

THE BAS Bulletin

Belize Audubon Society

Creating a balance between People & the Environment.



July 2021
Volume I Number 6



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About Us

VISION

Belize Audubon Society is a national conservation leader inspiring people to live in harmony with and benefit from the environment.

LOGO

One of our founding members, Dora Weyer, first designed the Belize Audubon Society's Logo inspired by the common symbiotic occurrence at Half Moon Caye.

The magnificent frigate birds with its seven-foot wingspan is unable to land on water and dive, therefore will harass returning Red-Footed Booby Birds after a day of fishing, forcing the Booby to drop its catch for the taking. Today, the Booby and Frigate continue to co-exist!

MISSION

The Belize Audubon Society is a non-governmental, membership-based organization dedicated to the sustainable management of our natural resources through leadership and strategic partnerships with stakeholders for the benefit of people and the environment.

SEE ANYTHING YOU LIKE?

Please feel free to quote or copy any information found within this issue. Kindly cite as the ***Belize Audubon Society Bulletin*** (Vol. No. p. date).

FEEDBACK?

We invite our readers to submit articles, photographs, or artwork for publication in the next ***Belize Audubon Society Bulletin***. Letters and emails are also appreciated! What subject would you like to see covered in the next issue? What environmental issue is on your mind? What are your thoughts on this issue?

We want to hear from you, our readers.

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About BIOPAMA

The Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management (BIOPAMA) programme aims to improve the long-term conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, in protected areas and surrounding communities. It is an initiative of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States financed by the European Union's 11th European Development Fund (EDF), jointly implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC). Building on the first five years of activities financed by the 10th EDF (2012-2017), BIOPAMA's second phase provides tools for data and information management, services for improving the knowledge and capacity for protected area planning and decision making, and funding opportunities for specific site-based actions. **www.biopama.org**

BIOPAMA
From Knowledge to Action for a Protected Planet

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APAMO
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CONTACT INFO
16 Taiwan Street, P.O. Box 1001, Belize City, Belize, Central America
Tel: (501)224-5004 | (501)223-4988/4987 Fax: (501)223-4985
website: www.belizeaudubon.org email: members@belizeaudubon.org

Board of Directors

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2nd Vice President
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1st Secretary
Ms. Rasine Gillett

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Mrs. Virginia Burns-Perez
Mrs. Mariana Ancona
Miss. Shajira Martinez
Mrs. Olivia Carballo Avilez
Mr. Ishmael Quiroz

Immediate Past President
Mr. Ernest Raymond Sr.

Our History

Since its formation in 1969, the Belize Audubon Society (BAS) has been Belize's foremost environmental organization protecting Belize's precious natural resources while educating the public about their value and sustainable use. BAS has grown from an all-volunteer organization with 55 charter members to a Society of over 300 members with a staff of more than 40 dedicated professionals, along with a thirteen-member Board of Directors.

Throughout its history, BAS has been involved in the development of the legal framework and policy for environmental protection in Belize. From the initial Wildlife Protection and National Parks System Acts in 1981, BAS has been instrumental in the financing, development, and management of protected areas. At the request of the Government of Belize, BAS currently co-manages seven of Belize's protected areas with a well-trained, knowledgeable staff; many of whom are from the surrounding buffer communities. Environmental Education, Advocacy, Community Outreach, and Biodiversity Research & Monitoring revolve around these protected areas and their buffer communities.

BAS Co-Managed Protected Areas

Blue Hole Natural Monument (BHNM)
1,043 acres – established 1996
Ramon Aguilar, Site Manager

Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary (CBWS)
127,107 acres – established 1986
Nicacio Coc, Site Manager

Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary (CTWS)
41,297 acres – established 1984; declared RAMSAR Site 1998
Derick Hendy, Site Manager

Half Moon Caye Natural Monument (HMCNM)
9,771 acres – established Crown Reserve 1928 and Natural Monument 1982
Ramon Aguilar, Site Manager

St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park (SHBHNP)
575 acres – established 1986
Albert Augustine, Site Manager

Victoria Peak Natural Monument (VPNM)
4,487 acres – established 1998
Nicacio Coc, Site Manager

Guanacaste National Park (GNP)
50 acres - established 1990
Steven Coc, Assistant Site Manager

Welcome

As we write to you with our mid-year update, it is with tentative hope – since our last Bulletin in December, the COVID-19 vaccine has arrived in Belize and our protected areas have been seeing an increase in visitation.

However, we know we are far from being out of the woods yet, and remaining safe and cautious is still the priority. All our sites have achieved Gold Standard Certification for safety, and our staff continue to implement safety measures for the protection of all our guests.

This issue of the BAS Bulletin is all about Conservation Heroes – the people making a real difference here in Belize. From the worthy winner of our James A. Waight Conservation Award and the conservation champions working at fellow environmental organizations, to our very own staff and the next generation of passionate young people.

We want to celebrate the hard work that everyone puts in – as our award winner says, "conservation is not for the weak minded" and it takes real dedication to achieve results, but we are proud to say that Belize has a strong conservation community who, working together, are putting our country on the environmental map with our successes.

In this issue, we also take a look back at the first year of our BIOPAMA project - $1 million BZD in funding over 2.5 years. We cannot overstate what a difference securing this funding has made to us, especially in such challenging times, and we are happy to be able to share with you an update on all that has been achieved so far.

Lastly, it gives me great pleasure to welcome our new BAS Board of Directors for 2021-22, following the hosting of our Virtual AGM in May. You can find out more about the Board and how the AGM was held over the page.

Thank you to all our valued members for your continued support – we couldn't do it without you!

In conservation,

Amanda Burgos-Acosta
Executive Director



Staff

Executive Director
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Terrestrial PAs Manager
Arvin Coc

Marine PAs Manager
Shane Young

Tourism Officer
Raymond Mossiah

Office Assistant
Ryan Chan

BAS conducts virtual 2021 AGM

Due to the global COVID19 pandemic and ongoing State of Emergency measures to restrict in-person gatherings, BAS conducted its 2021 AGM in an entirely virtual format, with more than 60 members watching the video broadcast on Thursday 27th May.

Members were notified of the virtual AGM in early May and provided with the opportunity to nominate fellow members for six vacancies on the BAS Board of Directors – President, 1st Secretary and four Directors. During the video broadcast, members were presented with the BAS Annual Report and Fiscal Report, as well as the nominees for the Board, and immediately sent a follow-up email with a link to cast their votes.

Members participating in the virtual AGM voted for Earl Green as President; Rasine Gillett as 1st Secretary; and Randal Taylor, Virginia Burns-Perez, Francis Canto Jr. and Ishmael Quiroz as Directors.

Amanda Acosta, Executive Director of Belize Audubon Society said: "The ongoing impact of the global pandemic means we are not yet back to 'business as usual', but we continue to be flexible and adapt, using new tools and methods of communication to reach our members.

"Conducting our AGM virtually had the additional benefit of allowing our members all over the world to participate, and we thank everyone who watched the AGM online and voted to endorse our Annual Report and Fiscal Report, and vote for our new Board of Directors.

"I would like to warmly welcome brand new Board member Ishmael Quiroz, who will be serving his first term as Director, and also express gratitude on behalf of everyone at BAS to Lascelle Tillett, who departs the Board after many years of helping the Society work towards achieving its goals."

The BAS Board of Directors 2021-22

President: Earl Green
1st Vice President: Mike Heusner
2nd Vice President: Kevin Geban
Treasurer: Simon Reardon Smith
1st Secretary: Rasine Gillett
2nd Secretary: Janelle Chanona
Director: Randal Taylor
Director: Virginia Burns Perez
Director: Francis Canto Jr.
Director: Shajira Martinez
Director: Olivia Carballo Avilez
Director: Mariana Ancona
Director: Ishmael Quiroz
Immediate Past President: Ernest Raymond Sr.

