

# BNT *Currents*

## PM Tours Private Sites at Exuma Cays Park—Calls for Eco-Planning

**W**ith concern growing over property development in the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park, BNT President Sandra Buckner accompanied Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham and other senior government officials recently on a tour of sites under development this year.

The delegation visited Musha Cay, Cave Cay, Black Point and Farmer's Cay (all south of the park), and Bell Island, Hall's Pond Cay and Warderick Wells (inside the park).

The delegation was impressed by the low-rise, eco-friendly resort development on Musha Cay and the minimal intrusion of work on Bell Island. However, there was disappointment with the environmental degradation witnessed at Hall's Pond Cay, where extensive roads had been bulldozed.

At the Trust's urging, the Office of the Prime Minister had halted work on the cay prior to the delegation's visit. An environmental survey found little damage to nearby reefs and sea grass beds as fast-moving currents had removed

most of the silt.

However, the Trust advised the government to require the owner to condemn surplus roads on the island (which is being developed as a private retreat) and restore the indigenous vegetation, to reduce the width of remaining roads, and properly grade them to prevent run-off into the sea.

Acting on this advice, the Office of the Prime Minister suspended further development at the cay until these deficiencies were corrected and construction could be based on properly engineered, environmentally-friendly plans.

According to Exuma Park Warden Ray Darville, this situation points out the need for legislation to clearly regulate develop-



*Ray Darville shows Prime Minister Ingraham and Earl Deveaux, Minister of Agriculture & Fisheries, the tooth from a Sperm whale that beached off Shroud Cay in the Exumas recently. This was the prime minister's first visit to the park.*

ment on private cays within the park. And BNT Executive Director Gary Larson said the Trust had long advocated the need for tighter regulations.

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### MARK YOUR CALENDAR

APRIL 23, 1998: Annual General Meeting, 6:30 pm, Government House Ballroom

MAY 3, 1998: BNT Ornithology Group Fund Raising BBQ, Maillis Beach, Adelaide

## BNT Helps Bahamas Meet Biodiversity Obligations

Through its involvement in the work of the Bahamas Environmental and Scientific Commission (BEST), the Trust is helping the country to meet its obligations as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. Deputy Director Susan Larson represented the Bahamas twice in the last few months at international meetings focusing on key biodiversity issues. In Montreal, Canada she took part in a scientific advisory committee forum and later attended the Latin America and Caribbean Regional Meeting in Lima, Peru. The treaty, signed by the Bahamas in 1994, commits nations to preserve biological diversity and ensure the sustainable and equitable use of the world's biological resources. "Keeping issues relevant to small island states high on the priority list is important," Mrs Larson said. "Funding for projects is based on the priorities established at the Conference of the Parties every three years. If the Bahamas wants continued funding it has to participate and be productive."

**Student Volunteers** Several students from the Governor-General's Awards Programme seeking to fulfill their community service



Students from L.W. Young's Interact Club worked raking paths and clearing areas in The Retreat before the Art and Wine Festival.



obligations have contributed many hours of service to the Trust. C. R. Walker high schoolers Lavar Peterson, Mark Moxey, Kenyon Parker and Keith Hanna worked four afternoons a week for eight weeks. Their biggest job was preparation of the Bahamas Naturalist for mailing—an enormous undertaking. They also helped light the Retreat garden for the Christmas Jollification and assisted at the event itself. Students from Queen's College volunteer each Wednesday to rake paths, label flyers and help out at functions. L. W. Young's Interact Club members gave a Saturday morning of hard work to the Retreat, raking and mulching areas in need of attention. Special thanks to all for their invaluable contribution.

**BNT President pays Courtesy Calls** Trust President Sandra Buckner paid courtesy calls

to government ministries recently.

*Pictured from left are Angela Cleare, director of business development and ecotourism at the Ministry of Tourism; Minister of Tourism C. A. Smith and Mrs Buckner.*



## Kirtland's Warbler Survey

Four BNT members are participating in The Nature Conservancy's Wings of America programme aimed at promoting conservation of the endangered Kirtland's Warbler which migrates to the Bahamas in winter. Eric Carey of the Department of Agriculture; Paul Dean and Aileen Bainton of the BNT Ornithology Group; and Rick Oliver of the Rand Nature Centre visited the bird's breeding habitat in Michigan last year. Several American experts visited New Providence and Grand Bahama to train volunteers in survey techniques for the warbler and other birds of concern. The objective is to collect enough field data to answer outstanding ques-

tions relating to the warbler's wintering habitat preferences.

