is a transcript of outgoing president John Bethell's report on the activities of the Trust during the past year. The report was delivered at the 38th annual general meeting held on April 24 in the ballroom at Government House.*

**T**he last year has been a busy one for the Trust. Exciting things are happening which will help us move into the next year confident in our ability to uphold our mandate.

In April, 1996, at the request of the BNT, Royal Bahamas Defense Force officers were stationed at the headquarters of the Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park on a permanent, rotational basis to assist Park Warden Ray Darville with the enforcement of bye laws. Their presence was requested due to continued poaching and the need to protect the warden and volunteers who work in the park. The Trust is pleased with the level of support received from the Defense Force and the Ministry of Public Safety and Immigration in enforcement matters in our parks.

For the past two years we have been talking with landowners and others interested in the park's future. These informal talks focused on the possibility of raising funds to expand accommodations at the park's headquarters and to reduce the operational burden of the park on the BNT generally.

With a new residence, the "old" building will serve as the park's headquarters, make sorely-needed facilities available for visiting scientists and researchers, and establish proper living space for the warden and stationed Defense Force officers.

In February, and again in March and April, Gary and myself met with this group and I'm pleased to announce that the necessary funds have

been raised to allow the Trust to go ahead with these plans. I would like to take this opportunity to thank these 'Friends of the Exuma Park' for their tremendous generosity and support.

Also, coming out of research work done in the park, Deputy Director Susan Larson, Marine Group Coordinator Ken Massie, and myself, attended an intensive five-and-a-half-day course on the use of geographic information systems in marine resource management. The course was put on in Nassau by the University of Miami and a GIS laboratory was set up on site to provide hands-on experience in applying spatial scientific data to resource management. The course used a case study of the Exuma park to examine issues relating to marine resource management.

One of our objectives is to reduce the reliance on subsidies for the operation of parks and to make them become more self-sufficient. Here again, Exuma is setting the example. With such promising developments in Exuma we can now start to look at the other major parks entrusted to our care and plan for their long-term sustainable development.

Also in April of 1996, Gary and Susan Larson and Lynn Gape attended the Bahamas Biodiversity Management Workshop whose main objectives were to develop a clear understanding of biodiversity data in decision making and to recognize the individual responsibilities of the respective agencies/institutions in managing biodiversity information.

### 1997 / 1998 OFFICERS

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Gary, Susan and Lynn all represent the Trust on different committees of the Bahamas Environment Science and Technology Commission (BEST). Gary sits on the board of directors of BEST and also on the land use committee. Susan is a member of BEST's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan Task Force. This strategy and action plan is based on the BNT's proposal on sustainable development to government over three years ago.

Public Relations and Education Officer Lynn Gape, and BNT consultants and special advisors Drs. Carleton Ray and Alan Bolten, are members of the team helping to develop the National Biodiversity Management Plan. The Bahamas was selected by the United Nations Environment Programme as one of 10 countries to take part in this pilot project. The purpose is to assist participating countries in marshaling all the available information on their flora & fauna and making this information readily available to all interested parties, especially decision-makers and policy-setters. The ultimate output will be a National Biodiversity Management Plan.

During the year the Public Education Committee organized four meetings. The first was a standing room-only presentation by world-renowned primate researcher Jane Goodall whose presentation was made possible by the generosity of the Young

Presidents Organization.

In May, Richard Moyroud of Mezozoic Landscapes gave a slide show on the importance of native vegetation. He also led a group of over 100 people on an informative and fun morning walk, identifying native flora on Athol Island.

The Native Flora Group, coordinated by Malcolm Rae, have observed on their monthly nature walks that Brazilian Pepper is establishing a strong presence on New Providence. To learn more about this exotic plant and what can be done to control it, Bob Doren, Assistant Director of the Everglades National Park Research Center, was invited to give a talk in January on invasive exotics like Brazilian Pepper, Melaluca and Casaurina. The nature walk following his talk showed concerned BNT members and officers of the Ministry of Agriculture a large area that has been heavily invaded by the Brazilian Pepper. Mr. Doren's visit was made possible through the Memorandum of Understanding between the BNT and the U.S. National Park Service.