Meet the

BAS Board of Directors


EARL GREEN


MIKE HEUSNER


KEVIN GEBAN


SIMON REARDON SMITH


RASINE GILLETT


JANELLE CHANONA


RANDAL TAYLOR


VIRGINIA BURNS PEREZ

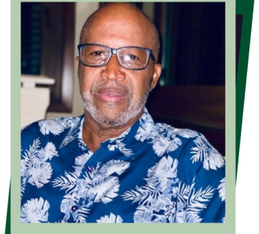

MARIANA ANCONA


FRANCIS CANTO JR.


OLIVIA CARBALLO AVILEZ


SHAJIRA MARTINEZ


ISHMAEL QUIROZ


ERNEST RAYMOND SR.

Terrestrial Update:

Site staff gain new skills through special training

by Arvin Coc

Over the past six months, BAS' terrestrial sites have enjoyed seeing an increase in visitors, as more tourists return to explore Belize. Our site staff have been busy working on the upkeep of trails and park facilities, as well as preparing for more significant construction works which will commence in the second half of the year.

BAS continues to provide opportunities for ongoing professional development and upskilling of our park rangers, and during the first half of the year staff have had the opportunity to take part in both customer service training and Special Constable training.

During the Special Constable training, our rangers, along with rangers from other protected areas in Belize, gained important knowledge through this training in areas such as beat and patrol, justifiable force, methods of arrest, the Belize Constitution,



BAS staff receiving their Special Constable training certificates



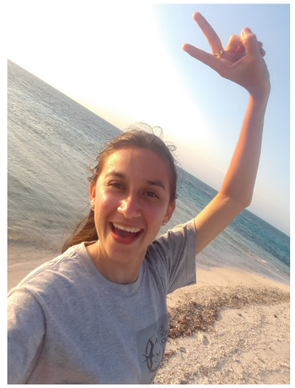
New BAS staff Yanik Moh, Valentino Penida and Selvin Bol

familiarization of the National Protected Areas System and other green laws, report writing and court procedures.

These techniques and practical methods presented to rangers will assist rangers to better execute the various duties under the patrol and enforcement efforts work carried out at their sites. The training was organized by the National Biodiversity Office, facilitated by the Belize Police Department, and funded by PACT.

We are also pleased to welcome three new members of staff to our terrestrial protected areas team – Valentino Pineda joins the team at CBWS headquarters, Selvin Bol has been appointed to be stationed at Juan Branch Post, and Yanik Moh, a graduate of BAS' Reef Protectors Program, has joined the staff at St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park.

Life as a BAS Intern



by Alma Urbina

Earlier this year, as part of my BSc degree in Tourism Management at the University of Belize, I applied to intern at BAS, as it is one of the country's leading environmental organizations and is focused on the management of Belize's protected areas – and I could not be more thankful to have been given this opportunity.

My responsibility as an intern was to develop two Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) documents to cover four of BAS' protected areas: Half Moon Caye Natural Monument, Blue Hole Natural Monument, Cockscomb Wildlife Sanctuary, and Victoria Peak Natural Monument.

I had the privilege to work along with the Marine Protected Areas Manager, Mr. Shane Young, and the Terrestrial Protected Areas Manager, Mr. Arvin Coc.

Under their guidance, I was able to work along with the marine and terrestrial Site Managers, Mr. Ramon Aguilar, and Mr. Nicacio Coc, who all were equally respectful, amiable, and supportive.

The Site Managers fully assisted me with providing information about their specific sites and I had the opportunity to meet the wonderful team of park rangers while visiting the protected areas. The atmosphere of the sites is already breathtaking, but the positive attitude of each and every staff member enlightens it even more.

Interning at BAS allowed me to restructure my perspective in regard to protected areas. Belize's natural and unique ecosystem is what attracts locals and foreigners to experience the natural diversity of species and corals within protected areas.

Despite the threats that are imposed, protected areas possess environmental, cultural and economic benefits to Belize. Not to mention, the entrance fee collected is used to finance the conservation effort, so, at all times, the integrity of the environment must be maintained.

I can wholeheartedly say that my nine weeks of interning with BAS resulted in a mesmerizing experience. One that I will never forget!

Inwardly laughing, the only gloomy experience I had was due to the rough seas when traveling to Half Moon Caye, knocking my head on the boat hard top while switching seats. But I won't let that affect my thoughts – it has been a full package of extraordinary experiences, and is a fantastic story to tell.

Once again, I could not be more thankful.



James A. Waight Award Winner:

Celso Poot



In February this year, Celso Poot, Managing Director of The Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Centre, and Belize Tapir Project, was awarded the prestigious James A. Waight Award in our first ever virtual award ceremony.

After presenting Celso with his award, we spoke with him to find out more about his career in conservation, how it feels to inspire the next generation, and what it really takes to be a conservation hero.

Celso, can you tell us a little about your background?

I live in San Ignacio, but I'm originally from Roaring Creek – Guanacaste National Park used to be one of my playgrounds growing up! I went to Belmopan Comprehensive School and Belize College of Agriculture, I studied my undergrad at Galen University, did my Masters at Miami of Ohio, and I am now undertaking my PHD at the University of Florida. I enjoy the outdoors, I like playing and watching football, I like snorkelling… and the outdoors is my office!

I started working at the Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Centre (TBZTEC) in 1995 as an environmental educator, and since then I have worked in different departments. Education has always been my passion; that is what I started out with and that is where I saw I was making a difference. Working with Belizean youths and students, exposing them to the environment, teaching them about conservation, that is what really captured my attention. TBZTEC has been my home, I grew up and matured here, and I've even seen students I've worked with mature and grow into conservation professionals themselves during my time here.

How does it feel to have been an inspiration for young people in conservation?

It's a good feeling, an overwhelming feeling, to know I'm inspiring younger conservation-minded people. I've worked with people from preschool, primary school, high school, and university level, and my goal is always to instil with them that we are part of the environment and we must take care of it.

Over the years, seeing people I've taught pursue degrees in natural resource management or environmental science, meeting them in the field and having them say 'you guys were an inspiration' is really a rewarding feeling, better than any financial reward. It is something sustainable, and will go on into the future.

In addition to your work at TBZTEC, you are also the founder of the Belize Tapir Project – what was it that sparked your interest in tapirs?

When I started as an educator at the zoo, one of my responsibilities was hosting April the Tapir's birthday party. Her birthday was celebrated for 30 years, and for 70% of the time, I was the person behind it. April brought out a lot in me, to see kids coming to the zoo to celebrate her birthday every year was really cool. Then I saw those children grown up and coming with their children, there was this second generation of students that April was impacting.



Photo courtesy of Celso Poot

After April passed, I felt I needed to do something to help tapirs. I was already part of the IUCN tapir group, but there wasn't much work being done in Belize, no real research on tapir ecology or people's attitudes towards tapirs, and we were also starting to see a high incidence of tapir vehicle collisions on the Burrell Boom road. So, I started the Belize Tapir Project, monitoring vehicle collisions, and made that part of my Masters degree. Since then it has taken over my life, I am spending a lot more time in the field, looking at tapir behaviour, tapir movement, and people's attitudes and beliefs towards tapirs.

What part of your work do you find the most rewarding?

I'm a hands-on field person, I'm a trained biologist; so, while at the zoo it's interacting with people that I enjoy, it's getting out in the field, monitoring wildlife,

following tracks, conducting research, working with animals, as well as meeting locals and getting their feedback, that's most rewarding for me.

I love knowing that I'm contributing to a species that doesn't have a voice – we the people need to be the voice for an endangered animal like the tapir, especially as it's our national animal, and that's what motivates me. We have to appreciate what we have, that's the driving force behind what I do.