## '97 Coastal Cleanup

The BNT again coordinated the Center for Marine Conservation's Coastal Cleanup in September on New Providence and Grand Bahama. The operation involved members of the BNT, Scouts, National Pride Association, Rotary Club of East Nassau, Girl Guides, ReGreen Club of St. Andrew's School, and Oceanwatch. About 230 bags of debris weighing over a ton were collected on New Providence. Members

of Oceanwatch, with the support of Stuart Cove's Dive South Ocean, were able to clean three diving sites of old tires, wood and a variety of plastic debris.

On Grand Bahama, 245 volunteers turned out to clean seven miles of coastline. Over 5,000 pounds of debris was collected. Cleanup sponsors included Aquapure, Bahamas Waste Management, Asa H. Pritchard, and City Markets.



Members of the BNT Discovery Club were ready for a cool drink of Aquapure.

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# BNT Andros Expedition

A Report by Executive Director Gary Larson

**A** Trust expedition to Andros in February was part of an ongoing effort to work with local inhabitants in conserving the island's natural resources. Since our last visit in 1997 we have worked to develop cooperation with and support from relevant government agencies. Toward this end I am pleased to report that our team also included Tanya Ferguson of the Department of Agriculture; Angela Cleare of the Ministry of Tourism; Eleanor Phillips of the Department of Fisheries; and Monique Clarke, BNT education officer.

BNT participants included President Sandra Buckner, Education Officer Monique Clarke, myself, and Karen Furnwegar of the John Shedd Aquarium in Chicago. We travelled on the *Coral Reef II*, a research vessel owned by the Shedd Aquarium and donated to the expedition. It provided an excellent way for the team to travel and be housed in Andros. Expenses were covered by a grant from the Henry foundation of Washington DC.

*These representatives gained first-hand knowledge of the resources needing protection and experienced the widespread support of Androsians for expanded conservation measures.*

Extensive parts of Andros have been included in the BNT parks system proposal for many years. The team toured some of the island's key environmental sites and met many people who appreciated the value of conservation.

The Trust's approach, endorsed by many Androsians, is to consider the whole island as a single ecosystem and to determine the kind of strategy needed to ensure sustainable conservation. An important element of this strategy will be the establishment of national parks and protected areas.

Meetings were held with local leaders, experts and concerned citizens to review the island's environmental resources and determine how a protective system could best be implemented.



*Expedition members meet with Androsians.*

Mrs Buckner tried to locate populations of the Andros Rock Iguana. Tanya Ferguson collected specimens for the National Herbarium. Monique Clarke distributed educational materials to local teachers, Karen Furnwegar acted as an observer for the Shedd Aquarium, Angela Cleare gained first-hand knowledge of the island's ecotourism potential, Eleanor Phillips and I concentrated on marine reserves.

We toured Mangrove Cay with Loundy and Joel Moxey, brothers who had met with the BNT in Nassau and were interested in seeing certain areas protected in Andros, and met with local government officials, bonefishing guides, teachers and commercial fishermen.

We investigated the vast mangrove habitats of South Bight by small boat, rescuing two illegally captured iguanas at Alcorine Cay. We travelled by road to Deep Creek, visiting selected sites, blue holes, fishing lodges and more local government official, including Chief Counsellor Norwood Rahming and Chief Administrator Gloria Bain.

At Fresh Creek we attended a meeting of the Central Andros Ad Hoc Committee on Conservation, chaired by Chief Councilor Peter Douglas. BNT educational materials were described and distributed. Maps were provided for plotting re-

source protection. Monique Clarke suggested a conservation approach similar to the Bahama Parrot Education Programme— identifying a target species as a mascot.

Cacique Award winner Rev. Newton Hamilton escorted the team through Calabash Bay, Davis Creek and Love Hill. From there the group were guided through the pine barrens by Catherine Forde, and visited the Kumalamee Cove development at Staniard Creek.

*We were again impressed with the professionalism of the bonefishing guides and their broad view of conservation for the whole island's ecosystem.*

Informal meetings were also held with representatives of Fresh Creek Primary and Behring Point Elementary to discuss a teachers' workshop on conservation and the environment.

