

Shark and Ray Eco Weekend - NC

In recent decades global shark and ray populations have [declined extensively](#) due to a myriad of factors including overfishing, habitat loss and decreasing prey availability. Arguably the most influential of these factors, certainly with respect to sharks, has been overfishing to supply a high demand Asian market for shark fins. Critically, Trinidad and Tobago is recognised as having been one of the leading suppliers of shark fins to Asia, reflected in the decline of regional shark populations.



It is recognised that the value of charismatic species such as sharks and manta rays over the course of a full lifetime far exceeds

their one time value in a market, leading to their protection in a number of countries, such as [sharks in Palau](#) and [manta rays in Indonesia](#). In Trinidad and Tobago, where tourism is an important part of the economy, the decline of these species represents a serious concern for communities, especially when their inherent and ecosystem value are also considered. Community engagement and resource pride are essential components in developing conservation management, rendering the awareness of the importance of such species critical.

ERIC recently hosted a shark and ray weekend during which divers and snorkelers, from both Trinidad and overseas, discussed shark and ray biology



and ecology, threats and conservation followed by a series of dives to record sightings of sharks and rays as we implement a database as part of a planned long term population study. Dive sites were Landslide, Sanka Rock and Turpin's Reef on Saturday, and Englishman's Bay and Sister's Rocks on Sunday. Two nurse sharks were recorded, three stingrays and two electric rays.



Caribbean Coral Bleaching - LF

Climate change, El Niño, high sea temperatures, coral bleaching - all some of the environmental phenomena that have recently been making global headlines.

Earlier this month the [Nature Conservancy](#) hosted a live webinar to discuss the current global coral bleaching event, attended by ERIC staff, Kimron and Weldon of North East Sea Turtles (NEST) and Rupert and Susan of Speyside Eco Marine Park Rangers (SEMPR). "[Preparing for Coral Bleaching: Outlook and Lessons in Monitoring and Response](#)" presented the background to the phenomenon, the trends observed to date, and future predictions.

Since the onset of [El Niño conditions](#) in mid-2014 higher than average sea surface temperatures have been recorded throughout the Florida Keys, extending into the Greater Antilles by the second half of 2015. Correspondingly coral bleaching has been observed in these areas.

While imminent seasonal changes should provide some respite from these conditions and the chance for coral recovery, forecasts are for El Niño



conditions to intensify in the southern hemisphere.

As the current conditions [significantly eclipse](#) the strongest recorded El Niño event of 1997-1998 the potential repercussions for the Southern Caribbean are serious, with temperature models pointing to a high level of bleaching risk and potential mortality in the Dutch Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago over the next four months.

Our on-going [Reef Check](#) monitoring programme records both incidence and severity of bleaching, while our community trainees provide a means of information dissemination in its event. While no spike in bleaching has been observed thus far, there is concern should thermal stress persist. Can anything be done to mitigate against bleaching, and what should be the response in its event? In our next issue we will present the options moving forward.



Hawksbill Turtle species profile - NC

[IUCN Red List](#) status - Critically Endangered

Scientific name - *Eretmochelys imbricata*

The hawksbill turtle is found throughout the tropical waters of the world, with some incidence in subtropical regions. It feeds primarily on sponges, and in some areas also on soft corals and algae, thereby contributing to coral reef health by controlling the amount of competition with reef-building hard corals to facilitate their growth.



Threats to hawksbill turtles include hunting for the shell trade and for meat consumption, nesting and foraging habitat loss and destruction, egg collection and marine debris.

Extensive population decline throughout its range has resulted in its classification as [Critically Endangered](#), with a growing number of community groups becoming active in turtle protection. In the Charlotteville area there remains one of the most important hawksbill rookeries in the Caribbean.



Upcoming Eco Weekends



The monthly ERIC Eco Weekends are a great opportunity to spend time with our science and dive teams in beautiful Charlotteville, exploring a particular topic of interest and expanding your knowledge. With discussion sessions, snorkels and dives they have proven popular so far and we hope this will continue.

Some dates for your diary:

19th and 20th December – Reef Check EcoDiver

16th and 17th January – Lionfish in Tobago

20th and 21st February – Sex and Mimicry

For more information or to book a weekend, please email ericexpeditions@eric-tobago.org.



Working with ERIC – Susan Suchit

Susan is one of our community trainees, as well as a member of the community based Speyside Eco Marine Park Rangers. Since August 2014 she has completed PADI Open Water dive training with ERIC and achieved certification as a Reef Check EcoDiver. Susan lives in Speyside.

ERIC: Why did you become involved [with ERIC] in the first place?

Susan: “The opportunity to make a difference in the environment. After ERIC spoke to me about their work, I was anxious to go underwater and see what [ERIC] saw.”



ERIC: What has been your experience so far?

Susan: “The experience has been Informative and educational. It was amazing to see how everything seen underwater came together to create something so beautiful.”

ERIC: What message would you give to people about their environment?

Susan: “Cherish what they have. Pay attention to the little things.”

ERIC: Congratulations on the birth of your beautiful baby girl!



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