What are the biggest challenges in your work?

Funding is a big challenge, particularly securing funding for pure research. Most of my funding comes from abroad, from other zoos or international donor agencies, not from within Belize.



Photo courtesy of Celso Poot

I'd like to see government and local funding agencies putting resources into science-based research that would directly lead to management and development policies, that is the direction I would like to see conservation in Belize going.

What are your goals for the next five to 10 years?

My goal and the goal of the Belize Tapir Project is to give Belizean students a classroom where they can get hands-on, field research experience. A research project that will afford students the invaluable opportunity to get what we are not currently getting in Belize.

Do you have any words of advice for people considering a career in conservation?

Conservation is not for the weak minded. If you're genuinely working to protect Belize's natural resources, the plants, wildlife, corals, fisheries – the whole enchilada – it's hard work, a lot of sacrifices, and the financial reward is not big.

If you're going to do it then you need to stay focused, set goals, and work towards them. Find a specific environmental or social problem in Belize – at the end of the day, wildlife conservation is not a wildlife issue, it's a people issue, a human issue – but find a solution and work towards fixing that problem.

And finally, what has been the highlight of your career so far?

The highlight of my career is having my son working with me. He was inspired by working with me, coming to zoo camp from the age of 5 until he was a teenager, then becoming a camp counsellor, so it's ingrained in him, it's in his genes.

He is my main field technician for the work we do with tapirs in central Belize, he has a good understanding of the work we do, and my hope is he will be able to take this baton on and champion wildlife conservation in Belize.

Planning for the Future

by Amanda Acosta

For the past two decades, Belize Audubon Society has prioritized the importance of strategic planning within the organization.

Strategic planning is vital to the growth of the institution. It serves as a road map that clearly defines objectives and processes for the next five years. Strategic planning is an important tool that is also used to improve the governance of the institution.

Since our current strategic plan had expired, BAS sought funding to carry out this process in 2021. As a result of the global pandemic, BAS had assessed its system to see if it was functional in these uncertain times, and saw now as the best time to determine our future trajectory. With funding from BIOPAMA Action Component (AC) which is funded by the European Union through IUCN, we have been able to embark on the process of developing our Strategic Plan for the year 2021-2026.

One may be asking what is a strategic planning, and why would you embark on this activity during a pandemic?

A strategic plan is the formal road map of an organization. It is the process by which the organization plans for the next five years; it forces us to look at where we want to go.

We look at the macro: the vision and mission of the organization. We then look at how we achieve





our vision and mission. The goal is for the strategic plan to help BAS be better, and do a better job, by having a clear direction which helps to focus our energy, resources, and time. The strategic plan is a management tool for growth, communication, and prioritization; ultimately providing focus and direction, the plan is to be actionable.

To be as comprehensive as possible, BAS decided it was also time to do an institutional assessment. The institutional assessment plays an integral role in strategic planning operationalization. The process is to conduct a systematic review of the institution to ensure we have the processes, staff, and resources in place to effectively accomplish the BAS mission and vision according to the strategic plan.

The consultants were selected through a competitive bidding process, and the timeframe is for a maximum of eight months. Through an interactive process with managers, field staff, and the Board of Directors (under COVID restrictions), we have been meeting in small groups to review and develop the institutional assessment and strategic plan, the results of which we are excited to share in the near future.

This project was made possible with the support of the European Union and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States through the BIOPAMA Programme.

BIOPAMA
From Knowledge to Action for a Protected Planet

ON YOUR MARKS...

BAS is celebrating all things health and wellness at its Protected Areas this summer with the #TrailblazersBZ campaign, starting with our first ever Protected Area trail run - the BAS Trailblazer 5k



Photo courtesy of Lliani Ordonez

by Natalie Blachford

On Sunday 4th July, BAS held its first ever Protected Area trail run – the BAS Trailblazer 5k at St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park.

This event was organized as part of the wider #TrailblazersBZ campaign, which we launched this year to encourage visitation of all of Belize's Protected Areas, by highlighting all the health and wellness benefits of getting outdoors and exploring our beautiful country.

Working with Total Time Belize, we were able to host a well-organized event with strict COVID-19 safety protocols, which allowed 49 runners to participate in the 5km run.

The route combined three of St. Herman's' popular trails. Setting out from in front of the visitor centre, runners quickly felt the challenge of trail running as they ascended the rocky Highland Trail. Looping back around on the Lowland Trail, they were given time to catch their breath on the wide, flat trail, before heading towards the Blue Hole swimming area on the Dusky Antbird Trail.

This is where things really started to get interesting for the runners – after heavy rain overnight, the Dusky Antbird Trail was slippery underfoot and with 49 runners heading up and down the trail, there was a lot of mud and a lot of slipping and sliding before the runners eventually crossed the finish line!

We are pleased to say that all 49 runners made it back across the finish line, with medics on hand to provide assistance to anyone who had taken a fall and refreshments provided by sponsor Bowen & Bowen waiting to help the runners rehydrate.

After the race, a ceremony was held to present top 3 medals to the fasted males and females, as well as to draw a raffle which all participants were entered into. Stuart Tucker was drawn as the winner, and walked away with a bumper prize package including



$100 cash, a voucher for a free guided tour of St. Herman's Cave, one year's free BAS membership, and a selection of other BAS goodies.

Following the success of this event – which fully booked within 48 hours of it being announced – BAS is excited to plan more trail running events in the future. Watch this space!

Top 3 Males	Top 3 Females
Victor Figueroa	Ana Lopez
Daniel Cruz	Roxana Lemus
Edgar Alvarez	Jane Champion





Meet the Marine Biologist:
Working to secure the sustainability of Belize's seas

As BAS' Marine Biodiversity Research & Monitoring Officer, Tanya Barona spearheads all of our monitoring and research work at Half Moon Caye, the Blue Hole, and across the Lighthouse Reef Atoll.

From conch and lobster to coral and sea turtles, the data Tanya collects plays a vitally important role not just in the management of our protected areas, but in fisheries policies for the entire country.

We caught up with Tanya to find out more about her career and what her role as marine research and monitoring officer involves.

Before going to university, I didn't really know what my career options would be. I don't remember having any career days or talks to help students learn about what routes they could take.

With the culture I grew up in, the two options you're presented with are getting an office job or being a doctor, so you just choose a business or a science path at university.

I grew up in Punta Gorda and went to school there before moving to Corozal, and then going on to study Biology, Marine Science and Natural Resources Management at the University of Belize in Belmopan. My initial thought was that I could become a teacher in biology, but once I was at university and started taking different courses and electives, I realized that there were other options.

I first became interested in conservation and marine science when we had a field trip to Calabash Caye at the Turneffe Atoll. Before that I didn't really know much about the marine environment, but it was so beautiful and I felt so inspired that I added marine science classes to the marine biology I was already doing, and my interest grew from there.

After I graduated, my first job was working in a power centre, but I only lasted a month – I just couldn't do it! I decided to dedicate my time to volunteering, in the hope of getting a job in the marine field.

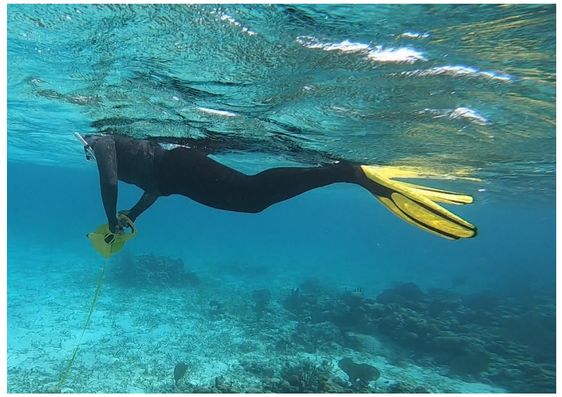
The best option I had at the time was to work at a dolphin experience centre off the coast, where people used to visit for dolphin encounters. While I was there I had the opportunity to certify as a PADI scuba diver, and completed my certifications all the way through to Rescue Diver level.

