



currents

Newsletter of the Bahamas National Trust

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BACARDI PLEDGES CONSERVATION FUND

The Bahamas National Trust has entered into an exciting partnership with the Bacardi Family Foundation and The Nature Conservancy to assist in further developing the country's national parks.

To launch the partnership, the Bacardi Family Foundation sponsored a mid-summer gala banquet at Atlantis Resort on Paradise Island and pledged matching funds of up to \$100,000 on the proceeds of the event. With over 400 supporters attending, the banquet was a tremendous success.

The Nature Conservancy is a Washington DC-based international conservation organisation which is highly respected for its work in support of development and management of protected areas—both marine and terrestrial. The Conservancy's expertise and the Trust's long record of conservation successes in The Bahamas will be mutually beneficial to both organisations. While Bahamian parks will ben-



Pictured (top) at the gala are: Rosa Cutillas; Manuel Cutillas and Deputy Prime Minister Frank Watson. From left (bottom) are: Ambassador for the Environment Lynn Holowesko; BNT President Glenn Bannister; and BNT past president Basil Kelly.

efit immediately from the partnership, lessons learned in The Bahamas will be taken to other parts of the world through TNC's network.

Bacardi Family Foundation Chairman, Manuel Cutillas, reported enthusiastically, "The Bahamas offers a unique opportunity to implement cost-effective programmes to conserve entire functioning ecosystems; rather than trying to reverse the effects of environmental degradation that has already taken place. The Foundation is happy to facilitate this partnership, to be joining two reputable organisations for the betterment of our national parks."

BNT executive director Gary Larson complimented the Bacardi Family Foundation for their exemplary display of corporate support for conservation.



Iguana Smugglers Convicted in US

Two South Florida men were convicted recently of smuggling endangered iguanas from the Bahamas into the United States.

The two men were employed aboard a cruise ship and were convicted of violating the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which is enforced in the US by the Endangered Species Act over a five-year period.

The poached reptiles included

the White's Cay Rock Iguana and the Exuma Rock Iguana which are found only in the Bahamas and are protected by law.

The case was developed by special agents of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and prosecuted by the Justice Department in Ft Lauderdale.

Former BNT President Sandra Buckner appeared as an expert witness for the prosecution, and a let-

ter from Maurice Isaacs, Conservation Officer at the Ministry of Agriculture, was accepted into evidence.

"This case bodes well for continued cooperation between the various agencies involved," Mrs Buckner said. "It helps to educate people that they will be prosecuted for smuggling endangered animals".

The Bahamas National Trust is a signatory to CITES.

Mark Your Calendars

- BNT 40th anniversary supplement—October 4
- Art & Wine Festival—October 30
- Jollification 1999—November 19-21
- Festival Noël—December 3 & 4
Rand Nature Centre

IUCN

The World Conservation Union

Bahamas
National Trust
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DISCOVERY CLUB AWARDS

Over 30 Discovery Club Explorers aged 6-11 received badges at the Bahamas National Trust recently. Described as "clean, green fun" Discovery Club offers younger BNT members rewarding learning adventure which include camping, nature studies, and practical skills. Like scouts or guides, members earn badges in different subject areas by completing learning assignments. The second Discovery Club level—known as Guardians—is for children aged 9 to 11. A third level—the

Rangers—for children aged 12 to 14 has been introduced this year. Space is limited and preference is given to graduating Guardians. Discovery Club teaches kids about ecology through related activities such as art, history, astronomy and exploring. The goal is to develop a better understanding and appreciation of the natural world among young people. To join, children must be members of the Trust between the ages of 6 and 14 with an interest in the environment. Meetings are

held every other Monday from 4 to 6pm at the Retreat on Village Road and are supervised by trained teachers and environmentalists with the aid of volunteers. Field activities in the four years since the club was formed have included camping trips to national parks, nature walks, snorkelling and duck banding. Pictured are Discovery Club members at the Summer 1999 awards presentation.

Education and Awareness Activities

The BNT Education Office has organised the following activities in celebration of our 40th anniversary.

Stamp Issues

A 40th anniversary flamingo stamp was issued in January. A 40th anniversary Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park marine stamp was issued in April. The ECLSP land stamp will be issued in October.

