

October 2011



► **Newsletter 3/2011**

STENAPA Update

EEZ Meeting on St Eustatius

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Don't forget...

Guided Hikes: Available for groups of 2 or more

Botanical Garden: Open from sunrise to sunset. Great for family picnics and BBOs

Congo Preserve: The eco-friendly camp site on island. Call for information and rates.

The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Dutch Caribbean was declared on 10th June 2010. The EEZ concerned is a large area of water extending to 200 nautical miles around each of the six islands. This area harbors exceptional biodiversity, and



Participants of the EEZ Marine Resources Committee at the inaugural meeting held on St Eustatius. (Saba Conservation Foundation)

represents an important natural renewable resource potential.

A joint management plan was commissioned by the Netherlands with input from all six islands. The resulting "Management Plan for the natural resources of the EEZ for the Dutch Caribbean" was reviewed by all stakeholders involved and published in June 2010.

To set the stage for implementation and properly initiate this process, it was decided to: install an EEZ Marine Resources Committee to guide the process of further management implementation.

Accordingly, a Dutch Caribbean Committee on Marine Biodiversity and Fisheries was established, which held its first meeting on St. Eustatius from October 10th to 11th, including

participants from Bonaire, Saba, St. Eustatius, the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation (EL&I), Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland (RCN), the Royal Dutch Coastguard (permanent observer) and the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (permanent observer).

The committee is responsible for the coordination of the implementation of the management plan, ensuring active management of the Dutch Caribbean EEZ, ensuring continuous stakeholder involvement, exploring avenues for financing the sustainable management of the natural resources, ensuring active law enforcement, as well as supporting the organization and implementation of sustainable fisheries in territorial waters and the Dutch Caribbean EEZ.

The meeting was chaired by Roberto Hensen, head of the LVV department of St. Eustatius, which hosted the meeting.

At this inaugural meeting, the focus was on setting the priorities from the identified actions set out in the management plan.

Following the outcome of this prioritization, the Ministry of EL&I, as the secretariat of the committee, have been tasked with further developing the following actions (among others):

Invite representatives from the shipping departments as permanent observers to advise on issues such as major oil spill response and shipping regulations.

Instigate fisheries data monitoring on Saba and St Eustatius to enable informed policies to be developed relating to commercial lobster and conch fisheries.

Develop criteria and procedures for issuing permits to fish the Saba Bank. Determine current concerns and loopholes and seek to shore up procedures.

The next meeting will be hosted by Saba in March 2012.



REMINDER

Lionfish are venomous and should only be removed by Marine Park Staff.

If you have any questions or a Lionfish sighting please call us on 318 2884

Marine Park Staff in French St Martin

In the last week of September 26th to 29th, three staff members of the St. Eustatius National Parks Foundation (STENAPA) attended the first regional Marine Protected Area (MPA's) Managers workshop which was held on the French side of St. Maarten.

The workshop was attended by management and staff from six islands including St. Eustatius, Saba, Anguilla, St. Barths, country St. Maarten and French St. Martin.

The purpose of the workshop was to exchange ideas, experiences and protocols between MPA staff in these neighboring islands. Because the islands are in such close proximity that their waters are connected, they often share the same issues and conduct the same research, the meeting turned out to be a valuable source of information sharing and capacity building.

The focus was on such topics as financing mechanisms, monitoring protocols, enforcement issues and the



Workshop participants receive an eco-snorkeling brief at Pinel Islands. Photo: Saba Conservation Foundation

Lionfish invasion.

There were field trips to Pinel and Tintamarre islands to see the positive results of management measures taken by La Reserve Naturelle de Saint-Martin who are responsible for the protection and preservation of those areas. While there, demonstrations were given of the monitoring protocols for sea turtles, sea birds, mooring placement, sea grass beds

and pest control. There was also a field trip to the newly created Man-o-War Shoal Marine Park of country St. Maarten.

During the wrap-up session of the workshop, understanding that the marine ecosystems of the neighboring islands are ultimately connected and exposed to the same threats, the need for better cooperation, sharing of expertise and resources was emphasized. It was proposed to set up a Northern Lesser Antilles MPA Network, which could include a taskforce to assist the often understaffed

and insufficiently funded MPAs with joint monitoring exercises, installation of infrastructure, public awareness building, staff and school exchanges et c e t e r a .

