

Straight from the Vine

The Environmental & Cultural Education Newsletter for the Virgin Islands Community

*How much is that light you left on adding to your electric bill?
Read this month's "Straight from the Vine" to find out!*

St. Mary's Students Discover Jack and Isaacs Bay

On March 15, St. Mary's students from Ms. Georgine Inks' 5 and 6th grade classes discovered some of the beauty nature has to offer on a Discovery Walk at Jack and Isaacs Bays, along St. Croix's undeveloped East End. The Discovery Walk, a hands-on, environmental educational program led by The Nature Conservancy's Richard Gideon, gives students the chance to observe up-close the "wild" side of St. Croix as it looked before settlers and development arrived. Mr. Gideon begins each walk through the conservancy's Jack and Isaac Bays Preserve by tapping into each student's natural curiosity, critical thinking skills and a little bit of their sweat. In their four-hour trip to the preserve, the kids are encouraged to collect 'found objects' for

further study and to seek answers to questions at the on-site shelter and back at school. On this particular walk, students came back to the shelter with feathers, rocks, and plant and animal specimens. Mr. Gideon, the conservancy's land steward, says he uses these initial examinations of natural 'found objects' to introduce larger concepts such as watershed management, biodiversity, preservation versus conservation and endangered species.

"Like any discovery, these trips are only the beginning of the process. Students use it as a starting point for more in-depth learning," says Mr. Gideon. Emphasizing this point, Mr. Gideon followed up on the walk by spending a few hours at St. Mary's working with the students to examine the role of their



Students work to identify a "found

objects in larger systems. "By tapping into students' curiosity and letting them form the questions, we are not only giving them information, but also nurturing their ability to examine the world around them," said Gideon.

For more information on Discovery Walks for your class or group, call:

Mr. Richard Gideon
The Nature Conservancy
(340)773-5575

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.

What's The Scoop? It's No Mystery!

Elizabeth Ban, of UVI's Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service (VIMAS) has started a regular column, "Sea Scoop!" in the Virgin Island Source, an online newspaper. The column answers people's questions about the marine environment in an accessible, easy-to-understand manner. The column also includes a section called "Today's Tip" and links to related online resources.

Ms. Ban, in addition to writing the monthly column, has a

"Mystery Creature" web contest where people try to identify some unusual marine creature. She says she enjoys her small corner of the internet. "Everyone in the office loves helping me with the column or guessing what the creature is. It's a lot of fun."

To read "Sea Scoop!", go to: <http://sts.onepaper.com> and click the "Environment" link.

To see this month's "Mystery Creature", go to: http://rps.uvi.edu/VIMAS/mystery_creature.htm



This month's Sea Scoop! column explores the world of bioluminescent marine creatures like this comb jelly.

Upcoming Events

- ◇ June 5:
World Environment Day
- ◇ July 11— August 5:
Summer Workshops,
Whim Museum

Landmarks Society Sweetens St. Croix with Chocolate Workshops

The St. Croix Landmarks Society's Education Outreach Program, with the sponsorship of the Prosser ICC Foundation, Inc., is presenting several half-day parent/child Chocolate Workshops at the Whim Museum on St. Croix. In the workshops, participants learn about the ecology of cacao trees and watch a short video about cacao production in Venezuela. Real cacao seeds are passed out, and participants try to peel them. Children work with parents to grind up cacao seeds using a variety of implements, then use an Aztec recipe to make, and sample, the drink first offered to Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez by Aztec king Montezuma. This drink includes annatto, ancho chili peppers, and vanilla in addition to cocoa powder and water.

Cortez took cacao seeds back to the Spanish court in 1519, and for the next 100 years, only the Spanish knew how to prepare chocolate. Since then, though, chocolate has literally taken the world by storm, with thousands of different recipes and uses from bonbons to hot cocoa.