Cancellation Stamp

A BNT 40th anniversary cancellation stamp will be used by the Post Office in the last quarter of this year.

Newspaper supplement

A 40th anniversary newspaper supplement will be published during October. Readers who answer a quiz on the back page correctly will be eligible to win a trip for two to Britain.

Radio quiz show

A quiz will also be aired on 100 JAMZ, timed to coincide with the newspaper supplement. Those who call in with correct answers will win a Domino's Pizza gift certificate.

T-shirt day

The 40th anniversary T-shirt day was held on September 10. Hundreds of Trust supporters wore the BNT's commemorative shirt featuring an original design by Doongalik Studios. A limited quantity of shirts are still on sale.

National Parks Exhibit

Portable educational exhibits are being created to promote greater awareness of our national park sys-

tem. They will be available for touring the Family Islands and will be featured at this year's Wine and Art Festival.

School Poster Competition

Students are being invited to enter poster designs on the theme "National Parks, National Treasures". Winners will be announced at the Wine and Art Festival where winning entries will be on display.

Science Competition

A BNT science competition is being organised for middle schools scheduled for February, 2000.

Trust Enhances Sans Souci Property for Bird Sanctuary

The Trust's Native Flora Group is planting native trees on the Sherwood Drive property in Sans Souci which was willed to The Trust by the late Gwen Lawrence for preservation as a natural coppice area and bird sanctuary.

Some 30 species of trees will be planted to provide additional cover and food sources for birds. Funding for the trees, brushcutting, fencing and signage was provided by the Rotary Club of East Nassau and the MacTaggart Third Fund.

The Native Flora Group, a sub-committee of the Wildlife Committee, promotes the use of indigenous plants in landscaping and discourages wholesale land clearing which replaces the natural vegetation with exotic imports. Not only are imported plants more expensive initially, they also require a lot of supplemental care in the form of watering, fertilizing and pest control.

Using the native trees in landscaping is a more practical alternative. Native species are adapted to local growing conditions; they rarely need additional water or fertilizer, they have fewer pest problems and they are generally more salt tolerant. Pruning and other maintenance requirements are usually minimized as well. Therefore, the proper use of well-adapted native plants conserves natural resources, energy and hard-earned dollars.

An area rich in native plants is also rich in wildlife. Birds are especially fond of "berry trees" like pigeon plum, fig, sea-grape, poisonwood and stoppers. The fragrant flowers of strongback and wild lime attract butterflies as do the colourful lantana and scarlet bush.

The use of ornamental plants decreases the diversity of Bahamian ecosystems. Many native trees have important economic, historical and cultural value as bush medicine, craft material, and wood products. Large native trees are also beautiful and can significantly increase property values.



Trees and natural plant communities are important because they purify the air and water, prevent soil erosion, cool city air and provide shade and wildlife habitat. In addition to screening out unwelcome sights, natural vegetative stands buffer inhabited areas against noise and protect them from storm winds. Leaving plant communities in place yields all these benefits to the landowner immediately.

The Native Flora Group (chaired by Cadrington Colby) organises monthly educational walks to different areas of New Providence to practice identification skills and also to note the vegetation in different parts of the island. Some native plants and trees are quite rare and it is useful to learn where they are found on our islands.

The Gwen Lawrence property will provide a pocket of native coppice in a highly-developed residential area. Some of the trees selected for planting are Crabwood, Brasiletto, Cinnamon Bark, Fiddlewood, Boar Pigeon Plum, Bahama Pigeon Plum, Cascarilla, Small Leaf Fig, Lignum Vitae, Red Cedar, Horseflesh, Mahogany, Poison Wood, Black Ebony, Rauvolfia, and Paradise Tree.

The Native Flora group is glad to offer advice to neighbourhood groups that would like to add native vegetation to their community park areas and learn more about creating wildlife habitat.

SCO Annual meeting in the Dominican Republic

The annual meeting of the Society of Caribbean Ornithology (SCO) was attended by Lynn Gape, BNT education and public relations officer, Carolyn Wardle, of the Trust's Ornithology Group, and Eric Carey, conservation officer for the Ministry of Agriculture and SCO president.

The BNT Ornithology Group held a special fund-raiser in May to help cover travel expenses for the delegates.

