

www.naturefoundationsxm.org

In January NFS proudly launched its new website. The project was funded by the Prince Bernard Culturefund Netherlands Antilles and Aruba.

The new site focuses heavily on education and awareness about the island's flora and fauna.

Some of the topics conclude with a quiz the viewer can download. This is of great educational value to students and teachers.

The site is considered one of the most up-to-date and information-rich internet sources about local environment and St. Maarten on a

wider scale also features the marine park map with underwater images. Interested snorkelers and divers will be very happy this feature as the photos will give them an idea of what to expect at each dive site.

Hyperlinks give users easy access to other sites of interest. The downloads page offers visitors a host of reading material such as press archives, legislation and annual reports. The colourful and easy to navigate site was created by Marcus van der Neut of Eloquent Web Designs.



Coming up...

CaMPAM training of trainers course, Tobago March 21—April 4

DCNA Board meeting, Saba May 11th—14th



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Nature Foundation's New ranger

In January we expanded our park ranger staff by hiring Vere Hill for the full-time position.

Vere has a long-time experience in customer service and logistical management from his former employment in the commercial air cargo industry.

Vere has a keen interest in local

conservation and the marine environment. He is the keyboardist of the Percy Rankin Band. Not only does he know how to tickle the ivories, he also knows how to move and energize a crowd with his raspy voice and large stage performance.

Vere's charisma is surely an added value to the team.

Welcome to the team Vere!




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Dear Reader,

Welcome to this year's first edition of Foundation News.

We are confident that 2009 will be one of increased successes in our projects and activities. The year started out on a high note with the launching of our new website, one we are certain you will find informative. In addition, we have a second marine park ranger on our staff so now we can start to expand our services.

Near future activities will include the Snorkel Club for young children and better focused and organized data gathering on sea turtle nesting beaches.

In the meantime enjoy the current articles.

Happy reading!

Sincerely,

*Beverly Mae Nisbeth, MSc.
Manager*

Data gathering: park user numbers

In an effort to generate information on the number of people that visit our reefs annually either by snorkelling or SCUBA diving, we started with monthly surveys. The survey will be a long-term programme. The best stakeholder group to assist us with acquiring the data is the dive shops. Each month, NFS will send out a blank report sheet that they can either print and fill in manually or simply fill it in digitally and email it to us.

Information on the form includes: dive/snorkel site name and number of clients and at the bottom of the page the total number of clients for that month.

Managers of MPAs around the world this type of information to determine e.g. what are the most used areas and user numbers also help to determine what is the carrying capacity in relation to the size of the area and the user pressures. The numbers can also help e.g. in the management of dive moorings to decide whether or not it is justifiable to add additional mooring(s) at a location or to even temporarily close a dive site.

Aquatic Invasive Species: the Pacific Lionfish



One of the top ten threats to coral reefs is Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS). A current example is the Pacific Lionfish that is making its way through the Caribbean.

The Pacific Lionfish, indigenous to the Pacific and Indian Oceans, is a voracious predator. It consumes more than its own body weight in food daily and hunts continually. The Lionfish has no natural predators in the Atlantic and therefore is considered a severe threat to our coral reef ecosystem. Research has

shown that in some areas where the Lionfish has invaded, reef fish recruitment is down by 80%. What this means is that only 20% of juvenile reef fish are surviving the slaughter.

The Lionfish is thought to have been introduced in the Atlantic off the coast of Florida in the 90s by the aquarium trade. The Lionfish population has grown and migrated further east since then. For more information on the Lionfish:

http://fl.biology.usgs.gov/lionfish_progression/lionfish_progression.html

<http://www.reef.org/programs/exotic/lionfish>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lionfish>

To prepare for the Lion fish arrival we set up a response schemes that includes cooperation from the relevant government authorities, the fishing community and the dive shops. A display poster of the fish

hangs at the fish markets and dive shops have a the poster and a sighting report sheet.

NFS will collect and collate the data from the dive shops and submit it to REEF where it will be added to the global data collection.

We have hand nets to help us remove the fish safely from the water. As the fish is eaten in the Pacific, some Caribbean islands that have large Lion fish populations are experimenting with it as food fish for human consumption.

Only when faced with the situation will we be able to best decide whether or not mass consumption will be feasible. Another possibility might be to use the fish as a research resource possibly for toxicology studies at the medical university in Cupecoy.



Left: This USGS map shows Lionfish population spread along the eastern US coast and throughout the Caribbean. The fish is present in Bermuda, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the Bahamas. There have been confirmed cases in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands as well as way down north off the coasts of Venezuela and Columbia, upwards to St. Lucia and off the coast of Belize in Central America.

Right: Polyethylene / nylon hand net and holding bag to safely remove Lionfish from water.



St. Maarten in the lens: SHAPE of nature

For a few days in March, the international group of nature photographers, called SHAPE, visited St. Maarten for a nature photo expedition. SHAPE promotes nature conservation through high quality & high aesthetic photos in cooperation with the major local conservation trusts, to help the organisations in their educational projects and in local and global environmental politics. The photographers specialize in macro, wide-angle landscape, bird, insect and flower photography. The work is featured on their website: <http://www.shapeofnature.net/index.html>

The photo expedition was funded by the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA) and started in Bonaire last year. So far this year SHAPE has visited St. Eustatius and St. Maarten.

The work of these very gifted artists will help to dispel the myth that St. Maarten is a 'concrete

jungle' only. There are still areas of great natural beauty to be found and enjoyed. Hopefully the captured images will help to make people more aware of the importance of local nature conservation. The images will be added to our photo database to be used free of copyright for our educational and outreach materials etc.



Standing from l to r: Henkjan Kievit; Beverly Nisbeth and Etienne Lake of NFS; Rostislav Stach. Kneeling from l to r: Christian König and Marjolijn Lopes Cardozo.

Deep Scarring: Erosion & Sedimentation

Soil erosion and the subsequent sedimentation in the coastal waters is a big problem on St. Maarten. Erosion control is not a part of the construction culture and is also not adequately addresses in island legislature.

During excavation works soil becomes unstable and is vulnerable to the natural elements like

rain and wind. Rain-induced run-off events dumps tons of terrestrial material into the coastal waters where currents carry the sediment away to sensitive coral reefs and fragile seagrass beds.

The sediment damages and kills these areas by either smothering the corals and seagrasses or causing them to starve because of blocked sunlight.

NFS has recommended to the

government that they place strict guidelines and conditions that promote environmentally sound excavation works in future planning permits. Hopefully the Department of Environmental Affairs will draft a policy advice on this matter for Executive Council approval.

