Swimming in a Blue Hole, camping in a national park and exploring the island of Andros and its diverse ecosystems, was a great experience for 40 young people, from nine Bahamian islands, who were participants in the BNT’s recent Eco Camp experience. “Eco Camp is designed to develop an appreciation for the natural environment and to foster a commitment to environmental stewardship in our young people. Our participants traveled from Abaco, Andros, Cat Island, Eleuthera, Long Island, Grand Bahama, Inagua, New Providence and Mayaguana.” said Portia Sweeting, BNT Director of Education.

The six-day camp is designed to be an intense environmental experience where students participate in classroom and field experiences that encompass all of the Bahamian ecosystems. Students camped in Blue Hole National Park where they erected tents, prepared camp meals and went on a three-mile hike back to the home base at Forfar Field Station. Participants also snorkeled at the North Marine Park, explored Pigeon Cay within park boundaries, and visited the Rocky Sea Shore where they collected marine organisms and invertebrates for a special lab session study. Additionally, an environmental awareness survey in Fresh Creek was conducted to ascertain the level of community support for Andros’ national parks, BNT’s environmental protection initiatives and environmental partners.

Indira Brown of the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) coordinated a special day for the Eco Campers. She conducted a Benthic Organism Survey with the campers, who collected plankton and sand samples which they then took to the lab for further study. The DMR also donated prizes for Eco Camp’s outstanding participants.

A visit to Red Bays was a special treat for campers. While there, they interacted with local straw workers and wood carvers, and visited a crab hatchery. They were also given a special tour of Eco Camp 2016 at For Far Field Station.
the Androsia Factory and designed their own shirts.

“This is the seventh year that the BNT has been able to provide this unique experience for high school students,” said Eric Carey, BNT Executive Director. “We would not be able offer this hands on learning opportunity without the support of our sponsors -- Bahamas Ferries, Forfar Field Station, RBC, Lyford Cay Foundation and Lyford Cay Club, Caribbean Bottling, Cable Cares Foundation, Sandy Port Beaches Resort, Cameron Symonette, Atlantis, and Harbourside Marine.”

Fisheries Officer Indira Brown demonstrates collection techniques for collecting Benthic Organisms.

Camper's snorkeled and explored the marine environment at Pigeon Cay in the Andros North Marine Park.

Discovery Club Leaders Plan an Active Year

Over 80 BNT Discovery Club Leaders gathered at Breezes the last week in July for their annual symposium. Leaders traveled from Andros, Berry Islands, Cat Island, Eleuthera, Exuma, Grand Bahama, Inagua, Long Island, and Nassau to share experiences, review badge materials and plan activities for the upcoming year.

Next year, one of the goals for Discovery Club is to expand the network of volunteers in communities to help and support local Discovery Clubs. “Our clubs on the Family Islands have become representatives of the BNT for their communities.” said Portia Sweeting, BNT Director of Education. “We want to give our leaders the skills and knowledge to take advantage of this interest in our work.”

In order to facilitate this outreach, the Discovery Club Leaders are developing “impact projects” around national parks or important ecosystems. Clubs continued on page 3
will choose from four project areas: My Science, My Conch, Mighty Mangroves, Five Star Forests and Bonefish and the Flats. In preparation for these exciting activities, the Discovery Club Leaders participated in a “My Conch, My Science” Citizen Science Project Learning Day. As a part of the project, they visited Arawak Cay to assess the maturity of conch harvested by measuring the lip thickness of the shells. Catherine Booker from Community Conch and the Exuma Foundation led this activity for the symposium. A number of the Nassau-based Discovery Clubs will be developing the “Five Star Forest” project which will culminate in a Bush Medicine Learning event at The Retreat.

Over the week-long symposium, Leaders participated in workshops on photography, social media and branding for Discovery Club. They also snorkeled and kayaked at Bonefish Pond National Park and traveled to Sandy Port Beach for a special sandy shore learning activity.

Special presentations on two BNT programmes, Creation Cares and Birdsleuth, were also included in the week-long programme. Creation Cares, the BNT’s religious outreach programme for churches and spiritual organizations, seeks to create an awareness of our national parks amongst this very important segment of the Bahamian community. Birdsleuth is an innovative curriculum designed to engage youth in birds, nature and science which teachers can implement in their schools as independent birding clubs.

According to Claire Sands and Steffon Evans, BNT Discovery Club Coordinators, this year’s symposium was very successful, with a high rate of participation by club leaders across The Bahamas. The Leaders’ symposium was made possible by the generous support of Breezes, an anonymous donor and the supporters of the Discovery Club Raffle, especially Commonwealth Bank.
This year’s Summer Nature Camp on Grand Bahama took place between July 4th to July 9th and it was a huge success! The camp was packed with learning, adventure, games and plenty of fun. The camp was a team effort and a huge success with outstanding participation by volunteers and teen leaders from the RBDF Ranger program, BMES Eco-school and Lucayan International School. A total of 17 participants from 10 schools representing every district on the island attended the camp, with eight of the participants fully sponsored by generous donations from the local community.