In the workshop, participants make a chocolate drink the Spanish way, with cinnamon and sugar. Groups of parents and kids then prepare their own chocolate fudge to snack on. The workshop concludes with participants melting chocolate and pouring it into molds, chilling the molds, and popping out the finished chocolates to take home. Workshops are given on Saturday mornings from 9:00 am until noon. The cost is \$5 per person.

Fun Chocolate Facts

The cacao tree bears its flowers, and its seed pods, on the trunk and main branches of the tree, a characteristic known as *cauliflory*.

Cacao flowers are pollinated by tiny flies called midges that live in the leaf litter underneath cacao trees.

A cacao pod is roughly the size of a pineapple. Each pod contains between 30 to 50 cacao seeds.

It takes about 12 cacao seeds to make 1 ounce of dark chocolate, and about 4 seeds to make 1 ounce of milk chocolate.

Cacao seeds are bitter because they contain the chemicals caffeine and theobromine.

Cacao trees cannot grow well in the sunshine. Cacao plantations usually plant cacao trees between taller trees called *mother of cocoa*. The mother of cocoa trees provide the shade needed by the cacao trees to grow and reproduce.

The average American eats about 12 pounds of chocolate each year. Over the course of a year, Americans spend about \$13 billion on chocolate products! Not to be outdone, an average Swiss eats a staggering 22 pounds of chocolate annually, more than any other country on the planet!



Life doesn't get much sweeter than this!

Mexicans use chocolate mostly as a drink and a spice. They use chocolate to make a sauce called *mole*. Mexicans do not eat much chocolate as a candy.

Europeans consume a lot of chocolate too. Of the 16 leading chocolate-consuming nations of the world, 15 are in Europe, with Switzerland leading the pack. At number 9, the U.S. is the only non-European country in the top 16.

Asians don't eat much chocolate. The Chinese eat about 1 bar of chocolate for every 1,000 chocolate bars eaten in England.

Although more than half of the world's cacao is grown in Africa, most of it is exported. African nations are among the lowest chocolate consumers in the world.

For more information on chocolate workshops, please contact:

Marilyn Chakroff
St. Croix Landmarks Society
(340) 772-0598

Students Follow the Trail to Adventure

On March 2, The Evelyn Williams Eco-Gecko Environmental Club celebrated the opening of the Estate Adventure Nature Trail on St. Croix with a ribbon cutting followed by an exciting, fun-filled hike led by UVI's Olasee Davis, the well-known ecologist and nature writer.

Fifth grader Chedelle Antoine said the trip was both fun and exciting because we "got to exercise, learn about tropical plants and see our tropical environment. I learned about the fruit bat. I like the plaques along the trail that tell you about the animals, plants and trees. I learned the fruit bat is 'nocturnal', which means it

only comes out at night." Jacquelyn Deport liked learning about grey nickers. Grey nickers, also called "burning stones", heat up when rubbed together and are used to play the African game Wari.

The club was organized in 2004 by library media specialist Ms. Rosilie Allaire and Ms. Dee Osinski of the VI Waste Management Authority. This year, 15 4th-6th grade students have been meeting weekly every Wednesday at 12:30pm to learn about environmental and cultural issues around the Virgin Islands, and to participate in environmental activities.



Evelyn Williams students begin their trip down the Estate Adventure Nature Trail on St. Croix..

To start an environmental club in your school please contact:

Ms. Dee Osinski
VI Waste Management Authority
(340) 773-4489

Have A Good Story or Picture? Share It Here At Straight from the Vine

Have a great story from a beach cleanup? Or maybe a poem about sea turtles? What about a great photo of one of our incomparable sunsets? Maybe you would like to publicize an upcoming event? If so, why not share it for all to read right here in *Straight from the Vine*?

The Virgin Islands Network of Environmental Educators (VINE) is looking for original stories, news releases, lesson plans, art, and photos from all around the Virgin Islands. The environmental and cultural newsletter is published seasonally both on St. Croix and St. Thomas. If you have a story or artistic piece to share,

please send it along to:

Liam Carr
University of the Virgin Islands
RR1 Box 10,000
Kingshill, VI 00850-9781
(340) 692-4144
(340) 692-4047 (fax)
lcarr@uvi.edu

Be certain to include contact information and return address. VINE will make every attempt to return all submissions. VINE maintains editorial oversight for grammar and overall clarity.