The expedition helped to demonstrate to Androsians the strong support of the Trust and government agencies for conservation initiatives on the Family Islands. The *Coral Reef II* was a constant source of attraction wherever we went, with many visitors discussing conservation with team members late into the night. Our heartfelt thanks go to the people of Andros whose desire for real conservation for their island is inspiring. We look forward to working with them in establishing conservation for Andros.



From left: Gary Larson, Sandra Buckner, Jimmy Nixon, Lynn Holowesko, Alexander Sprunt IV

## CACIQUE AWARD FOR INAGUA WARDEN

James "Jimmy" Nixon, retired Inagua National Park warden, received the Cacique Lifetime Achievement Award in January from the Ministry of Tourism.

The award cited his lifetime of work in preserving the Bahamas' national bird—the flamingo—for future generations of Bahamians to enjoy.

The Cacique Awards recognize the contributions of individuals and groups whose performance or products have consistently made a positive impact on the quality and growth of Bahamas tourism.

Jimmy and his late brother Sam are credited with preserving what might have been the last breeding colony of West Indian Flamingos.

In 1952, the National Audubon Society began a search for these spectacular birds throughout the Caribbean and the

Bahamas. They found a breeding colony of a few thousand birds on Inagua and hired the Nixon brothers to protect them from hunters and monitor their population.

In 1964 the Inagua National Park was established by the Trust, and Sam and Jimmy became the first wardens of the 287-square-mile preserve.

The work of the Nixon brothers is a true conservation success story recognized worldwide. The flamingo colonies have attracted many visitors, including such notables as the Duke of Edinburgh over the years.

In 1994 Jimmy Nixon was included in the Queen's honour roll for his conservation efforts at Inagua. On his 80th birthday in 1995 he was made an honorary life member of the Trust, which joins with all Bahamians in recognizing and congratulating a true national hero.

# First Birding Course held in Abaco

Earlier this year, 18 enthusiasts graduated from the first birdwatching training programme held in Abaco.

Sponsored by the Ministries of Tourism, and Agriculture & Fisheries, as well as the Trust, the four-day course was the first of its kind to be held in a Family Island.

Classroom instruction was held in the District Council Office at Marsh Harbour and included lectures and videos on bird identification, important bird species found in the Bahamas, bird guiding etiquette, the importance of neo-tropical migrants, native flora, and wildlife legislation.

Field trips included visits to the Abaco National Park, trekking through pine barrens and coppice in South and North Abaco, and a stop at Nettica Symonette's "Different of Abaco" bonefish lodge south of Marsh Harbour.

The group identified some 40 species during the two days of field work. Lecturers included Sandy Sprunt, retired vice-president of the National Audubon Society and a longtime BNT council member; Trust Education Officer Lynn Gape; Department of Agriculture Veterinarian Dr Maurice Isaacs; and Pericles Maillis, a past president of the Trust.



Graduates from the birdwatching training programme in Abaco.

Angela Cleare of the Ministry of Tourism was encouraged by the enthusiasm of participants who included bonefish guides, eco-lodge operators, prospective tour guides, developers, and government officials (including Agriculture Director Carl Smith).

Birdwatching has become one of the fastest-growing recreational activities in the world, accounting for some \$14.4 billion a year in travel and accessories. The Ministry of Tourism is placing high priority on birdwatching as an eco-tourism niche market which attracts upmarket visitors.

The course is also useful as a way of enabling the people of Abaco to benefit from the national park. It is hoped that residents will be trained to conduct birding and other natural history tours in Abaco National Park.

# Executive Director attends U.N. Workshop on National Environmental Funds

Executive Director Gary Larson recently attended a United Nations Development Programme workshop in Mexico on *Strengthening the Capacity of National Environmental Funds in Latin America and the Caribbean*.

Participants were surveyed on their needs for capacity-building assistance and discussions were held on four major themes:

- Manpower development
- Domestic and external fundraising
- Asset management
- Evaluation of grants

Representatives came from Argentina, the Bahamas, Belize, Bolivia,

Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Uruguay.

Most of the organizations represented were national agencies that provide grants to other groups for the implementation of environmental projects. Very few managed project work themselves. Most were funded by governments, public agencies or multilateral agencies.