The SCO has formed several working groups, most notably one focusing on the West Indian Whistling Duck. This group organised a special one-day Wetlands Education Workshop for teachers in the Dominican Republic and are in the process of completing an educational workbook for the Caribbean funded by a grant from United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

The group has also received financial support to help create Watchable Wildlife Ponds throughout the region, and plans are underway to identify appropriate sites in the Bahamas.

Another spin-off from the SCO meeting is the offer by Herb Raffael (and his co-authors of the new *Field Guide to Birds of the West Indies*) that any part of this book may be reproduced to create local field-guides and laminated identification cards.

Plans are underway in the Bahamas to produce a small field guide for Cat Island and this will extend to other appropriate island guides and perhaps a "common birds" guide for the Bahamas suitable for use in local schools.

The West Indian Whistling Duck Working Group also introduced at the meeting a laminated card of Resident and Migratory Ducks found in the West Indies with identification of endangered species. The card is designed for hunters to carry in the field and was graciously funded by Ducks Unlimited Canada.

MOVE TO PRIVATISE HISTORIC LIGHTHOUSES

The Bahamas Lighthouse Preservation Society is seeking to take over the three remaining Victorian lighthouses that are still operational—at Hope Town, San Salvador and Great Inagua.

These 19th-century lights are now operated and maintained by the Port Department. They represent a national treasure and would be restored to museum standards by the society if the privatisation proposal is accepted.

The lighthouses feature hand-wound clockwork mechanisms and kerosene-fired lamps which the society wants to preserve in working order.

Also envisioned is an Elbow Reef Lighthouse and Wreckers Museum at Hope Town, plus ongoing co-operation with the Trust and the Department of Archives "to preserve these historic maritime treasures."

According to Abaco resident David Gale, the society's founder, privatisation would keep the lighthouses operating at reduced cost. The government would continue to fund the upkeep of the buildings and their associated facilities.

The Trust endorses these very worthwhile efforts of the Bahamas Lighthouse Preservation Society.

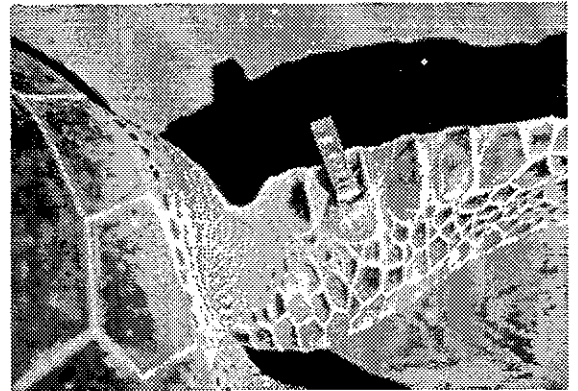
Sea Turtles Nesting at Cay Sal Tracked by Satellite

A research team from the Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research at the University of Florida, Gainesville, has initiated a satellite tracking programme in The Bahamas to determine where female turtles go when they finish nesting.

The team recently returned from the Cay Sal Bank in the southwestern Bahamas where they attached satellite transmitters to four nesting loggerhead sea turtles. The Cay Sal Bank has the most important loggerhead nesting colony in The Bahamas.

"Loggerheads are an endangered species," said a spokesperson for the Center. "To ensure the survival of this important nesting colony, it is essential to know the feeding grounds and migratory paths that are used by the nesting females."

A transmitter attached to the shell of each turtle beams a signal to orbiting satellites which track the location of each turtle. Scientists at the Center will receive daily information on each turtle's location via the Internet. A web site (<http://accstr.ufl.edu>) will have the daily positions of the turtles plotted on a map so that the public can follow the turtles' movements. Genetic studies are also being conducted to determine



the relationship of the Cay Sal loggerhead population with other loggerhead populations in the Atlantic.

Researchers Alan Bolten, Karen Bjorndal and Brian Riewald are conducting this study in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Bahamas National Trust. Drs. Bolten and Bjorndal are long-time advisors to the Trust and have been conducting sea turtle research in The Bahamas since the mid-1970s.

The satellite tracking project is funded by the Ocean Fund of Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines. Results from this research will be used to help develop policy and recommend protected areas so that nesting beaches, feeding grounds and migratory routes are conserved and adequately managed for the survival of sea turtles.



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