

TrustNotes

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BNT Chiefs on Fact-Finding Mission to Bimini

—To Assess Ecological Impacts of Development

BNT President Neil McKinney and Executive Director Eric Carey were in Bimini recently on a fact-finding mission.

Their objective was to determine what residents know about the proposed cruise ship terminal that is planned for the western shore of North Bimini.

They also wanted to survey the marine areas that will likely be impacted by the development.

After talking to many Biminites it became clear that there was a lot of appreciation for the economic benefits of the Bimini Bay Resort.

However, many also complained about the huge toll that the development is taking on the island, and the lack of information about the cruise terminal project.

“While the BNT understands and supports the need for development projects to provide jobs, we have a responsibility to advise the government and express our concerns

if these projects are likely to have negative and sometimes avoidable impact on our fragile environment,” said Carey.

After visiting several popular dive

According to unconfirmed news reports, the proposed 1,000-foot-long jetty will be built off the western shore of North Bimini and will include a six-acre dredge spoil island.

McKinney noted that “coral reefs are some of the most threatened ecosystems globally. However, all of the sites that I visited were healthy. These reefs are important to Bimini both ecologically and economically. Their loss would have a double negative impact on the island, which is a world-famous fishing capital.”

If the terminal is constructed in the area that news reports have suggested, the BNT believes it would be a huge disservice to Bimini, the people of Bimini, and the marine ecosystem surrounding the islands.

“While development is essential, we must preserve our natural resources before it’s too late,” McKinney said.



Eric Carey and Neil McKinney visited with Matt Weech and a number of local people on their recent visit to Bimini.

areas near the location where the cruise pier will be built, McKinney noted that the sites were teeming with fish, generally healthy coral and other marine life.

On one of the dive sites, there was a substantial colony of elkhorn coral, which is critically endangered in other parts of The Bahamas, but is thriving at Bimini.

Science

Cane Toads: A New Invader

In early August, a Lyford Cay resident alerted the BNT to the presence of a new invasive species with the potential to spread rapidly.

The venomous Cane Toad is a large, stocky amphibian with dry, warty skin that is native to the southern United States, Central America, and tropical South America.

According to the resident, "The toad had been living in the ferns outside my front door. Every time I would go outside to feed the cat, the toad would come out."

With the help of the Lyford Cay Property Association, traps were set and the toad was captured. Sandy Buckner, an expert who is a BNT past president, confirmed its identity. The toad weighed just under a pound and was euthanized.

"We first thought that a single toad may have been a waif," Buckner said. "But after further sightings, and possible breeding within the Lyford Cay ponds, it appears we have an invasive species."

The Cane Toad produces toxin from special glands just behind its eyes. If ingested the toxin is capable of killing small pets. It can also cause severe skin reactions in humans.

All stages of the toad's life-cycle (i.e. eggs, tadpoles and adults) are poisonous, but the only reports of human deaths have been in instances where people have actually eaten the animals or their eggs.

A survey of Lyford Cay and surrounding areas was conducted in September by BNT Science and Policy Director Vanessa Haley-Benjamin, Mrs Buckner, Janeen Bullard (consultant), and Joe Wasilwski and Joe Burgess (wildlife biologists).

It appeared that the toads were confined to the Lyford Cay area, reproducing in freshwater/ brackish ponds.

This species can lay 30,000 eggs in a single clutch twice a year, so swift action was required to control its spread.

Environment Minister Kenred Dorsett held a press conference to educate the public and ask for sightings to be reported. The BEST Commission began developing an eradication/control plan. And experts from the BEST Commission, the BNT, the DEHS and the College of The Bahamas surveyed the entire Lyford Cay area to collect animals to be euthanized and assess their numbers.

BNT Education Officer Scott Johnson is training volunteers to identify and properly handle the toads. Over 200 toads and 73 metamorphs have been collected to date.

Control requires the capture and destruction of all life stages of the toad. Residents and staff at Lyford Cay are contributing to this effort, and the Lyford Cay Property Owners Association is funding a three-month coordinator's position to manage the control programme.

The Lyford Cay Golf Course is supporting the effort and is spraying the grass and sand traps during the day for the metamorphs, as well as raising salinity in the pond where tadpoles were originally found.

"We are unable to definitively say how long the Cane Toads have been here, but there is one confirmed report dating back to 2010," a BNT spokesperson said. "We do know they are reproducing, and swift action is needed to eradicate them."

Their numbers are manageable in the toad's natural habitat, but they overpopulate other areas because of the absence of natural predators. Cane Toads breed easily and often



Janeen Bullard, Vanessa Haley Benjamin and Joe Wasilewski conduct a site visit at the Lyford Cay Golf Course accompanied by Lyford Cay security.

eat pet food left outside of homes.

There was a single isolated report of a toad killed in Mount Pleasant Village (outside the Lyford Cay property). But anecdotal reports of toad sightings in Charlotteville, Adelaide and St. Alban's Drive are unconfirmed.