The place where we did the training wasn't great, the visibility was terrible, but it was something I wanted to get under my belt as I was focused on wanting to do marine work.

After that, I ended up going back to school to study Natural Resources Management, and while taking classes, I was able to do a studentship with the University of Belize's Environmental Research Institute, assisting with field data collection. I was also able to volunteer with NGOs all over the country, as well as working for PHD students who needed scuba divers.

It was through volunteering, and the connections I had with the local community in Punta Gorda, that I ended up taking my first job as a marine biologist with the Toledo Institute of Development and Environment (TIDE). They manage the Port of Honduras Marine Reserve, and I was working in coastal areas carrying out monitoring and data collection work.

After five years with TIDE, I moved to my current role at BAS – I felt like I had achieved a lot there, and had a desire to learn more, to grow and progress, which is what the opportunity at BAS gave me.



At TIDE, my role was predominantly working in the field, but now I am able to be involved with things like writing proposals for funding, and being a representative on national research networks – which gives me a more holistic understanding of Belize's conservation efforts on a national level.

My role as a marine biologist at BAS is important because of how the data we collect is used – it feeds into the management of protected areas, it is used in education and community engagement, and it contributes to national efforts in sustainability and fisheries management.

There are three key areas we monitor – reef resilience, reef health and commercial benthic species. Thanks to funding from BIOPAMA, we are able to conduct regular reef health and resilience monitoring, which is especially important with the recent emergence of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease.

In addition to our pre- and post-season assessments of lobster and conch density, we are able to carry out monitoring trips every two months to track its spread



and determine which areas to treat in collaboration with the national network.

I think one of the biggest issues facing marine conservation in Belize is the understanding and perception of certain fisheries, and getting buy in from people for conservation efforts.

For example, during conch season, it's easy to buy conch and it's available at a reasonable price, so for most people there's no reason to think there is a problem or this fishery might be unsustainable, especially when people have much bigger worries like the COVID19 pandemic and their own financial problems. People just think 'everything will be fine', but that's not the case.

I personally have spent so much time and put so much work into conch monitoring and management, that one of the biggest changes I would like to see is a move from measuring conch length to lip thickness for the fisheries regulations. It's been years in the making, so to see a result from that would be fantastic.

What I love the most about my job is just being able to go out to the marine sites, and escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life; it really doesn't feel like work when you are visiting these beautiful natural monuments and protected areas.

The work is never boring, and it also gives me the opportunity to travel, to attend conferences and events, and have exchanges with researchers from around the world.

Being able to do this opens my eyes to so many things I wouldn't even think about, listening to other people speak about the marine issues they're facing gives me ideas, and I can share information that might help others.

I think for anyone who has an interest in working in conservation, it's actually a lot easier now than when I was young. You can do your own research and find out so much online, and there are also other people in Belize who you can speak to - especially for girls, there are a lot of inspiring women working in conservation.

I do have a lot of people reaching out to me asking for advice, how I ended up in this field, what direction they can go in, as well as students interviewing me for projects. I never had a reference person like that, so I am glad that I can provide that information and support.





UPGRADES AT COCKSCOMB

by Dareece Chuc

Thanks to funding from Panthera and National Audubon Society, the Nature Centre at Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary has had an upgrade, with a brand new, engaging display for guests.

BAS' education team assessed the existing informational displays at the Nature Centre and has been working hard throughout the first half of this year to implement the upgrades.

Next time you visit CBWS, you can expect to see a more informed and interactive Nature Centre, where you can experience the rich history of CBWS and learn about 'Balum', the jaguar which led to the protected area's designation.

New additions include murals on the walls to highlight the habitat of the five species of wild cat found at CBWS, and to showcase Maya culture, the impact of logging, and the majestic Victoria Peak.

The jaguar monitoring displays tell the story of how the sanctuary was established through Dr. Alan Rabinowitz's jaguar study and the results of long-term jaguar monitoring at CBWS. The actual jaguar cage used for trapping of jaguars can also be seen on display.

Another grant from Panthera has allowed BAS to make improvements to the Plane Wreck Trail, leading to the site of a plane wreck from over 35 years ago in the early 1980s.

A short hike leads visitors to the twin engine Cessna that was used by Dr. Alan Rabinowitz to track radio collared jaguars during his study at CBWS. A storm caused the plane to crash, rendering it a historic place and leaving behind evidence of the jaguar research which resulted in the CBWS being established as the world's first jaguar preserve.

Over the past few months, BAS has carried out improvements to the trail including installing a concrete bridge over the creek to access the site, adding railings and stairs for safety, as well as caution signs and informational signs about the plane wreck incident.



Creating a Collaborative Conservation Community

by Natalie Blachford

Home to thousands of acres of protected forests, mountains, wetlands and the second largest barrier reef in the world, all rich in biodiversity and iconic species of wildlife, Belize is an environmental paradise – but only because of the conservation community working hard to keep it that way.

From Protected Area managers such as BAS, to research organizations, wildlife rescue and environmental advocates, there is a closely connected network of conservation champions who are not only achieving impressive results individually, but are increasingly working together collaboratively to even greater effect.

Bolstered by effective communication and relevant information, this approach is helping to stabilize economic benefits and increase public participation in the management of shared natural resources.

"Belize is unique in the amount of people involved in conservation", says BAS Executive Director Amanda Acosta.

"Collaboration is becoming more common and more productive – we are writing grants together to have larger impact; we are tackling issues together as a collective voice."

BAS is well-connected within Belize's environmental sector, sitting on the PACT Board as NGO representative, sitting on the APAMO Executive Council as Vice Chair, participating in scientific network groups and advocating for management of national resources, as well as working collaboratively with government agencies and supporting research partners working in the protected areas.



Marine monitoring – Image courtesy of MarAlliance



UB-ERI provides marine mointoring training for BAS staff

In recent years, BAS has lent its voice to join forces with other organizations and advocate for change, such as supporting The Coalition for Sustainable Fisheries' push to ban the use of gillnets in marine waters, amplifying Mar Alliance's call to limit long lines throughout the Lighthouse Reef Atoll, backing The Coalition to Save Our Natural Heritage's campaign against the dumping of dredge spoils in the ocean, and most recently supporting the Maya Forest Corridor Coalition to secure 30,000 acres of the highest priority land for conservation in Belize.

Jamal Andrewin-Bohn, Belize Country Coordinator for MarAlliance, says: "Conservation messaging absolutely carries more weight and has greater impact when organizations are unified and coordinated. Stakeholders and the general public want to know that we are working together to solve issues, and also that there are local or grassroots organizations at the forefront of those efforts. This can inspire public confidence, promote inclusivity, and make conservation goals more achievable. A unified approach often tends to improve dialogue and outcomes when engaging decision makers."

Janelle Chanona, Vice President of Oceana in Belize agrees that "Multiple organizations saying the same thing, whether individually or part of a group, should register to national leaders and fellow citizens. We've been keen on collaboration and cooperation from the outset, based on the 'unity is strength' approach, because it works to the benefit of all."

Reflecting on success of the Coalition of Sustainable Fisheries and the Coalition to Save Our Natural Heritage, which resulted in a moratorium against offshore oil drilling and a ban on gillnets, Janelle adds: "These efforts underscore the importance of being allies towards common goals, which benefit natural resources, and most importantly, the people who depend on them."



