



currents

Newsletter of the Bahamas National Trust

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Retreat Suffers Crippling Blow From Hurricane

The Retreat Gardens, home to the Trust's national headquarters and one of the world's largest and most renowned palm collections, suffered crippling damage as a result of Hurricane Michelle. An early estimation indicates 10-20% of the palm collection volume has been lost. All rare palms are safe! Hundreds of trees came down, including large native hardwoods and flowering trees, which caused their own extensive damage as they fell. A towering Poinciana tree toppled hitting the corner of the historic house, now the Trust's administrative office.

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New Exuma Residence

The new warden's residence in the Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park is finished, bringing a badly-needed addition to the Park's headquarter facilities on Warderick Wells.

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New National Parks on the Way

The Office of the Prime Minister has confirmed that Government is proceeding with final preparations to officially designate several new national parks.

In a meeting with the Trust's Executive Director, Office of the Prime Minister Permanent Secretary, Theresa Butler, indicated that the Department of Lands and Surveys had been requested to draw up the boundaries of the proposed new areas for presentation to Cabinet.

The new areas include Little Inagua, Central Andros, Wilson and Harrold Ponds, Pasture and O'Brien Cays, Walker's Cay, Big Green Cay, and Bonefish Pond.

Together these new additions will more than double the size of the existing National Park System. More importantly they bring increased ranges and types of biodiversity and ecosystems under protection – a key objective for the Trust in meeting its mandate to build and manage the National Park System of the country.

LITTLE INAGUA – the largest uninhabited island in the

Wider Caribbean. A geographically ideal marine fishery reserve and a biodiversity hotspot.

CENTRAL ANDROS – multiple areas are proposed to protect portions of Andros' spectacular coral reefs, its expansive wetlands, and the country's highest concentration of blue holes.

WILSON & HARROLD PONDS – Over 100 bird species inhabit this 250-acre wetland on the outskirts of Nassau. An ecotourism hotspot!

PASTURE AND O'BRIEN CAYS – These two cays are within the Exuma Park.

WALKER'S CAY – An important marine site. High recreational diving value.

BIG GREEN CAY – Lies approx. 60 miles south of New Providence. One of the most important White Crowned pigeon breeding cays anywhere.

BONEFISH POND – A critical wetland on New Providence, which once supported a colony of flamingos. High ecotourism value.

President

John Bethell

Executive Director

Gary Larson

Glory Banks Gallery Moves Forward

With construction drawings now underway, the Trust's Glory Banks Art Gallery in Grand Bahama has taken a major step toward completion. The design stage of the Art Gallery has been comprehensive. It has taken into account the long-term maintenance and operating expenses of the Gallery itself and the needs of the BNT Rand Nature Center, which is the site of the Trust's regional office in Grand Bahama, a functional nature center, and the future location of the Gallery.

The architectural firm of Alexiou and Associates has combined their award-winning design skills with a generous spirit of corporate giving and produced conceptual drawings that merge the existing building with the new Gallery and reception center. The conceptual drawings are now being taken to the construction drawing stage.

Executive Director Gary Larson said, "so much planning has gone into this project. It is exciting to know that ground-breaking is now just around the corner. I think everyone will be pleased with the end product." Mr. Larson also acknowledged the great generosity of Glory Banks to the National Trust.



(Exuma continued from page 1)

Designed and built through the generosity of an anonymous group of friends of the Park, the beautiful, new warden's residence provides, for the first time in the Park's history, private living space for the warden and his family. It also contains guest quarters for visiting scientists, volunteers, and students. "The Trust is deeply indebted to the individuals who made the warden's residence possible," said Mr Larson. "Thank you for your wonderful generosity!"

NEW DISTINCTION FOR EXUMA PARK A recent scientific study has concluded that the largest breeding colony of Audubon Shearwaters in the world is found in the Exuma



Park! A census conducted at Long Cay has recorded 1,100 nesting

pairs – about one-fifth of the population of Audubon Shearwaters (*P.I. herminieri*) in the West Indies. Shearwaters are an endangered species.

DUNE STABILIZATION plans at Lucayan National Park were aided by a sea oats purchasing program in Grand Bahama. Trust members and the general public were invited to purchase sea oats for their own

use and the proceeds of the sales were used to cover the cost of some 400 sea oat plants for the Lucayan National Park beach restoration project. Sea oats produce a stabilizing network of roots below the beach surface, holding dunes together in the face of natural forces such as wave action and storms. They are critical vegetation for Bahamian coastlines.

FIRST QUARTERLY MEMBERS MEETING was held in July. Attended by some 75 Trust members, the evening included presentations by the president, wildlife committee chair and staff on park management, education, wildlife issues and activities, and strategic planning. President John Bethell gave the night a good review overall and expressed hope that more members would turn out for future meetings.

GREENFORCE, a global environmental research organization, has signed a three-year memorandum of understanding with the Trust to conduct research on the Trust's behalf in Andros. Greenforce selected The Bahamas and the Bahamas National Trust as one of three cooperative ventures for the next triennium.



They are now on Andros and have begun work on marine surveys. The results of Greenforce's work will contribute to the development of management regimes for the new national parks due to come online in Central Andros.