Every morning, the camp began with a ‘Motivation Check’ physical exercise activity led by the RBDF Rangers, followed by an educational lesson on the ecosystem that was to be visited that day. The daily activities included educational games, field trips and one overnight camping experience in Lucayan National Park. The camp also focused on sustainability, using reusable items for lunch and snacks to minimize waste, and healthy options such as fruits, salads and homemade foods were served.

Many ecosystems were visited during the week-long camp. Participants toured the Rand Nature Centre; visited Josey’s Cave at Holmes Rock and Paradise Cove, where they snorkeled the largest continuous ball reef in The Bahamas and the infamous Deadman’s Reef area; swam and snorkeled on Tyne Beach; and spent an entire day kayaking through the mangroves on the north shore of the island. This activity was led by local tour operator, Shamie Rolle whose company, Calabash Eco Adventures donated the kayaks.

The week of activities included a visit from the local proprietor of New Life Vegetation, Jamal Moncur. Mr. Moncur gave a session on eating healthy and the campers were treated to vegan smoothies made from Cat Island sea moss.

The camp culminated in a tour of Lucayan National Park and a night of camping at Gold Rock Beach.

Campers learned about the ecosystems at the park and were shown how Grand Bahama Summer Safari Camp 2016
to set up and break down tents, create a fire and tie various nautical knots. After a night in the park, the children hiked to Grand Bahama’s famous Owl’s Hole. Owl’s Hole is an inland blue hole and participants enjoyed a 30-foot jump into the cool waters.

A closing ceremony, where outstanding campers were recognized, was held at the Rand Nature Centre when the participants returned from their camping adventure.

Camp leaders and volunteers included BNT Outreach Officer Cheri Wood (Camp Leader); BNT Park Warden Ellsworth Weir; volunteers Nina Sanchez, Havanna Gibson, Savanna Gibson, Toio Mazzoni, Julian Moss, and RBDF Rangers Tyriq Forbes, Joshua Cartwright and Ron Lewis.

Snorkeling is cool and fun!

Campers “Crept and Leapt” at Leon Levy’s Summer Camp

Camp Safari recently wrapped up at the Leon Levy Native Plant Preserve in Eleuthera. A week of activities was hosted for children between the ages of 8 and 14 in partnership with the Haynes Library of Governor’s Harbour. A total of 28 campers and 12 volunteers participated in the camp themed “Creeping and Leaping with Our Cold-Blooded Critters”. As suggested by the theme, the week was focused entirely on herpetofauna, the animal group that includes amphibians and reptiles.

On the first day of camp, participants practiced the herp-themed camp song and pledge which they sang and recited to start each day. Campers learned how to identify Bahamian amphibians and reptiles by watching picture-filled presentations, looking at live tadpoles and froglets through a microscope, and observing resident snakes and turtles up close and personal at The Preserve. ‘The Herp-Round Up’ game, where campers used a map of the Preserve with clues to find critters in their environment was a huge hit! Two craft projects brought out the campers’ imagination and artistic abilities. They created a poster showing the different stages in a frog life cycle and also designed and constructed a 3-D model of a Bahamian reptile or amphibian in their habitat. Each afternoon, campers cooled off and wrapped up the day with snorkeling at a nearby beach.

On Thursday, special guests from the faculty of the Cape Eleuthera Institute led a presentation on the beautiful species of sea turtles that live in Bahamian waters. They also facilitated a discussion about the threats to wildlife and how each person, no matter their age, can do their part to protect the environment and its inhabitants. On Friday, the week culminated with an awards ceremony and party to celebrate the completion of the camp and the library’s children’s summer programming.

The Preserve extends a special thank you to the One Eleuthera Foundation for a generous donation of 30 reusable water bottles for the campers, and to the Haynes Library for once again partnering on such a special program.
Education

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Delphines’ group displaying metamorphosis poster and Cuban tree frog.

BNT Office Assistant Alvanna Johnson holding a Bahamian racer.

Camp Safari, Eleuthera 2016 participants.
With funding from Oceans 5, BNT staff travelled to Cat Island and Long Island in July to advance the expansion of Marine Protected Areas throughout the Bahamas. This relates directly to the Caribbean Challenge Initiative which the Bahamas signed on to in 2013 to protect 20% of the Bahamas nearshore and marine environment by the year 2020.