Bird banding at CBWS is carried out in partnership with UB-ERI

It is not just NGOs and protected area managers which benefit from collaboration – academia is also involved, through the University of Belize's Environmental Research Institute (UB-ERI).

Dr. Leandra Cho-Ricketts, Marine Science Director at UB-ERI, says: "We have an opportunity to contribute technical and scientific capacity for the management of protected areas and we also establish networks that open up opportunities for partnerships and funding for us. We regularly assist with capacity building opportunities and have combined resources with conservation organizations to apply for various grants or funding opportunities.

"By combining both human and financial resources we can have a coordinated and more holistic approach to conservation that any one organization can have individually."



Photo above shows a baby Red-footed Booby rescued at Half Moon Caye, rehabilitated at Belize Bird Rescue, then released at HMC below



UB-ERI's Terrestrial Science Director, Dr. Elma Kay, agrees: "Working with other organizations is imperative to our mission of building capacity at the national level for the sustainable use and conservation of the country's natural resources. We cannot be everywhere and do everything so we rely on solid partnerships to accomplish our larger goals."

Coordinating resources is more important than ever in a sector where budgets are constrained and funding is limited. Nikki Buxton, founder of Belize Bird Rescue, says that not being able to be everywhere and do everything applies to the wildlife rescue organizations in Belize as well.

"There are only a handful of wildlife rescue organisations in Belize; we all have our niche to fill and we all face similar challenges of limited resources. Close cooperation, especially with transport and overnight care of injured or sick animals can take a daily pressure off an individual organization.

"Communication is paramount for sharing resources. We use a WhatsApp transport group which has proved invaluable. Members of the group include conservation organisations, humane societies, businesses and members of public that make regular highway trips.

"Gas prices are increasing and staff members are a precious resource, so this collaboration of organizations and their supporters often takes the pressure off a single organization and more importantly, provides the best possible outcome for rescue of imperilled wildlife."

Communication is also essential in promoting effective collaboration, especially when it comes to presenting a united front to the public. Often, members of the public will contact the environmental organization they are most familiar with, rather than the one that is most directly relevant to their issue. For example, BAS will frequently receive messages about injured birds, which will ultimately need to be referred to Belize Bird Rescue.

Nikki adds: "It's all about response. A member of public in need of wildlife assistance will call any number they find that relates to wildlife issues, so it's critical that those organizations are able to refer them to a qualified wildlife partner in order to get rapid and appropriate action."

Educating the public is an important part of the work for most environmental organizations, and is another area where collaboration is key.

Jamal Andrewin-Bohn says: "Environmental education efforts benefit from having multiple conservation organizations working with stakeholders countrywide, but the efforts are most impactful when they are coordinated. This prevents redundancy of time and resources, and conflict or confusion with conservation messaging.

"For this reason, MarAlliance worked to create a network of marine education and outreach practitioners in 2018, including BAS, to help identify priorities, work overlap, and potential for alliances and partnerships.

"We reconvened this group in 2020 to reconnect, discuss challenges and successes in education and outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic, and discuss ways to move forward as a network."

Despite the success that has been achieved so far, there is still more to be done to improve collaboration between organizations and strive for even greater results.

Amanda Acosta states: "We need to see we are all working toward the same goals. The commonality of sustainable resource management binds us. We can still be different but come together on common issues."

As with any sector, there can be elements of perceived territoriality or working in silos, and much of the success in collaboration to date is a testament to the strong personal relationships that have been built between individuals. However, where collaboration has happened, only positive outcomes have been seen.

Dr. Elma Kay says: "We can accomplish more together. Bigger goals and impacts can be achieved when we unite for a larger vision rather than tackling things one little thing at a time or only sticking to our patch of the woods. My experience is that we neither lose funding nor capacity by working together but rather attract more of both."

As Janelle Chanona summarizes, "Unity is strength. If everyone worked together, we could have a truly strong Belize, leading in conservation, capitalizing on our resources and ensuring that future generations of Belizeans will have the best quality of life possible."



Shark monitoring at the Lighthouse Reef Atoll; Image courtesy of MarAlliance

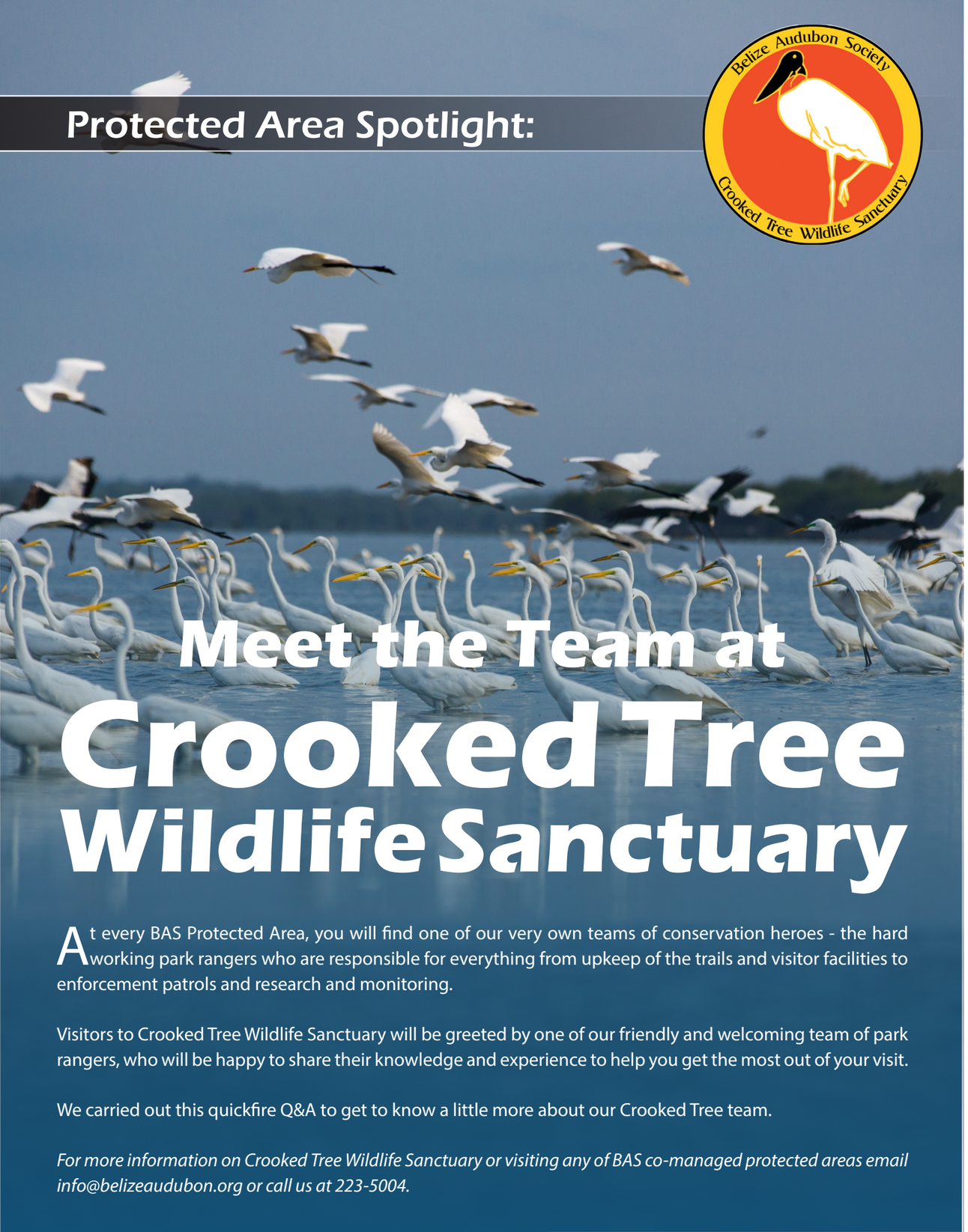


Image courtesy of Tony Rath

Protected Area Spotlight:

Meet the Team at Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

At every BAS Protected Area, you will find one of our very own teams of conservation heroes - the hard working park rangers who are responsible for everything from upkeep of the trails and visitor facilities to enforcement patrols and research and monitoring.