Students from St. Croix helped to make UVI's AgriFest tent a rousing success with games like 'MPA Fishing Derby'. Have a story to share? Let all the Virgin Islands read it here in Straight from the Vine.

St. Thomas Gives EPA and 'Pro-Enviro Fair' A Warm Island Welcome

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Virgin Islands Office celebrated Earth Month 2005, island-style, with a series of fun public events highlighting environmental issues and education on St. Thomas. In addition to the usual Earth Day fare focused on involving school children and community groups, this year also saw the EPA hosting the first 'Pro-Enviro Fair', a symposium bringing together the territory's environmental professionals and schoolchildren to discuss solutions to the island's various environmental concerns through educational initiatives and local action.

The Pro-Enviro Fair was held at the Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School on Earth Day, April 22. The theme for this year's celebration was "Sustainable Green Building and Living Practices" with a focus in the Virgin Islands on "Water Conservation and Energy Efficiency". These issues carry a critical, and ever increasing significance to the communities' daily experience, quality of life, and the territory's economy. The EPA stated their goal in convening this mini-fair was "to educate, inform and excite our islands' youth and community to the importance of sustaining a healthy island environment." Approximately 250 students participated in the fair from Bertha C. Boschulte and Adedlita Cancryn Junior High School.

There were a variety of presenters from governmental and non-governmental organizations, including The Department of Planning and Natural Resources, The University of the Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Services, Friends of the National Park, and the V.I. Water and Power Authority. The presentations ranged from displays, hands on activities and speakers, to information packets that teachers and parents could keep.

From all accounts and feedback received, the kick-off of EPA's 1st Pro-Enviro Fair was a huge success. The agency plans to make this event an annual one, creating a forum for highlighting environmental and natural resource management issues of interest to the Virgin Islands experience, to celebrate the people and measured progress achieved in those areas, and to empower the youth to become good stewards of an environmentally sound Virgin Islands.

For More Information on Pro-Enviro Fair, Earth Day materials, and other EPA programs in the Virgin Islands, please contact:

Keshema Abramsen
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
(340) 714-2233

Did you know that Earth Day has a connection to St. Croix? St. Croix, Wisconsin, that is. In 1963, at the urging of Wisconsin senator Gaylord Nelson, President Kennedy undertook a largely ignored five-day, eleven-state "National Tour of Conservation". Six years later, inspired by the anti-war protests known as "teach-ins", Senator Nelson found the right vehicle to bring environmental issues to the nation's conscience—grassroots educational demonstrations. His office released a statement that in the spring of 1970, there would be a nation-wide teach-in on behalf of the environment. That little teach-in became one of the great environmental moments of the 20th century, with nearly 20 million volunteers around the country participating that first spring. Within months, Congress passed the Clean Air Act and, in 1972, the Clean Water Act. The Environmental Movement was born. Thanks in large part to the ideas and courage of a lone senator from outside St. Croix, Wisconsin, who understood the importance of protecting the environment long before it became a national issue.

RC&D Supplements Classroom Texts with Fun, Informative Materials

The Virgin Islands Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc. (VI RC&D) is again offering environmental education materials to students, teachers, and parents in the Virgin Islands. This year's offerings deal with conservation of soils, water, plants and animals. For the past four years, VI RC&D has endeavored to provide environmental education materials and information to both public and private schools throughout the territory. These publications are meant to supplement classroom instructions.