The workshop was sponsored by GCFI, the Caribbean Environment Program, UNEP, CARSPAW, the Reserve Naturelle St. Martin and the Guadeloupe Regional Fund.

Sargassum in Statia

Recent months have seen an influx of floating algae patches throughout the Caribbean region causing concern to representatives of the environmental and tourism industries.

The floating weed is known as Sargassum and is usually found floating in an area known as the Sargasso Sea in the mid Atlantic, contained by the various current regimes found in this ocean. The Sargasso Sea itself is approximately 700 miles wide and 2000 miles long, with Bermuda being near its western fringes.

The Sargassum weed that we have been seeing on our shores, is thought to come from this Sargasso Sea, with its unusual release being triggered by shifts in the oceanic currents. There are theories as to why these shifts have occurred ranging from climate change to alterations in the Gulf Stream, but at the moment, this is still a mystery.

This unprecedented event has had far reaching impacts from Anguilla to



Sargassum algae washing up on Zeelandia Beach, St Eustatius

Tobago with many islands going to great effort to remove the weed from their important touristic beaches. One Antigua resort was forced to close its doors for the month of September while 10,000 tonnes of Sargassum was removed from its beach.

Here on Statia, while the Sargassum provided an unsightly, inconvenient and pungent spectacle at Zeelandia beach, it was not necessary to manually clean up the shore. Our tourism industry isn't

dependant on the quality of Zeelandia beach and therefore decisions were made to 'wait and see' how the invasion developed.

On Zeelandia now, you can see dried up remnants of the algae, but this is breaking down naturally and being absorbed into the ecosystem, bringing nutrients to the shoreline.

It is thought that the Sargasso Sea provides shelter for, among many other things, turtle hatchlings during their early developmental years and until the extent of the loss of Sargassum in this sea is known, the implications for this important ecosystem can only be guessed at.

Answers are still needed about what caused the disruption to the Sargasso Sea this year, and while research is currently being carried out, here on the islands we must wait and see what the coming months brings.

Nature Policy Plan for CN Islands Being Developed

Kate Walker, director of STENAPA, recently attended a stakeholder workshop as the first step towards developing a new five year nature policy plan for the Caribbean Netherlands (CN) islands of Statia, Saba and Bonaire.

The policy document has been commissioned by the Ministry of EL&I and the vision behind it is to develop a common set of practices and procedures on the three unique islands while working to preserve, conserve and strengthen nature, both inside and outside the protected areas. The concept is that once this national policy document has been passed, each of the CN islands will be obliged to write their own island nature policy plan using the national plan as a framework.

The former Netherlands Antilles did have a national nature policy plan, however, only two of the six Dutch islands actually wrote their own island nature policies.

As a precursor to the development of this new plan, efforts were made to review the success of the NA policy. It was found that many of the 63 action points had been partially achieved but it was overwhelmingly found that the main barriers to completion of many actions were both financial (and therefore capacity) limitations and the lack of political will on the islands.

The outcome of the recent CN nature policy plan workshop was the development of new and strategic actions to be developed and incorporated. It was felt that the new policy needs to be very clear from the outset and two of the most crucial elements to come out of this was, firstly, the need for inventories, descriptions and usage guidelines for areas marked as 'nature' on the CN islands Spatial Development Plans. This is an urgent need for assessing what the islands have both inside and outside the protected areas and will provide some cohesive guidelines for island governments when considering future use of these areas.

Secondly, it was deemed fundamental for the policy document to state the clear roles and responsibilities of nature management on the three islands. With the advent of 10-10-10 comes a new level of responsibility from all involved in nature conservation, therefore it was requested that the roles of the national government, the local government and the park management NGOs be clearly defined so that each entity knows the extent of its involvement in nature management on the CN islands.

The national nature policy plan is hoped to be approved by April 2012 for immediate implementation and STENAPA looks forward to being



Botanical Garden to host Press Trip

The Miriam C Schmidt Botanical Garden will, this November, play host to a fantastic event for invited members of the international press and travel operators.

Arranged by Botanical Garden Ranger, Claire Blair and Authentic Caribbean Holidays Manager, Andrew Sharpe is a 'Dinner Under The Stars' event which will see the garden decorated to reflect the sparkling night sky.

The venue of the Botanical Garden was selected for this event to give an opportunity to showcase this beautiful location and to demonstrate that St Eustatius has something unique to offer international visitors to the Dutch Caribbean.

