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Straight from the Vine

The Environmental & Cultural Education Newsletter for the Virgin Islands Community

What determines the sex of a baby sea turtle?
Read this month's "Straight from the Vine" to find out!

VINE Grows, Offers Educational Outreach Across USVI

Seeing a need to improve environmental and cultural education opportunities throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Virgin Islands Network of Environmental Educators (VINE) was formed in August 2004 by educators wanting to share information and community contacts. VINE members work together to offer environmental education programs and provide resources for teachers and the community. The network links K-20 educators, natural and cultural resource organizations and stakeholders to promote environmental and cultural education throughout the USVI.

VINE currently has partnered with 24 agencies throughout

the U.S. Virgin Islands and is actively developing new programs and materials for use on a number of issues, including the impacts of water pollution, the role of mangroves in the marine environment, the life cycle of the leatherback sea turtle, energy conservation, the cultural history of the Virgin Islands, and preventing soil erosion, to name just a few.

On October 18, 2004, VINE made a presentation at the Quality Education Standards in Teaching (QuEST) teacher professional development workshop at Education Complex on St. Croix. Seventy-two public school teachers attended the presentation, indicating the need for such



VINE's Dee Osinski talks about VINE programs at the QuEST workshop.

educational outreach programs both on St. Croix and throughout the USVI.

For a directory of VINE members and programs, contact:

Dee Osinski
St. Croix Anti-Litter & Beautification
(340) 773-4489

VINE is

- ◇ Anti-Litter & Beautification, St. Croix
- ◇ Coral World
- ◇ Island Resources Foundation
- ◇ The National Park Service Virgin Islands NP
- ◇ The Nature Conservancy
- ◇ USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- ◇ St. Croix Environmental Association
- ◇ St. Croix Landmarks Society
- ◇ University of the Virgin Islands Cooperative Extension Service
- ◇ University of the Virgin Islands Globe Program
- ◇ US Fish & Wildlife
- ◇ VI Department of Agriculture
- ◇ VI Department of Planning & Natural Resources
- ◇ VI Environmental Resource Station
- ◇ VI EpSCOR
- ◇ VI Marine Advisory Service
- ◇ VI Resource Conservation & Development, Inc.
- ◇ West Indies Marine Animal Research & Conservation Service, Inc.

Juanita Gardine Students See The Sea

The 4th–6th grade students at Juanita Gardine Elementary got a sneak preview of the new video highlighting the East End Marine Park on St. Croix during a three-week long series of class activities devoted to marine environments. The video blends science and management issues with vibrant images of Crucian culture, recreational activities, and the island's natural beauty both above and below the sea. The

video tells the island's rich history through the eyes of fishermen, scientists, community leaders, and children.

Teachers interested in the video or the park can contact:

Susan Curtis
DPNR—CZM
(340) 773-1082
susan.curtis@viczmp.com



Dr. William Coles of DPNR gives students from Juanita Gardine's "Kids Against Pollution" Eco-Club a hands-on learning experience during their "Water Water Everywhere" Science Unit.

Upcoming Events

- ◇ April 22: Earth Day
- ◇ November 28–30: Non-point Source Pollution Conference, St. John

Leatherbacks Make Return to St. Croix, See Turtles Nesting Up Close

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is pleased to announce that they will, once again, offer school, youth, and community groups the opportunity to visit Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) during the 2005 leatherback sea turtle nesting season.

Since 1981, the United States Virgin Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife (DPINR) has run a comprehensive study of the biology of the leatherback sea turtles nesting on the beaches of Sandy Point NWR. Education has been an important component of the study since its inception.

Sandy Point NWR, as an important nesting site for these endangered turtles, provides unique educational opportunities for the St. Croix community. Every nesting season, hundreds of local students and adults visit Sandy Point to witness both leatherback nesting and hatching emergence. The program, started in 1997 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, plays an important role in the conservation of the leatherback sea turtle.

Throughout the history of the Leatherback Research Project, there has been a steady increase in the number of turtles nesting each season. The combination of increases in both public awareness and nesting turtles created a need for a visitor program which would allow community members to see turtles while ensuring the protection of this globally endangered species.

The Sandy Point Sea Turtle Education Program makes the community an inte-

gral part of the protection of sea turtles and their habitats. In doing so, it fosters a conservation ethic which extends to all aspects of the natural community. An educated and concerned public is our greatest ally when it comes to the preservation of sites such as Sandy Point. The visitor program shows visitors a world they may never have seen before. This is especially true of our local, young people since St. Croix has no zoos or natural history museums. For many of these children, this is their first opportunity to interact with a wild animal.

Since 1997, thousands of schoolchildren and local adults have visited Sandy Point to see leatherback sea turtles nesting. Beginning on 1 March, we will be accepting reservations from school, youth, and community groups for trips in April, May, June, and July. Weekend nights are limited to school and youth groups and reservations are only accepted for groups of 15 to 30 people at a time.

For more information, please contact:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
(340) 773-4554.

After 1 March, call (340) 690-9452 for reservation information.



Baby leatherbacks hatch each spring from Sandy Point NWR.

Did you know that nest temperature determines the sex of baby sea turtles?

During the middle third of the incubation period for sea turtle eggs, warmer nest temperatures (above 29°C or 82°F) tend to have more females. Above 33°C (91°F), nests are almost exclusively females. Nest temperatures are determined by strength of sun, air temperatures, and shade sources. Since sea turtles nest above the high tide line, water temperatures don't have an effect.

St. Croix Students Become Ocean Scientists for A Day

Students and science teachers from high schools on St. Croix toured the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) research ship *Nancy Foster* on January 31, 2005.

This is the second year of the ship's ongoing scientific research mission, exploring the seafloor around the U.S. Virgin Islands. Students were able to learn about the equipment and advanced technologies needed for the mission. Scientists explained how they would map the seafloor using a Remotely-Operated Vehicle (ROV), which takes still and video footage underwater.

The crew of the *Nancy Foster* gave a tour of the ship, showing students where the scientists work, eat, sleep, and relax while on a mission. After the tour, the students were given advice on how to become an ocean scientist by setting high goals and working hard in school. The scientists shared stories of how their first jobs set them along the road to becoming ocean scientists. Students got a first-hand look at how school and experience are invaluable tools for reaching their goals and professional aspirations. Everyone involved expressed having a great time meeting today's and tomorrow's ocean scientists.



Students take a stop during their tour of the Nancy Foster for a quick pose on the gangway to the research vessel.