BNT met with members of Cat Island Local Government and the Island Administrator to discuss the project and get recommendations for working with the local community for a successful transition into the project, give timelines and expectations and discuss concerns related to the marine environment.

Focus groups with fishermen were hosted by the BNT, in addition to a community meeting with other stakeholders from the north and south of Cat Island, to identify areas of ecological importance, provide human uses, and discuss concerns regarding MPA implementation and the marine environment. As a result, seven areas were identified as proposed MPAs on Cat Island. BNT staff also committed time to visiting some of the proposed sites to observe important and diverse ecosystems.

BNT is now working on obtaining funding for REAs before returning to Cat Island. The REAs will aid in prioritizing the sites proposed in these meetings. Public meetings will be conducted to inform Cat Island stakeholders about the results of the REAs and allow them to confine the list of proposed sites.

BNT staff also met with Long Island Local Government and conducted public meetings in the north and south of Long Island. This visit to Long Island follows years of visits for stakeholder consultations, which in late 2013 culminated in eight proposed MPA sites.

The primary purpose of the visit was to meet with local stakeholders to present mapped results of 2013 discussions and prioritize those proposed MPAs by discussing human uses, and concerns held by the community. BNT staff also visited some of these sites to gain an appreciation and understanding of the significance of these areas to the local community.

As a result of the meetings, modifications were made to four of the proposed sites and seven additional sites were recommended as MPAs. Residents also discussed management recommendations for an additional site.

BNT is now in the process of obtaining funding to perform a series of scientific assessments (REAs) on these sites to aid in the technical prioritization of the proposed MPAs. Once funding has been granted BNT will return to Long Island to undertake the REAs and will notify the community about the results through a series of public meetings in the north and the south to finalize MPA site selection.

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Long Island stakeholders participating in mapping exercise to select propose sites for Marine Protected Areas.

Second row L-R: Terrece Bootle-Bethel, (Long Island – Island Administrator); Ian Knowles, (Long Island Chief Councilor); Sharon Cartwright (Long Island Deputy Chief Councilor); Agnessa Lundy (BNT Marine Science Officer); Lindy Knowles (BNT Senior Science Officer). Front row L-R: Cindy Cartwright (Long Island Secretary District Council); Andrea d’Arceuil (BNT Conservation Planner).

Queen Conch are able to produce pearls, much like clams and oysters. This can happen when a foreign particle, usually a grain of sand, becomes trapped in the soft tissues or mantle of the Conch’s body. Conch pearls are usually pink and those of the highest quality have a shimmer and “flame” texture to them. The perfect pearl can be worth up to $30,000 apiece!

The National Conch Conservation Campaign is a collaborative effort between the Government of the Bahamas and the NGO community to prevent the collapse of the Bahamian Queen Conch population through science and education. Follow the campaign at www.facebook.com/conchconservation.
Lavanda Rahming joined the BNT family in 2014 as an accountant in the Finance department. The Trust appreciates the contributions of such a capable individual and is happy to have her on the team!

“As a member of the finance team, I have a newfound appreciation for the environment. My exposure to the biological make-up of our communities has sparked a desire to learn more about nature and has inspired a sense of responsibility. I intend to be a good steward of this beautiful paradise that God has blessed us with.”
BNT member Amanda Meyers is a great supporter of the Bahamas National Trust. She has shown her support by attending BNT events, participating as a Jollification vendor and working with the membership office to promote the BNT by offering a BNT members’ discount. She likes to tell the story of the Kingsway Discovery Club’s visit to Fox Hill Nursery as part of their Flora Badge. “I was very impressed with how well prepared the students were for their visit. We get many requests for help with student projects and I wish that more educators were as organized as the Kingsway Discovery Club Leaders. It was a pleasure to have the club visit our nursery – a very impressive club for young people!”

As a long-time Jollification vendor, she and her friend Lynn Gratton have become a fixture in Jolly Market. Each year they develop new products, often giving part of the proceeds to animal rescue efforts such as Operation Potcake. They exemplify the Jollification spirit as their booth has won best decorated for the past four years in a row.

When asked why she supports the BNT Amanda said, “I support the BNT because they are the guardians of our environment here in The Bahamas. They do such a great job with the national parks and try to protect our marine life. I was able to visit the Primeval Forest National Park and was very impressed with the signage and trails at the park.”

**Event Calendar**

**Wine & Art**
Saturday, October 29 - 30, 2016, Nassau, Bahamas

**Jollification**
Saturday, November 19 - 20, 2016
Nassau, Bahamas.

**Festival Noel**
Friday, December 9, 2016 - Grand Bahama Bahamas

Bahamas National Trust
P. O. Box N 4105, Nassau, The Bahamas
Tel: 242-393-1317
www.bnt.bs | bnt@bnt.bs