Not deterred by the condition of the road to the garden, both Claire and Mr Sharpe are positive that this event will be a real eye opener for visitors to the island and will put the garden

on the Statia map as a place to hold your special events and activities.

The event will be catered locally and will also feature music from a steel pan band.



Twilight at the Miriam Schmidt Botanical Garden

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STENAPA is an environmental not-for-profit foundation on St Eustatius and was established in 1988. The objectives of STENAPA are to upkeep the natural environment, to preserve and protect endangered or endemic species (flora and fauna) and to educate the community about the importance of the protection of the natural environment.

Areas of responsibility include management of the marine park, the national parks and the Miriam Schmidt Botanical Gardens. STENAPA is legally delegated by the Island Council to manage these protected areas.

Acting President: Roberto Hensen
Vice President: Ira Walker
Treasurer: Ruth Pandt
Secretary: Linda Berkel

www.statiapark.org

Sea Turtles on Zeelandia

The 2010 Sea Turtle nesting season was a very busy year for the Statia Sea turtle conservation program. As in many other places around the world last year, Statia experienced an unprecedented number of nests of the Green Sea turtle. The 2010 annual report is available for those who are interested in reading a summary of that year's record breaking nesting activities.

The program staff were looking forward to a good leatherback season in 2011 as 10 females were due to arrive for nesting. Sadly this did not come to pass. There was only a single leatherback track on Zeelandia at the end of March and that remained the only activity for the entire Leatherback season which ended in late July. One of "our" leatherbacks which was expected was reported as having nested successfully on a beach on the east coast of St. Kitts in April.

The hard shell species, Greens and Hawksbills, also seem to be giving Zeelandia a miss this year. The hard shell season which runs from June to

November has so far seen only 7 hawksbill activities, 7 Green turtle activities and 1 activity from an unknown turtle. The latter means that the track was too vague to determine exactly which turtle species is responsible for the activity.

The nests that have hatched so far have been very successful so despite the small numbers we still have a high success rate.



Green Sea Turtle tracks. This activity did not result in a nest being laid.

The turtle program would like to remind the public that Zeelandia beach is a protected area. It is protected by local and international laws because it is nesting habitat for endangered sea turtles.



Tire tracks on Zeelandia which came within a meter of a Green turtle nest.

Although the numbers are low so far this year, there are still nests on the beach and they are vulnerable to destruction by sand miners and persons driving on the beach. These illegal activities have been on the increase lately and patrols for violators have been stepped up. There is a minimum \$500 fine for persons caught violating these regulations.

Pilot Whale Strandings

Back in July, three whales were discovered dead on a remote beach in Statia. The two females and one male were confirmed to be short-finned pilot whales. No necropsy was performed, however the mammals did not show signs of anthropogenic injuries, sickness, malnourishment, dehydration or other injury. STENAPA therefore believes they became stranded due to disorientation.

Pilot whales are toothed whales that can grow to be between 14 and 17 feet (4.3 to 5.2 meters). They live in warm, tropical waters in groups called pods that consist of between 15 and 50 animals. Pilot whales, like other toothed whales, use echolocation to map out their environment. The stranding of pilot whales is not uncommon and the list of possible reasons is long, including the whales' social nature. It is thought that if one gets sick, the whole pod will strand. A single stranded animal can prompt an entire pod to respond to its distress signals and strand alongside it. In 2003, about 25 pilot whales became stranded in the Florida Keys.

years, loud noises caused by oil and gas exploration, Navy sonar or even natural events like earthquakes, have received attention as causes of whale strandings.



Female [B] on Statia



Female [A] on Statia

Beached whales often die due to dehydration, the body collapsing under its own weight, or drowning when high tide covers the blowhole. Whales have beached throughout human history, so many strandings can be attributed to natural and environmental factors, such as rough weather, weakness due to old age or infection, difficulty giving birth, hunting too close to shore and navigation errors. Some experts believe that parasites or disease, could cause one or two whales to strand themselves, with the rest of the pod following. In recent

As with other marine mammals, pilot whales are susceptible to certain pollutants. High amounts of DDT and PCB have been found in the tissues of long-finned pilot whales off the Faroes, France, the UK and the eastern US. Heavy metals such as cadmium and mercury have also been found in pilot whales off the Faroes.