The GAME BIRD SYMPOSIUM, held in the summer and sponsored by the Trust and the Ministry of Agriculture, concluded that more enforcement and better educational



outreach is needed to sustain national game bird populations. The Symposium was attended by

hunters, law enforcement and government officials, national park wardens and members of the Trust's Gamebird Committee. Additional recommendations included knowledge of conservation laws as a requirement to obtain a hunting license, protection of rookeries and breeding cays, and incentives for habitat preservation.

BNT EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES The Trust's Reference Library, housed mainly in Nassau, has received more than 500 visitors since April. A combination of students, teachers, govern-

ment officials, and general researchers make up the users. More than 750 students have participated in Trust educational programs in the past six months. More than 5,000 students in 6 countries have seen the Trust's highly commended puppet show, "Wetlands are Wild."

WINE & ART FESTIVAL The 11th Annual Wine and Art Festival was held at The Retreat in October. This important fund-raiser was a great success, attracting more than 800 patrons during the day. On display was the work of 24 artists and artisans, the largest number in the popular event's history. Bristol Cellars sampled more than 50 varieties of wine from around the world. The Festival is one of the Trust's most complimented fund raising events. Proceeds from the gate are donated to the Trust. Wide-spread support of the Festival ensures large crowds for the artists, some of whom are exhibiting for the first time and this year's event brought sales for every artist – another measure the Trust uses to gauge success of the Festival. Thanks and gratitude are extended to George Kelly and Diane Dunkley for their untiring efforts in presenting the Festival annually.

"BLOW HOLES" are crater-shaped damaged seabeds, caused when vessels such as barges, use engines to keep their bow on shore. Several such blow holes have occurred in the Exuma Park. Through education the Trust is trying to stop the practice. The Trust is also working with owners and using input from the U.S. Park Service and environmental engineers to repair such holes where possible or mitigate.

Farewells to Trust Staff

The Trust said goodbye to Kaderin Mills recently. Kadie was part of the front office team at BNT headquarters. She happily wore many different hats and regularly took on duties far apart from her secretarial responsibilities. In 2000 she participated in the Trust's accredited birding tour guide program, finishing tops in her class. "Kadie was a joy to work with, a joy to have around," said BNT Director, Gary Larson, "we will miss her very much, and we wish her the very best!" Kadie continues to support the Trust as a volunteer.

The Trust also said goodbye to Rick and Kathy Oliver. They have returned to the US to pursue opportunities there. The Olivers joined the Trust in 1993 as curators at the BNT Rand Nature Center on Grand Bahama. Kathy was instrumental in implementing tours, at the Center, promoted awareness of native flora, with a particular interest in bush medicine. Rick was responsible for management of the Center's wildlife. An avid birdwatcher, he took the lead in organizing monthly bird walks and helped develop an accredited G.B. birding tour guide program. Mr. Larson noted, "Rick and Kathy contributed much to the work of the Trust family and will be missed. We wish them the very best in the future."

Corporate sponsors continue to support the Trust in significant ways, making possible a number of programs and activities. Recently **Deloitte and Touche** sponsored a much-praised Gamebird Hunting Regulations poster. **E.D.S.A.**, **Caribbean Landscape**, **Kenneth Higgs & Sons**, **City Lumber**, **Cavalier Construction** and **Taylor Industries** made significant contributions to the new, low-impact parking facility at The Retreat. The **Rotary Club of East Nassau** has underwritten the cost of a national parks exhibit to be premiered soon. Long-lasting signage is now be-

ing introduced to several national parks around the country. **Cavalier Construction** underwrote the costs of

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two signs, one for Conception Island National Park and one for the Exuma Cays Park at Rocky Dundas. **Morton Salt** also sponsored two signs, one for Inagua Na-

tional Park and the other for Union Creek National Reserve. **Kayak Nature Tours** and **Club Fortuna** teamed up to cover the Peterson Cay National Park sign on Grand Bahama. **CIBC Ltd**, **Majestic Tours**, **Commonwealth Bank** and **Scotiabank** made it possible to purchase the signs for Abaco National Park. Scotiabank also pledged their sponsorship of signage for Wilson and Harrold Ponds National Park when it comes online. **Bahamas Realty** underwrote the Exuma Park sign at Shroud Cay. **Mees Pierson** made possible the Pelican Cays Land & Sea Park sign in Abaco.



The Ministry of Tourism Office in Fresh Creek, Andros has become a center of activity to facilitate the establishment of National Parks at Central Andros. Shown are members of Tourism, the Andros Conservancy, and the National Trust with their logos for the office.

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(Hurricane continued from page 1)

"We were hit hard by Hurricane Floyd in 1999. It took three months of intense work to recover and regain some semblance of order after that," said Trust President John F. Bethell. "This is easily much worse. The extensive damage to the garden is coupled by structural damage to the buildings and roads. We have a long road of recovery in front of us, but we'll get there!" Mr. Bethell continued.

Immediate recovery efforts focus on clearing the driveway. Cranes will be brought in to help right the trees and palms that can be saved and remove those that cannot. As much material as possible is being mulched and recycled back into the garden. The Trust is accepting offers of assistance with its recovery efforts. Please call (393-1317) if you can help.