Visitors to Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary will be greeted by one of our friendly and welcoming team of park rangers, who will be happy to share their knowledge and experience to help you get the most out of your visit.

We carried out this quickfire Q&A to get to know a little more about our Crooked Tree team.

For more information on Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary or visiting any of BAS co-managed protected areas email info@belizeaudubon.org or call us at 223-5004.



Name: Derick Hendy

Job title: Site Manager

Time working for BAS: 21 years and 6 months

What is the best thing about your job at CTWS: The best thing about my job at CTWS is knowing that I am working and educating the people of Crooked Tree and the buffering communities about a very important and recognized international wetland, and to strike that balance between the people and the environment.

What has been your favourite moment working at CTWS? My most memorable experience is coming up with the idea for the Junior Bird Club, to work with schools local to CTWS to educate the children on the importance of wetlands and teach them about birds.

Do you have a favourite species of bird to see at CTWS? The Roseate Spoonbill

Which is your favorite BAS protected area apart from CTWS and why: My other favorite BAS protected area would be Guanacaste National Park, because of the easy access to get in and out of the park.

Who has been the biggest inspiration in your life? My dad.



Name: Walter Perriott

Job title: Warden/Ranger

Time working for BAS: 2 years

What is the best thing about your job at CTWS: Being able to help protect and conserve an area that I also call home.

What has been your favourite moment working at CTWS? It would be riding dirt bikes up to the northern part of the protected area with Mr. Steve (recently retired ranger), then across the lagoon into the pine forest area. While on this ride I got to see my favourite bird, the Jabiru Stork - it always amazes me how large of a bird it is.

Do you have any top tips for visitors to CTWS? I would say come in the dry season, because you will see huge flocks of birds all over.

Which is your favorite BAS protected area apart from CTWS and why? Besides CTWS, my favorite BAS protected area is St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park, because it has a beautiful cave system that is easily accessible.

Who has been the biggest inspiration in your life? My family, especially my mum, because they are always pushing me to do better.

BIOPAMA: 2020-21 Year One Update

The BIOPAMA project is a 2.5-year project, which commenced in July 2020, that aims to build BAS' capacity to effectively manage and use its four highest priority protected areas: Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, Victoria Peak Natural Monument, Half Moon Caye Natural Monument and the Blue Hole Natural Monument.

These four protected areas are to be used as landscape and seascape models – Centres of Excellence – for other protected areas in Belize and the region, with a focus on promoting improved long term biodiversity conservation, protection and provision of ecosystem services, and socio-economic benefits across Belize's National Protected Areas System.

Surveillance and Enforcement

One of the five Key Results in the BIOPAMA project focuses on positioning the protected areas as effective models for innovative strategic landscape and seascape enforcement. During Year 1 of the project (2020-21), the BIOPAMA funding has supported surveillance and enforcement across these protected areas.



Enforcement patrol at CBWS

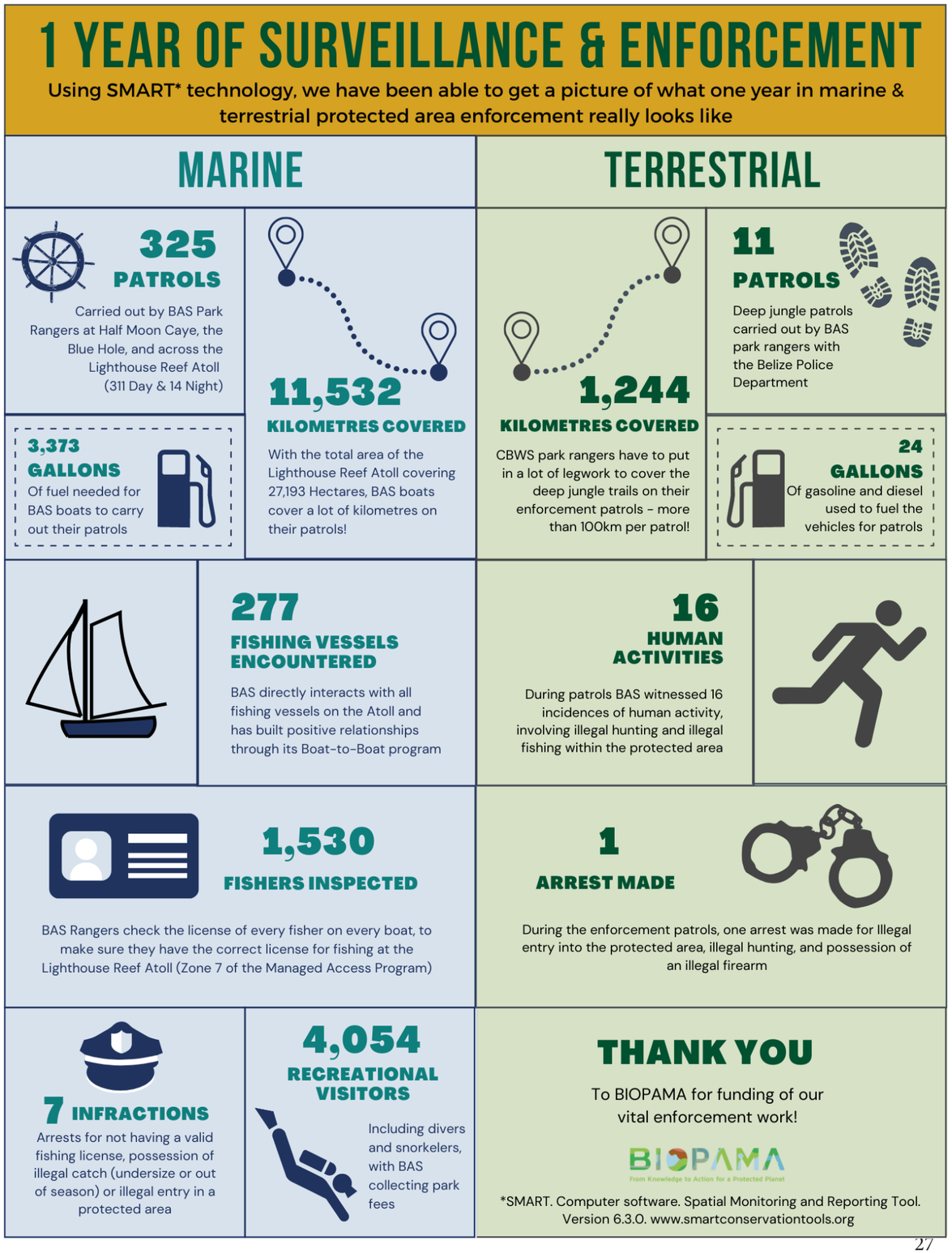
The project provided necessary equipment for rangers to carry out effective surveillance and enforcement, as well as biodiversity research and monitoring, and community engagement activities, including the procurement of two 150 horsepower 4 stroke boat engines.

Staff capacity was also enhanced through the project. Rangers participated in Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) training, done in partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society; as well as Law Enforcement/Special Constable Training which was done in partnership with the Belize National Biodiversity Office and Belize Police Department.

At CBWS, staff conducted 11 deep jungle patrols jointly with personnel from the Belize Police Department. Throughout these patrols staff and police personnel walk for hours each month trekking through difficult terrain in known 'hot spots' to monitor illegal activity within CBWS.