Mr Larson gave a presentation on the Trust's Heritage Fund—an endowment established in 1985 with donations from individuals and corporations to provide perpetual interest income for the BNT to carry out its work. None of the fund's capital has come from governments or multilateral agencies.

The Heritage Fund now exceeds \$4 million and has provided about half of the Trust's annual income for the past 10 years (\$330,000 in 1996 alone). By drawing on the interest only, the fund can continue to help finance Trust activities indefinitely.

At the workshop Mr Larson also investigated new sources of funding from multilateral agencies whose rules and guidelines continue to change. For instance, the Global Environmental Facility recently opened a window to mid-sized grants that the BNT may be eligible for.

The Heritage Fund is a great success story that has enabled the Trust to operate at a much expanded level. However, the fund's capital must be increased in order to provide enough revenue for the Trust to fully execute its mandate.

*Members are invited to provide the names of any individuals or corporations that may be interested in making a significant donation to the Heritage Fund. There is no need to be involved in solicitation (unless you want to be).*

The Bahamas became the 99th party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands last year.

At the same time, the Inagua National Park was designated a wetland site of international importance.

The Ramsar Convention commits signatories to stem the loss of wetlands around the world to development.

tural, scientific, and recreational value, the loss of which would be irreparable.

The Ramsar treaty also recognizes that waterfowl migrations cross many frontiers and so international protection is required.

The designation of the Inagua National Park as a wetland of international importance is of great significance.

The park is home to a breeding colony of 50,000 West Indian flamingos as well as to egrets, herons, roseate

spoonbills, and a multitude of other waterfowl.

The Trust has worked closely with the government for many years to make the country a party to this convention. Ratification is considered a major step for the protection of wetlands in the Bahamas.

## Bahamas Signs Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Once seen as wastelands, wetlands are now considered fundamental to the world's ecology as regulators of water regimes and as habitats for a wide variety of plants and animals, especially waterfowl.

They are viewed as a resource of great economic, cul-



## Trust Hosts Workshop on Whistling Duck and Wetlands

Eleven representatives from the Caribbean, four Family Island teachers and two BNT wardens joined more than 20 others for the West Indian Whistling Duck and Wetlands Education Workshop held at The Retreat last November. The two-day workshop focused on the importance of wetlands conservation and taught survey skills for waterfowl. The Bahamas was chosen as the site for the workshop by the West Indian Whistling Duck Working Group. Funding for Family Island delegates was provided by a grant from Conservation International Bahamas Ltd.

# News from the NATIONAL PARKS and REGIONAL BRANCHES

## GRAND BAHAMA

### RAND NATURE CENTRE

The Trust's Freeport branch has been soliciting support for infrastructure improvements in the national parks on Grand Bahama. As a result, Southern Company and Freeport Power Company have agreed to adopt the Flamingo Pond portion of the Rand Nature Centre. The agreement includes a \$50,000 donation for construction of a three-level interpretation and observation deck so visitors can observe the flamingos and other waterfowl without disturbance. The adoption concept involves a long-term commitment to the success of the flamingo pond.



Members of the BNT in Grand Bahama enjoyed wine, art and jazz at the Rand Nature Centre recently.

In December over 400 people enjoyed two days of wine, music, art and crafts at the Rand Nature Centre in the largest fundraising event ever held on Grand Bahama. The event featured an auction of designer *Sea Treasures* jewellery, displays by local artists and craftsmen (along with guest artist

John Cox from Nassau). Four major sponsors provided outstanding support—Bristol Cellars, Colombian Emeralds International, COOL 96 Radio, and Freeport Advertising & Printing. Over \$18,000 was raised.

### LUCAYAN NATIONAL PARK

In an effort to move all national parks towards self-sufficiency, a ticketing system has been established for the Lucayan National Park—one of the most frequently-used parks in the country. To enhance visitor experience a full-time park reception officer was hired, an information kiosk has been installed in the car park and public facilities will be installed in the near future. In the first phase of revenue collection, commercial users (i.e. anyone hired to take visitors to the park) will pay \$3 per person. Tickets must be pre-paid at the Rand Nature Centre or at taxi head offices. In phase two the ticketing system will expand to include all tourists. At present, admission fees for residents are voluntary. A visitor centre with interpretive displays is also planned.