In February, special advisor to Council, Dr. Carleton Ray, gave a talk on the role of marine parks and reserves in protecting biodiversity and fishery resources. In 1958 Dr. Ray, then of the New York Zoological Society, was instrumental in establishing what is now the Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park, the first of its kind in the world.

His presentation covered the history of the park and the people involved in making this beautiful marine reserve a reality.

The Trust has been working with prospective developers of Cay Sal to establish a national park on the Cay Sal Bank. In June of 1996 a team consisting of Gary Larson, Drs. Carleton Ray, Alan Bolten and Karen Bjorndal, and Geraldine McCormick Ray, along with Chief Ranger Reed Detring and Public Affairs Officer Rick Cook from the Everglades National Park, took part in a multi-disciplinary, natural history survey and protected area feasibility assessment of the Cay Sal Bank. The trip was undertaken through the Memorandum of Understanding between the BNT and the U.S. National Park Service and made possible by the use of the USNPS Vessel 'Aptiva'. The Trust has submitted its most recent findings and recommendations to government, including environmental parameters for development of Cay Sal Island as well as for the establishment of protected areas.

This same team travelled to Andros in February to do a preliminary feasibility assessment of conservation and protected areas on that island in response to requests from residents (representing the Andros Fishing Guides Association and Small Hope Bay Lodge) for help in establishing protection for the natural resources of Andros. What the team found was both exciting and encouraging.

The local people the team met understand the value of conservation and are the ones asking for formal protection of their resources. The BNT has committed to working with the local people to bring this goal to reality.

To take advantage of the International Year of the Reef, the Trust will highlight the Andros Barrier Reef but also include the other critical components of the island's ecosystem—such as blue holes, creeks, bights and the west side.

We are also working with concerned citizens and dive operators towards the possible establishment of a marine park on the western end of New Providence. Work is presently being done by the Trust's Marine Group. This group also coordinated the Center for Marine Conservation's annual Coastal Cleanup. Four cleanups were organized on New Providence and cleanups were also undertaken on Grand Bahama, Inagua and Conception Island National Parks. The three beaches cleaned in New Providence are popular weekend picnic spots and, in addition to over 2,000 aluminum cans, volunteers found diapers, chairs, clothing, a wet suit, an air conditioner and a washing machine. Members of Ocean Watch organized an underwater cleanup and retrieved batteries, wash basins, and rusty metal from around the wrecks of the Willaurie and Bahama Mama.

The cleanup on Conception Island was made

possible by the John Shedd Aquarium which donated their research vessel, Coral Reef II. The group collected over 700 pounds of garbage, approximately 400 pounds of it being lost fishing nets. Two bottles with messages were also found, one from as far away as Nantucket. This trip, organized by Deputy President Sandra Buckner, was an excellent opportunity to visit Conception Island National Park, an important sanctuary for migratory birds, sea birds and green turtles.

The Trust thanks Aquapure Limited which donated water; members of the Rotary Club of East Nassau, who acted as data recorders; and Bahamas Waste Management, which supplied collection containers for the event.

Our Ornithology Group acted as the local coordinator and organizer of the Society for Caribbean Ornithology's Annual General Meeting, held in the first week of August 1996. SCO President Joe Wunderle praised the BNT saying, 'it was one of the best conferences in SCO history'. At the closing ceremony and banquet three persons were recognized for their contribution to Bahamian Ornithology: Alexander Sprunt IV, Pericles A. Maillis and Oris Russell—all active BNT Members. We especially recognize Carolyn Wardle for the outstanding job she did as the local chairperson for the conference.

Following a regional workshop on the White Crowned Pigeon at the SCO

Conference, the BNT's Game Bird Group organized a special meeting of ornithological experts and knowledgeable local people to discuss scientific monitoring of national White Crowned Pigeon populations. There is a need for more scientific information on this bird to make management recommendations. The Trust is grateful to David Blankinship of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Sandy Sprunt for taking time to participate in the meeting.

Discovery Club continues to be a great success. This year a second age group was added and even before it was opened there was a waiting list. The success of this highly innovative activity is due to the leadership of Libba Massie and Monique Clarke.