The main human activities observed through these patrols were illegal hunting and illegal fishing. There was one arrest during the year, where an individual was found within the protected area conducting illegal activity. The person was detained and charged for illegal entry into a protected area, illegal hunting, and possession of a fire arm within a protected area.

Marine patrols of the Lighthouse Reef Atoll resulted in seven arrests, three of which have now been concluded in court and four of which are still pending. These arrests were for a range of offences including not having a valid fishing license, illegal entry to the Half Moon Caye Natural Monument, illegal possession of conch in the close season, illegal possession of lobster during the close season and possession of undersize conch.



Community engagement

During the first year of the BIOPAMA project, a key focus for BAS has been communicating with the stakeholder communities of Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary and the Lighthouse Reef Atoll.

Dedicated communications plans were produced by an external consultant for each of the two stakeholder community groups, and a consultant was hired to conduct a Knowledge, Attitude, Practice survey in both communities.

One of the communication strategies outlined in the plans was the formation of Local Advisory Committees (LAC) for the protected areas, to engage local stakeholders. Representatives from the communities were sent invitations and the first LAC meeting for CBWS was held at the end of June.

Elsewhere, BAS has been carrying out project sensitization with the Maya Center Women's Group, as part of the marketing of CBWS. A meeting was held with the group in June and project activities,



Conducting the KAP survey in CBWS buffer communities

including customer service training, marketing support and a sewing project were agreed upon.

A promotional video for CBWS is currently being produced, which will feature the Maya Center Women's Group as well as highlighting the trails at the park, and is due to launch in the second half of the year.

Additional promotional materials are also being created, which will be presented to hotels and tour operators in the local area to assist them in promoting CBWS to their guests.



The first meeting of the CBWS Local Advisory Committee

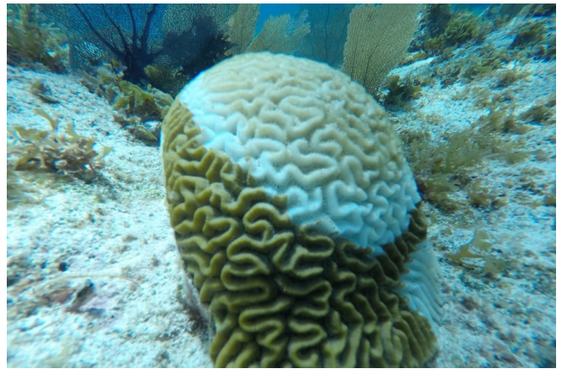
Biodiversity Research & Monitoring

BIOPAMA funding is supporting BAS' Biodiversity Research & Monitoring Department to standardize and strengthen its program, for effective data collection that will inform adaptive management strategies for the four key protected areas.

Over the past year, BIOPAMA funding has supported marine monitoring of corals, notably to assess bleaching, reef health and diseases, including Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease; and surveys of the commercial species, lobster and conch. The funding also supported terrestrial monitoring with the MoSI bird monitoring at CBWS from November 2020 – March 2021.

Outside of the field work, the funding has also helped BAS create a data management system for the program and improved IT systems with new hardware for data analysis, a new cloud server for housing all data and acquiring user accounts and licenses through National Audubon Society for ArcGIS Online and ArcGIS Pro, that will help in creating an improved data management.

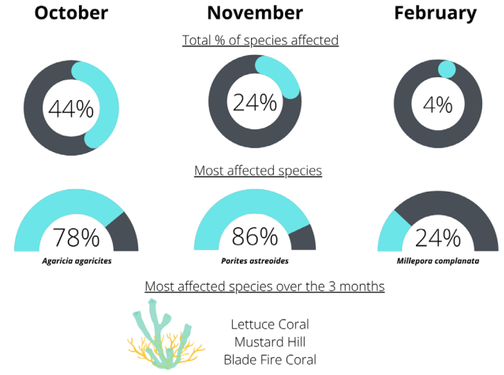
Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease



Monitoring for Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease is showing a general trend of the disease spreading more on the western side of LHRA in a southerly direction, and also spreading inside the Atoll. For a full view of all affected sites in the region and Belize, visit **www.agrra.org**.

Coral Bleaching

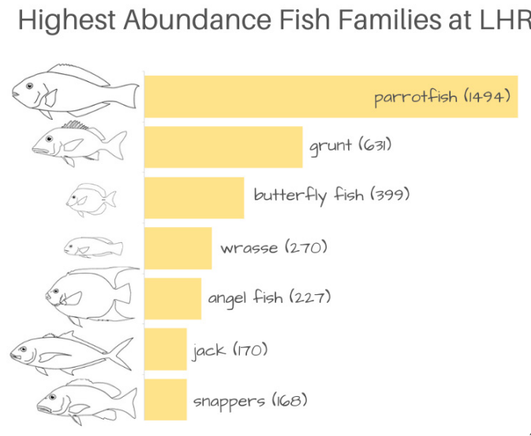
When the last round of monitoring was carried out in February 2021, the level of bleaching was 4% - down from 44% in October 2020. The most affected was the Mustard Hill Coral, with only three species severely impacted overall.



Coral Reef Health

The Lighthouse Reef Atoll Coral Reef Health Index Score was 3.0 – Fair in 2020, which is an improvement on the 2.3 – Poor recorded in 2015.

The most notable indicator was herbivorous fish (parrotfish), which showed the highest densities in the patch reef, followed by back reef and fore reef. Patch reef had the overall highest fish abundance while forereef had the highest species richness.





Commercial Species

Marine monitoring of commercial species – lobster and conch – for pre- and post-season showed that the conch population has remained over 88 conch/ha, although most of the sample measured failed to meet the lip thickness maturity size limit of 12mm for females and 9mm for males, indicating a juvenile population at LHRA.

The lobster population was predominantly adult with more males than females.

Migrant Birds

As a safe haven for migrating birds during their winter journey from North America to Central and South America, Belize is well poised as a winter destination! The MoSI season lasted from November 2020 to March 2021.

This monitoring effort continues to be led by the University of Belize-Environmental Research Institute and supported by its partners for the different MoSI stations, including CBWS.

The Assistant Terrestrial Research and Monitoring Officer is a key member of the team based at CBWS.



Seasonal highlights

- Total 386 captures
- Of a total of 20 target species to be caught in Belize, Black Rock Lodge had the highest (16) and CBWS the second highest (13)
- 33 recaptured migrants and 44 recaptured residents
- 5 migrants and 11 residents were common across all stations

Long-term trend

- Newly banded individuals varied from season to season for each species, but the recaptured individuals increased each season
- Species richness for migrants is also decreasing.
- Species with the highest capture rate were Wood Thrush and Gray Catbird followed by White-eyed Vireo, Northern Waterthrush, Ovenbird, Kentucky Warbler and Magnolia Warbler.
- November and December are the most active months having the highest number of newly banded birds and highest in recaptures.



Popular captures

Migrants: Wood Thrush, Worm-eating Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Ovenbird, Gray Catbird

Residents: Greenish Elaenia, Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, Ochre-bellied flycatcher, Red-capped Manakin, Northern Bentbill, Red-throated Ant-tanager

CBWS highlights

- CBWS had the highest number of birds captured than all other MOSI stations.
- CBWS had the highest number of newly banded residents and migrant individuals
- CBWS had the highest resident species captured and second highest migrant species captured
- A total of 41 migrant individuals and 76 resident individuals were recaptured
- 25 migrant individuals and 18 resident individuals caught during the MoSI season were repeat captures from previous seasons
- Gray Catbird and Wood Thrush were the most common species
- "Returns" highlight the importance of CBWS as a critical habitat for birds and their survival and shows that birds exhibit site fidelity.