The information is geared towards students from grades 2-8, but can be easily modified to suit other grade levels. Materials currently available include the following:

- The Living Ocean • Water Cycle Poster • Water: A Splash in Class • Search for Soil • It All Starts with Soil • Soil Story • Wonders of the Soil • Habitat Heroes • Habitat Network • How to Plant A Tree • Trees and Me • Tree Lab • Earth's Bright Future • People and Places: Neighbors with Nature • Wendy Water Coloring Book • Sammy Soil Coloring Book

For more information on VI RC&D programs or to pick up any of the materials listed above, please contact:

Julie Wright
VI RC&D
5030 Anchor Way Suite 2
Gallows Bay, Christiansted, VI 00820
(340) 692-9632
Email: vircd@usvircd.org

VI Energy Office to Unveil New Look, Website This Summer

After discussing the weather, especially during hurricane season, one of the most familiar and popular topics of conversation in the Virgin Islands is the cost of electricity. While it's well-known that the U.S. Virgin Islands are home to some of the highest electricity rates in the Caribbean, owing to the high cost of oil needed for the oil-fired power plants at Water and Power Authority (WAPA), very few Virgin Islanders realize that they are not powerless to accepting high electricity bills. Thankfully, there is The Virgin Islands Energy Office (VIEO), a division of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources. VIEO is at the frontline of educating energy consumers throughout the territory about energy conservation, alternative and renewable energy sources, and, most importantly to Virgin Islanders, lowering their WAPA bills through wise consumption of electricity.

Through The Experience Energy program, VIEO champions energy efficiency and renewable energy technology. The program, which highlights the realm of possibilities of solar and wind power, has been received warm receptions at school and community events throughout the islands. VIEO's Leila Muller says, "We want to modify the every-day energy behaviors of our audience so that they become energy-wise consumers."

Additionally, VIEO is preparing to unveil a new-look website. The website, which will be online on June 1, is full of information packets, energy conservation tips, fun activities, and useful facts for the energy-conscious consumer.

For more information on VIEO's various programs and educational materials, please contact:

Leila Muller
Virgin Islands Energy Office
(340) 772-2616

Or visit their new website at:
<http://www.vienergy.org>

Did you know that leaving one 100-Watt bulb on in your house while you're gone can end up costing nearly \$100 in unneeded electric bills? Leaving one light on in your house while you sleep or while you're at school or work eats up over 300 Kilowatt-hours (kWh) each year. If you leave on your air conditioner, you waste over 13,000 kWh. In a year, that's nearly \$3000 in extra electric bills. Why not save some energy and buy a \$20 timer switch instead?

Seeking the Next Jacques Cousteau, VIMAS Turns to Virgin Islanders

In response to a territory-wide demand to find more Virgin Island students to consider marine careers, The Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service (VIMAS) has begun a series of classroom presentations highlighting the exciting world of working above and below the sea.

"There is a natural attraction to working on the sea here in the Virgin Islands," says VIMAS' Liam Carr. "Yet few students know that there are number of options aside of becoming a fisherman. What we want to do is get excitement growing here in the territory to address the new generation of marine issues that we all are facing. We have a strong tourist industry, vital commercial and recreational

fisheries, and a whole host of issues which threaten their continued growth and prosperity. It's absolutely vital for the Virgin Islands community to identify and develop some of their own to help tackle these issues and lead the next wave of economic growth and environmental stewardship. That's where VIMAS comes in."

In addition to school classroom and Career Day presentations, VIMAS has a number of bulletins available highlighting marine careers. "It's no longer just marine biology," Carr joked. Turning serious, he added, "Marine organisms and their unique chemical compounds lead to novel medical and pharmaceuti-

cal advances. Oil and mineral companies have turned their attention to off-shore drilling and mining. The U.S. Navy and Coast Guard both have increased roles in our nation's defense. There's a tremendous diversity in the field. And there's a need here in the Virgin Islands for people with these skills, talents, and energies. Lawyers, scientists, resort managers, business owners, dive masters, you name it. We have a great career for you."

For more information on marine careers, call:
Liam Carr
UVI – VIMAS
(340) 692-4144

Or visit their website at:
<http://rps.uvi.edu/VIMAS/careers.htm>