The Ministry of the Environment is setting up a Cane Toad Hotline, but until that is established the public can report sightings and send images to canetoad@bnt.bs.

All reports should include: name, contact information, date and location of sighting.

If you see large frogs on a wall, window, or tree they are probably not Cane Toads, which live on the ground.

Education

BNT is Back to School



After a busy summer of teacher workshops, a symposium for Discovery Club leaders, and a successful Eco Camp on Andros, BNT education officers are now giving regular school presentations at national parks. Students from Queen's College, St Andrew's and C.V. Bethel high schools recently visited Bonefish Pond, Harrold and Wilson Pond and the Retreat.



National Parks



Rotarians Volunteer at Harrold and Wilson Ponds National Park

Rotarians from the South East Nassau club, together with Rotaract members, volunteered to help the BNT clear invasive cattails from around the boardwalk at Harrold and Wilson Ponds National Park recently.

“Rotary is a great partner for the BNT, they understand the importance of protecting the natural environment, and are always willing to help in our conservation work,” said BNT Deputy Executive Director Lynn Gape.

Cattails, though visually pleasing, can ruin the visual and recreational benefits of wetlands when they grow out of control.

Unfortunately, this is the case at the Harrold and Wilson Ponds park. The BNT is currently working with experts to establish a management plan that will control the spread of cattails in the ponds.

According to Peter Goudie, a past president of the South East club, “volunteering for the BNT fits in perfectly with Rotary’s motto of ‘Service Above Self’. We were pleased to team up with our Rotaract Club and provide this valuable community service so that visitors would be better able to enjoy our natural treasures.”

Harrold and Wilson Ponds National Park is located in the central part of Southern New Providence, just off Sir Milo Butler



Highway and Fire Trail Road. It was established in 2002 and is open seven days a week from 9am to 5pm. Admission is free.

The park features educational signage, public access boardwalks and covered viewing decks. This wetland park is popular for student field trips. For more information, visit www.bnt.bs





BNT Membership has its Privileges

In addition to supporting the national parks of The Bahamas, the BNT also provides members with discounts at a number of businesses in The Bahamas

NEW PROVIDENCE 10% Discount at:
 Aiken Imaging • Fox Hill Nursery • Harbourside Marine
 Hoffer Sport • Mr. Photo • Native Sun Nursery
 Potting Shed • Powerboat Adventures
 Wild Seed Designs
 15% Discount Native Touches Landscape
 10% Discount (except tyres & batteries) at all AID stores
 located throughout the Bahamas

GRAND BAHAMA 10% Discount at:
 Foto Factory • Kelly's

**In the Bahamas get free admission to any BNT properties
 Internationally, get free admission to National Trust
 properties (except special events)**



BNT and GEF say 'Thank You' To Atlantis and Staniel Cay Divers



Lab equipment and re-agents

The BNT is the lead organization for a demonstration project focusing on tourism and coral reef health in the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park.

This is part of a larger Global Environment Facility (GEF) project aimed at building a network of marine protected areas in The Bahamas.

Krista Sherman, is the BNT's GEF project coordinator. She is supported by a research team that includes Dr. Daniel Brumbaugh of the American Museum of Natural History; Dr. Craig Dahlgren of the Perry Institute of Marine Science; and BNT Science Officer Lindy Knowles.



Jake Leese preparing for a dive at Horseshoe Reef.

so much to its success," said BNT Deputy Executive Director Lynn Gape.

"The support of the Atlantis Resort on Paradise Island and Jacob Leese and Joelle Jaskiel of Staniel Cay Divers has been absolutely vital to the execution of this important project."

ATLANTIS RESORT

Since 2011, the laboratory for Marine Aquarium Operations at Atlantis has provided pro bono water quality testing for monitoring sites under the GEF project in the Exuma park. The lab performed standard water quality tests and microbial analyses to assess the effects of eutrophication, or nutrient loading, within

the park. The total in-kind and co-financing value of the lab's contribution from 2011-2013 is over \$108,000.

STANIEL CAY DIVERS

Over the last three years this company has discounted scuba tank rentals and fills for field trips whenever the BNT compressor and/or generator was inoperable. The owners of Staniel Cay Divers have participated in workshops, interviews and community meetings on various aspects of the project. They have also worked with the BNT on options to protect the marine environment at Thunderball Grotto - a major tourist attraction in the Cays.



Pictured at the Atlantis lab from left: Jessica Martin, lab technician; Krista Sherman, GEF coordinator; Miaya Armstrong-Smith, lab manager.



Meeting with GEF coordinator and consultants to discuss a sustainable tourism model for the Exuma cays.

National Parks

Environment Minister and Local Government visit the Joulter Cays

Environment Minister Kenred Dorsett recently toured the Joulter Cays with National Audubon Society representatives, BNT Council members, Local Government officials and bonefish guides. This area of intertidal flats and low-lying cays off the north coast of Andros has been proposed for designation as a new national park.