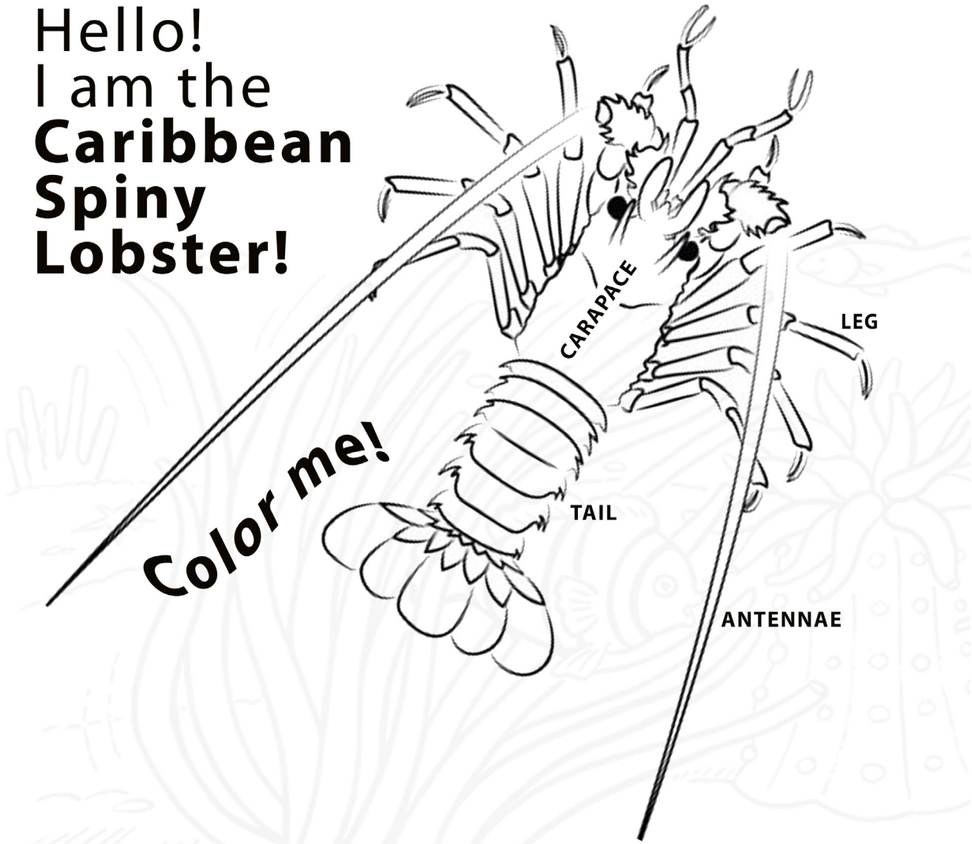
University of Belize, Environmental Institute 2021
Summary based on 2020-2021 MOSI season report
"Improving Natural Resources Management in Belize through Bird Monitoring"

BAS Kids' Corner

Belize Audubon Society

Where learning about nature is Fun!

Hello! I am the Caribbean Spiny Lobster!



Color me!



DID YOU KNOW?

The Caribbean Spiny Lobster gets its name from the forward pointing spines that cover it's body to help protect them from predators?

This lobster takes about 2 years to grow to be an adult! To be legally harvested, the part of it's shell named the "carapace" must be 3 inches in length.

This lobster makes it's home within corals and comes out at night to feed on snails, crabs and clams!

Membership

Protector

Aaron F. Samuels
Aeisha Robinson
Alec Shannon
Alson Ovando
Amanda Acosta
Arvin Coc
Brett Bowen
Brian Driscoll
Carolee Chanona
Caroline Atkinson
Charlton Castillo
Cheryl Rowland-Nunez
Dareece Chuc
David Foster
Delia Noble
Derick Hendy
Dominique Lizama
Edilia Zayden
Emily Heusner
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Francis Canto
George Acosta
Gian Martinez
Giannie Mai
Harvey Valenzona
Isela Duran
J.Michael Floyd
Jackie Driscoll
Jaliss Kuo
Jamani Balderamos
Jennifer Hall
Karen Griffiths
Krysten Zayden
Leslie Penner
Liany Ayuso
Lisa Zayden-Alvarez
Loretta Baxter
Luis Meyer-thor Straten
Lydia Chuc
Lyn Bibe
Macy Young
Martha Sho
Mary Alice Koeneke
Michael Hernandez
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Nelson Zayden
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Senaida Castillo
Shanine Bainton
Sharon Grennan
Sof B. Alvarez
Stephen Williams Jr.
Stuart Tucker
Taryn Oshun
Tessie Duran Tonaco
Tiago Tonaco
Valerie Black
Valorie Patillo
Varsha Clarke
Yasel Acosta

Listing

Junior Protector

Abigail Raymond
Amariah Card
Ella Heusner
Ivy Hung

Patron

Albert England
Brandon Reo
Celso Poot
Charles Feldman
Christopher Siviter
Dan & Kim Edwards
David Ford
Diego Sapien
Dirk Burgard
Dolores Balderamos-Garcia
Dorothy Beveridge
Earl & Ida Green
Ernest & Cordelia Raymond
Graham Sampson
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J. Thomas Brownrigg
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James Scott
James Wayne Warnica
Jennifer Wildman
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Mara & Phil Del Margo & Hess
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Pablo Guerra
Patricia Heusner
Randall Taylor
Richard & Ellen Del Margo
Richard Sleeth
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Robert Clinton
Robert Fields
Robert Hobbs
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Tamara Sniffin
Vincent Peter
Virginia Burns-Perez
William McCarthy

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Angela Wagner
Anthony Hunt
Asha Brown
Bancroft & Mary Poor
Barbara Flowers
Brian Watters
Bryan Diaz
Cara & Eric Stallsmith
Christina Boyd
Cindy Blanco
Cornelius G. Thiessen
Diana Locke

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Elvira Nunez
Evian Broaster
Glynn Morris
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Meghann Gordon
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Ramiro Santana
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Rasine Gillett
Ravi Nandwani
Ruben Thiessen
Shajira Martinez
Sophia Clarke
Tania Morejon
Tony & Myrtle Chanona
William/Laurie Wilson/Jackson
Zaowei Yang

Guardian

Phoebe & Mary Costigan
Judy Lumb
Simon Reardon-Smith
James G/Kathy Waight/Sweetman
GG Sr. Colville Young
Gene Baniulis
Paul Burnside
Ralph Capeling
Maria & Michael Zeringue
Jeremy Enriquez
Lynn & Mary Beth Whittaker
Tony Rath
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Bronze

Steven & Barbara Gaskin

Silver

Denver Wilson
Martha Steenstrup

Gold

Atlantic Bank

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Cyndi Bakir

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If you are not already a BAS member, you can join the Society today!

Membership Rates:

Junior Protector: $20+
Protector: $30+
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Guardian: $300+

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For more information, or to renew your existing membership, please email:
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CREATING A BALANCE BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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CONTACT INFORMATION

16 Taiwan Street, Belize City
P.O. Box 1001
Belize, Central America
(501) 223-5004/4988
members@belizeaudubon.org
www.belizeaudubon.org

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- Belize National Coast Guard
- Belize Police Department
- Belize Fisheries Department
- Belize Forest Department
- Belize Hotel Association (BHA)
- Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA)
- Belize Coalition to Save Our Natural Heritage
- Black Rock Lodge
- Corozal Sustainable Future Initiative
- Foundation for Wildlife Conservation (FWC)
- MarAlliance
- Museum of Belize (NICH)
- The Peregrine Fund
- Panthera Belize
- Projects Abroad
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-Toledo Institute for Development & Environment (TIDE)
- University of Belize - Environmental Research Institute (UB-ERI)
- Wake Forest University

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- Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT)
- San Diego Zoo Global