Pilot whale meat is available for consumption in a few areas of Japan, and also in other areas of the world such as the Faroe Islands. The meat is higher in protein than beef and low in fat. In Japan, where pilot whale meat can be found in certain restaurants, the meat is sometimes served raw, but just as often pilot whale steaks are marinated, cut into small chunks and grilled.

In both Japan and the Faroe Islands, the meat is contaminated with mercury and cadmium, causing a health risk for those frequently eating it, especially children and pregnant women. Research done on the Faroe Islands resulted in two chief medical officers recommending against the consumption of pilot whale meat, considering it to be too toxic. In 2008 the local authorities recommended that pilot whale meat should no longer be eaten due to contamination, which has resulted in reduced consumption.

Statia's waters are home to a variety of marine mammals, the largest of which is the humpback whale which passes through the area between January and April each year on its migration route.



Male [C] on Statia

Other species include the bottlenose and spinner dolphin. Any persons that spot a sea creature in distress, trapped or stranded should contact STENAPA on 318 2884.

Photos by Anna Maitz.

Statia's Morning Glory



The vibrant pink colour of the flower on Statia (photo by Hannah Madden)

St. Eustatius' only endemic species, Statia Morning Glory (*Ipomoea sphenophylla*), has flowered in the Netherlands. In 2008 Dutch botanist André van Proosdij visited St. Eustatius to conduct a training in plant identification for STENAPA staff. He took some Statia Morning Glory seeds back to the Netherlands and attempted to cultivate them at the Hortus Botanicus, Amsterdam. Unfortunately, all the plants died. However, he still had five seeds which he kept to test germination capacity after a storage of two years. These seeds were brought to the Hortus Botanicus in Leiden, resulting in the successful germination of three plants. This year one of the plants flowered although with a noticeably paler colour, probably due to longer daylight hours or the low energy level of the European sunlight.



The paler colour in the Netherlands (photo by Rogier van Vugt)

As a result of this good news, Proosdij's colleague Rogier van Vugt met with world-renowned primatologist Jane Goodall who is writing a book showcasing highly endangered spe-

cies whose stories have a happy ending, ie. species that were once almost extinct but are now safeguarded due to conservation efforts. Statia Morning Glory was thought for many years to be extinct, until some years ago it was discovered to be growing outside the property fence of the oil terminal on Statia.

Since then a number of vines have been discovered in the northern hills and the population is thought to be relatively stable. After hearing the story, Goodall indicated that she may include Statia Morning Glory in her book although this is yet to be confirmed.

Hortus Leiden is currently trying to raise funds to set up an ex-situ breeding program for the Kingdom of the Netherlands' rarest plant. STENAPA is excited about the impact that Statia Morning Glory being featured in Goodall's book will have for nature conservation on Statia, as well as for the pride of Statiens: 'their own precious rare flower'.

Ipomoea is the largest genus in the flowering plant family Convolvaceae, with over 500 species, often called "morning glories". The genus occurs throughout the tropical and subtropical regions of the world, and comprises annual and perennial herbaceous plants, lianas, shrubs and small trees; most of the species are twining climbing plants.

Many herbivores avoid morning glories like *Ipomoea*, as the high alkaloid content makes these plants unpalatable, if not toxic. Nonetheless, *Ipomoea* species are used as food plants by the caterpillars of certain butterflies and moths.

Most *Ipomoea* species have spectacular, colorful flowers and are often grown as ornamental plants. Their deep flowers attract large butterflies and carpenter bees - or even hummingbirds.

The genus also includes food crops; the tubers of sweet potato (*I. batatas*) and the leaves of water spinach (*I. aquatica*) are commercially important food items and have been for millen-

nia.

Other species in this genus contain medically and psychoactive compounds, mainly alkaloids. Some are renowned for their properties in folk medicine and herbalism; the Giant Potato, *I. mauritiana* is one of the many ingredients of the ancient Ayurvedic tonic called "the elixir of life" for its wide-ranging properties. Seeds of Mexican Morning Glory (*Tiltitiltzin, I. tricolor*) were used by Aztecs and Zapotecs in rituals, and also as a poison to give the victim a "horror trip". Beach Moonflower (*I. violacea*) was also used in this way. Statia is home to various other species of morning glory, including the Cy-



press Vine (*I. quamoclit*) [below], *Jacquetia solaniflora* [below], and



the Alamo vine (*Merremia dissecta*) [below].



(Photos above by H. Madden)