“This visit helped to educate government officials and others about the importance of the Joulter Cays for human livelihoods as well as the survival of many species of birds and marine life,” said Matt Jeffrey, a senior manager of the Audubon Society’s International Alliances Programme. “Minister Dorsett was impressed with the site, and intrigued to hear from the bonefish guides who saw the benefit of protecting the area.”

A Rapid Ecological Assessment of the marine environment surrounding the three primary cays that make up the Joulter’s was recently completed, and Andros communities have been engaged in the park plan-

ning process. The Joulter Cays were already designated as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International, which means they are a key conservation site.

Many fishermen depend on the flats and associated reef system of the Joulter Cays to support their livelihoods. Both commercial and catch-and-release fishing are important economic activities in the area. And in order to sustain the life cycles of commercially important species, it is recommended that an area surrounding the Joulter Cays, including a portion of the barrier reef, be protected.

The tidal flats and vegetation of the Joulter Cays are important to all species of migrant

shorebirds that use them as a resting, feeding or stop-over on their long migration journey south each fall. The flats are also a haven for migrant shorebirds that remain in the area all winter long.

Recent bird counts confirm that 4% of the global population of Piping Plovers and 9% of the Atlantic population are found wintering in the Joulter Cays, along with 1% of the global population of Short-billed Dowitchers. White-crowned pigeons are also abundant, nesting in the mangrove forests and foraging in the mixed coppice.

The Rapid Ecological Assessment evaluated the feasibility of incorporating offshore reefs into the proposed Joulter Cays National Park. The survey found that the reefs off the main cays are healthy and

support abundant coral and fish populations, in contrast to areas surveyed just north of Mastic Point.

The reefs are ecologically connected to the mangrove forests and sea grass meadows, and an ecosystem-based approach is necessary to protect marine species throughout their life cycles - from deepwater areas, to sandy embayments, mangroves and surrounding flats. Healthy habitats translate to profitable fishing. Fly fishing alone, for example, contributes some



Minister Dorsett, upon learning that the Piping Plover spends eight months out of the year in The Bahamas said, “It’s a very long period of time the bird finds itself in The Bahamas. So, I dare say, it’s probably a Bahamian bird,”.

\$141 million to the Bahamian economy.

Currently, external threats to shorebirds that use the Joulter Cays habitat are minimal. The only human disturbance is caused by the movement of fishermen and recreational boaters. Threats to the marine environment include high levels of fishing pressure, sand mining, foreign fishing, petroleum exploration and development. Protecting the Joulter Cays from these threats will provide significant economic benefits for Androsians.

The fishing communities of Andros support habitat protection of the Joulter Cays, and the management plan for the proposed park will seek input from all key stakeholders. Designating the Joulter Cays as a national park will also help The Bahamas meet its international conservation obligations.



Matthew Jeffery, senior manager of Audubon’s International Alliances programme, talks about the importance of the Joulter Cays to migrating shorebirds.



Prescott Smith and BNT Deputy President Lawrence Ginton discuss importance of the Joulter Cays to local Bonefishing Guides.

Mark Your Calendar



November 22:

Christmas Jollification
Members' Evening: 6 to 9pm
The Retreat, Village Road

November 23-24:

Christmas Jollification
11am to 5pm
The Retreat, Village Road

December 7 - 8:

Festival Noel, Rand Nature Centre,
Grand Bahama

March 3 - 7, 2014

The Second Bahamas Natural History Conference will be held in collaboration with the College of The Bahamas. Conference details and activities will be posted on bnhc@bnt.bs



Staff Profile

Spotlighting Our Conservation Professionals: Lakeshia Anderson Parks Planner

Lakeshia Anderson was appointed parks planner in October 2011. Before joining the BNT, she was an assistant fisheries officer at the Department of Marine Resources, where she worked on stakeholder engagement and planning for the network of no-take marine reserves that The Bahamas has committed to establishing. She also coordinated national efforts to control the invasive Lionfish.

In her new role, Lakeshia is responsible for planning for new national parks and for developing park management plans in collaboration with key stakeholders. She also assists with biological data collection and project management.

"I love the fact that I am able to learn from, and work along with, folks in the smaller communities who are most affected by the work we do. I love the fact that we are building relationships while combining our efforts for a worthy cause."

Currently, Lakeshia is working with the BNT's Grand Bahama Regional Committee on proposals to expand the Lucayan National Park and Peterson Cay National Park. Proposals are also being developed to designate new protected areas in East Grand Bahama and the North Shore.

She is also working with the San Salvador Living Jewels, a local conservation group, on national park proposals for that island. This effort to protect iguana and seabird habitats is supported by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, which helps private sector groups to protect vital ecosystems.

Lakeshia is often in the field working on ecological surveys, or visiting island communities for discussions on how best to implement protected areas.

She is a certified Reef Check EcoDiver, able to participate in the monitoring and conservation of coral reefs, and a qualified PADI Rescue Diver. She is also trained in the use of Geographical Information Systems software to support protected area planning, and is an instructor in the safe handling and capture of Lionfish.



Bahamas National Trust

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