About Belize Audubon Society's Environmental Education Programme

Nature in the classroom

Our first attempt to encourage environmental stewardship started some 40 plus years ago through classroom visits to schools in Belize City and in buffer communities adjacent to protected areas we co-managed; thousands of school children from around the country have been reached through classroom presentations and now have a greater awareness of the Belizean environment. Today our school outreach program continues to thrive. Interactive classroom presentations as well as hands-on activities are used to challenge students to think critically, discover solutions and become involved in conservation efforts. These classroom presentations often set the stage for field trips and experiences in nature. How do we help to make the link? Our Environmental education team conducts monthly visits to schools where they create excitement about protected areas and invite teachers to plan a field trip for their students. Presentations on Belize's protected areas system and ecosystems are most popular.

Our Nature School

There is so much to learn and enjoy at our protected areas. It is the aim of the BAS to continue to use our protected areas as centers of environmental education where young people can enjoy the wonders of nature. For many years teachers around the country have been using our protected area (Guanacaste National Park, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary and St Herman's Blue Hole National Park) as nature schools. The carefully designed Nature School program provides students with hands-on experiences with nature, teaches environmental stewardship skills, foster problem solving and critical thinking skills as well as supports national curriculum standards. These guided tours are led by BAS' park rangers, who are excellent at interpreting the natural environment for students and teachers.

An impressive annual average of **6500** students and teachers visited one of four sites annually designated Nature Schools at different months of the year; With the dry season months of April and May having the highest visitation. St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park continues to lead the way with an annual average of **3500** nature school visitors.

Each site offers a unique ecosystem type ideal for outdoor learning and exploration. Whether you want your students to learn about the protected areas system, medicinal plants, coral reefs, birds, wetlands, caves or watersheds BAS' protected areas will inspire and encourage a love of nature in students.

To ensure that the experience is rewarding, BAS assists organizers in coordinating their field trips. Trip organizers are asked to call in at least two weeks in advance to ensure proper planning and availability of field educators. Organizers are also asked to send in their list of objectives and questions for their educational field trip so that the field educators can incorporate them into their presentation. Each year, our field educators welcome hundreds of students through the gates of our protected areas. The Belize Audubon Society welcomes all groups of students.

Summer Program

The protected areas co-managed by us are some of the most frequently visited parks in the country. However, there is still a high number of Belizeans who are not familiar with the Protected Areas of Belize. Thus, BAS has taken the summertime to engage its members, families and buffer community children that would not have received this opportunity. Every summer a variety of day camps are designed and carried out for these targeted groups. All our summer camps are nature themed and fosters environmental stewardship.

Bird Clubs

In the buffer communities of CBWS, CTW and SHBHNP our park rangers play a key role in outreach activities at the schools. Together they reach nine (9) primary schools through monthly environmental/bird clubs interaction. This longstanding relationship with the schools is important to fulfill our environmental education mission, of creating environmentally responsible citizens. Currently over **200** students are engaged through the clubs on a monthly basis.

Reef Protectors

The Reef Protectors program started as a pilot in 2013 with the objective to provide youth from fishing communities the opportunity to learn about marine protected areas and their importance to Belize. The program now runs in 2 year cycles with the objective to teach students about reef ecosystems and how they can continue protecting it for the future.

Through a blended approach of classroom and field activities, leadership and communication skills training the Reef Protector program is essential to building capacity of youths to play an active role in being stewards of their environment. During the course of the program participants visit four Marine protected areas including Half Moon Caye and Blue Hole Natural Monuments, where they gain experience in turtle nesting monitoring, beach profiling, bird point count, sea grass ecosystem monitoring and snorkeling the Belize Barrier Reef to learn fish and coral identification. In addition to other noteworthy experiences such as, spending time at sea and learning basic seamanship skills of knots, navigation and boat handling and friendly encounters out at sea with fishermen from their communities while collecting catch of the day data.

Since 2018 open water dive certification has been added to the program. This component was integral, demonstrating the program's advancement from just environmental education and experiential learning, to skills training. Once equipped with the knowledge and skills sets, we hope the participants will be ready for a marine science career and to support marine conservation.

Not only did the program positively impact the participants, but it spread to their respective communities and families. Parents agree with us, that their children are more motivated to learn and get involved in conservation work. Noteworthy are the positive attitudes and behaviors of their children towards the marine environment. According to Mrs. Ofelia Gonzalez, parent of one of the participants, "my son is using the internet more to research about marine conservation and how to get involved in other positive conservation programs". He told me, "mom, don't throw garbage in the water because it can affect the turtles and other marine life. It is our country, and we have to take care of it."

Note: To schedule and classroom presentation, booth display or a nature school field trip or learn more about our programs please contact us at 223-5004/4987/4988 or info@belizeaudubon.org or education@belizeaudubon.org