### EXUMA CAYS PARK

A new fee structure has also been implemented in the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park following a survey of park users by Wardens Evelyn and Ray Darville on ways to generate more income for the park. Private pleasure vessels are charged \$5 a day which allows anchoring in the park. Charter vessels must pay \$1 per foot per day (or \$1 per person per trip in the case of seaplane charters). Bahamian boats are exempt from these user fees. Annual fees are also available. Mooring fees for private vessels range from \$15 to \$100 per day, depending on size. Trust and Park Support Fleet members have preferred access to moorings.

### RESEARCH IN THE ECLSP

Dr Kathleen Sullivan-Sealey and a team from The Nature Conservancy are continuing a three-year study in the Exuma park on the economic sustainability of tropical island ecosystems. The study aims to provide a database in support of regional marine resource conservation and sustainable use planning. The research includes assessing water quality for reef communities near populated and unpopulated islands, evaluating grouper populations in the context of the overall marine food chain, and developing a model for management of the marine environment. The model will seek to de-

termine what level of development can be sustained without ecological degradation. The team also completed a park visitation survey and mailed over 3,000 questionnaires to people who had visited the Exumas in the last three years. A regional data management plan and data centre is also being developed from information gathered with the aid of Geographic Information Systems and the mapping of reef communities in the region. Work on all these areas is ongoing. For more detailed information, please contact the Trust.

### NEW FACILITY

Funding has been secured to expand the Trust's Exuma Park headquarters in order to provide extra space for the wardens and Defense Force officers stationed there.

### INAGUA NATIONAL PARK

Inagua Warden Henry Nixon recently reported a large rookery being formed in the park. Two recent donations, a 1995 Ford Truck from Morton Salt and a 10-foot Quicksilver inflatable with new 5hp Mercury engine from Lightbourne Marine—have helped with this on-going transportation challenges.

### THE RETREAT

The Retreat garden continues to improve under the direction of Bobbie Pyfrom.

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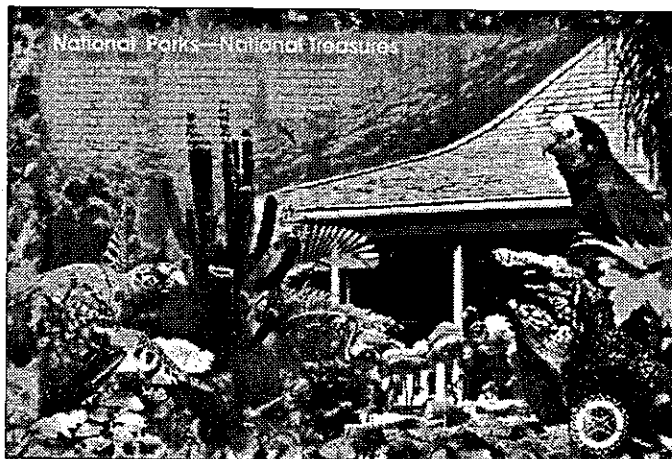
# Public Meetings

Dr William Keegan, associate curator of anthropology at the Florida Museum of Natural History in Gainesville, gave a presentation on the Lucayan indians in February—a joint effort of the Trust and the Bahamas Historical Society.

Dr Keegan is responsible for the discovery and excavation of many Lucayan archeological sites and he gave a fascinating account of the spiritual and cultural activities of the original inhabitants of the Bahamas. He also autographed copies of his new book, *Bahamian Archaeology: Life in the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos before Columbus*, which is on sale at the Trust.

The Kirtland's Warbler story was the topic for a second February meeting when Dr David Ewart, Dr

David Mehlman, Dr David Lee and Mike DeCapita gave a tag-team presentation on the work being done in Michigan to protect this endangered species which migrates to the Bahamas in winter. They were visiting to sample possible habitats (pine, scrub and coppice) for these elusive birds and to set up a monitoring programme with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Trust. The group also travelled to Freeport where they gave a talk at the Rand Nature Centre.