In June, 35 members of Discovery Club travelled to Inagua National Park for a four-day, fun-filled weekend. The trip included an in-depth tour of the Morton Salt Works and their Museum & Library, participation in a Coastal Marine Debris Survey, and a journey to Union Creek to see the Trust's work with sea turtles there. The group stayed at Camp Vernay in the heart of the Inagua National Park. They played cards, dominoes and even got to use the camp out-house! The Trust thanks Texaco Bahamas Ltd for their generous financial sponsorship of this trip.

The BNT premiered its newest documentary, 'Historic Family Islands: Eleuthera, Harbour Island

and Spanish Wells." This latest video is the fourth in the Trust's Proud and Singular Heritage Series' and comes under the auspices of the Historic Preservation Committee. The entire video series is sponsored exclusively by Commonwealth Bank. Our appreciation to Commonwealth Bank for their generosity.

According to the bank's president, James Cockwell, they are firmly committed to supplying copies of all the videos in the series to the nation's schools, as part of its community-building initiatives. A fifth documentary, 'Historic Family Islands: the Abacos', is already in production.

The Historic Preservation Committee continues to recognize outstanding examples of restoration. This awards programme recognizes new uses for old buildings through interior renovation and exterior preservation. The most recent recipients were the Catholic Diocese of Nassau and the Bahamas, for the restoration of St. Francis of Assisi Church in Cat Island; attorney James Knowles, for his Shirley Street law office; and Lionel Levine for Cumberland House.

The Sixth Annual Art & Wine Festival took place in October, once again generously sponsored by Wholesale Wines & Spirits and Butler & Sands. This event raises close to \$10,000 each year and introduces many people to the Trust and the gardens of the Retreat. An added attraction this year was the Bahamas Concert

Orchestra, which performed during the day on the Poinciana Lawn.

The Fourth Annual Christmas Jollification was attended by over 8,000 people and over 50 exhibitors in November. The committee, under the direction of Lee Ogilvie, began planning the event in February under the theme "Island Christmas". Over \$25,000 was raised this year to support the Retreat garden. Thanks to Lee and her hard-working committee, and also to Wholesale Wines & Spirits and Butler & Sands for their hard work.

This is just a partial overview of some of the events and projects which took place last year. Time does not allow for a full report of all the activities of the Trust. In closing I would like to thank Gary, Susan, Lynn, Sharon, Kadie, Monique and Blanche for all their support and hard work during the past year and also recognize the Executive Committee and Council for their support.

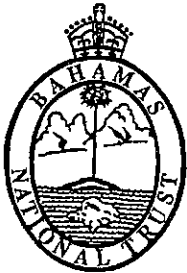
John F. Bethell  
President  
April 24, 1997

## COUNCIL MEMBERS

Durward Archer ..... Elected member  
Glenn Bannister ..... Elected member  
John F. Bethell ..... Deputy president, elected member  
Dr. Donald Bruning ..... Representative Wildlife Conservation Society  
Sandra Buckner ..... President, elected member  
Dr. David Challinor ..... Representing Smithsonian Institution  
Angela Cleare ..... Representing Ministry of Tourism  
Donald Cooper ..... Representing Ministry of Health  
Elma Garraway ..... Representing Ministry of Education  
Dr. Samuel Gruber ..... Representing University of Miami  
Colins Higgs ..... Representing Ministry Agriculture of Fisheries  
Lyn Holowesko ..... Representing Governor-General  
Geoffrey Johnstone ..... Elected member  
Pericles Maillis ..... Elected member  
Richard Ring ..... Representing U.S. National Parks Service  
Macgregor Robertson .. Honorary secretary, elected member  
Oris Russell ..... Representing Governor-General  
Alexander Sprunt IV ..... Representing National Audubon Society  
Dr. Melanie Stiassny .... Representing American Museum of Natural History  
Philip Weech ..... Elected member

### *SPECIAL ADVISORS TO COUNCIL*

*Dr Karen Bjorndal ..... Centre for Sea Turtle Reaseach*  
*Dr Alan Bolten ..... Centre for Sea Turtle Reaseach*  
*Dennis Knowles ..... Chairman, Grand Bahama Regional Branch*  
*Dr. Carleton Ray ..... University of Virginia*



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