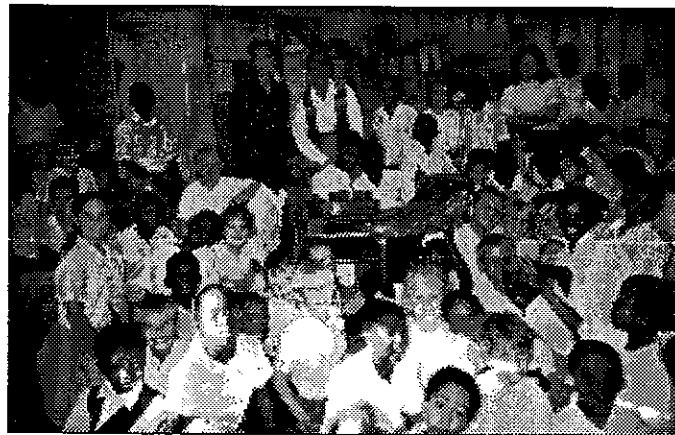


The Trust's stunning National Parks poster was made possible by a generous donation by the Rotary Club of East Nassau. It is being distributed to all school and throughout the Bahamas and is available for sale.

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New areas have been created and a fountain has been added to the huamil area. The Retreat Committee sold palms in the Horticultural Society's February show to raise money for the garden. New Providence Development Company recently made a donation of soil, and the paths are about to

be improved with the help of volunteers from the Rotary Club of East Nassau. Volunteers Margaret Day, John Wright and others have been giving much-needed help to Mrs Pyfrom in garden improvements. Please call the office if you are interested in helping in the garden or with giving tours.



Lynn Gape presented a programme on sea turtles to students of the Green Turtle Cay All-Age School in January.

The Education Office has been deluged with orders for the booklet produced last fall called *Our Fragile Coral Reefs: An Educator's Resource*. Teachers all over the country are calling the booklet an invaluable teaching resource.

Education Officers Lynn Gape and Monique Clarke gave a series of presentations to schools and other groups—including Tamberley, Carlton Fancis, Kingsway, Woodcock Primary, Yellow Elder Primary, St. Cecelia's Primary, C.C. Sweeting, Stephen Dillet, St. Augustine's Ecology Club, 8th Bahamas Cub Scouts, Ministry of Tourism overseas representatives, Bahamahosts and the police force.

Mrs Gape presented a programme on sea turtles at the Green Turtle Cay All-Age School in January. A public meeting on how to control marine debris was also held. Mrs Gape was hosted by Mr and Mrs Bruce Van Dyke, part-time residents of the island, and funded by Philip Gresh, board member of the Center for Marine Conservation.

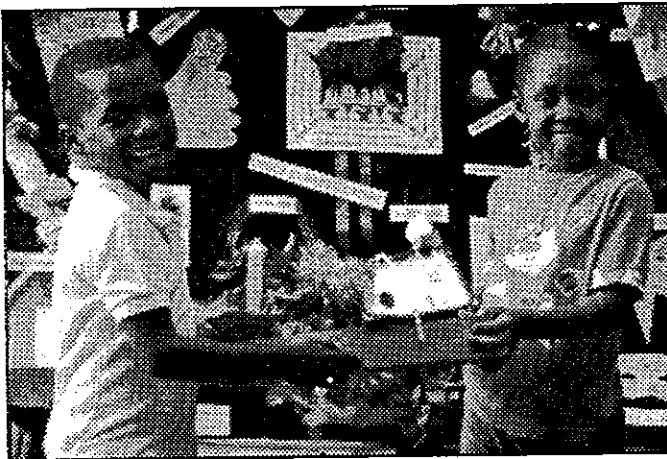
Also in January, the education officers and volunteer Marcia Clarke presented the West Indian Whistling Duck Puppet Show to the Bahamas Music Society's Festival of Music and Learning at Government House.



Monique Clarke points out the difference between pinnate and palmate leaves in palms to St. Cecelia's students.



*The BNT was honoured to have the Governor-General visit the Retreat at the Annual Art & Wine Festival.*



*The Bluebird Children's Crafts area offered children a variety of wonderful crafts to create at the Jollification.*

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The Trust recognizes that private land holdings within the park may be developed. The Trust's position is that such development must be regulated and controlled so it does not cause damage to the park.

The Trust is pleased with the recent support and backing from the Office of the Prime Minister and looks forward to working with them to "define the parameters for development within the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park".

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### **Christmas Bird Count**

The Trust's Ornithology Group participated in the 98th National Audubon Christmas Bird Count in December for the fourth year in a row. About 20 members in five teams spent the day taking census of specific areas of New Providence. Over one hundred species were identified.



*Governor-General's Youth Award students from Queen's College volunteer each Wednesday at The Retreat.*



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**Conservation and Preservation for a Better Quality of Life!**