ERIC collaborates with Global FinPrint for sharks and rays - NC

In recent decades global shark and ray populations have declined extensively, with an estimated 100 million sharks killed per year to supply the high demand Asian market for shark fins. Faced with fishing pressure greatly in excess of sustainable levels it is inevitable that some of the most highly sought species of shark, such as the great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*, have declined to the point of becoming endangered, as classified by the [IUCN Red List](https://www.iucnredlist.org/). Indeed in 2013 the great hammerhead was one of five species of shark and all species of manta ray added to Appendix II of [CITES](https://www.cites.org/), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Whilst inclusion in international conventions such as CITES affords a degree of protection to sharks, the recognition that their value over the course of a full lifetime far exceeds their one time value in a market has prompted a number of countries to declare all or part of their territorial waters as shark sanctuaries. These countries have typically been small island states where tourism is an important part of the economy and the presence of sharks and rays is closely linked to healthy and resilient reefs, such as Palau. Therefore the continued decline of these species would represent a serious concern for communities, especially when their inherent and ecosystem value are also considered.

As recognition of the value of sharks and rays grows there continues to be a corresponding increase in efforts to develop more effective conservation management strategies for these species. [Global FinPrint](https://www.globalfinprint.org/) is the first multi-institutional attempt to assess global populations of reef-associated sharks and rays, and January 2016 is the beginning of a long-term collaboration between ERIC and Global FinPrint to assess and monitor shark and ray populations in Tobago. Deploying Baited Remote Underwater Videos (BRUVs) we will be collecting on-going data on population dynamics for incorporation into the global dataset, data that are integral to the facilitation and development of increasingly effective conservation management on national, regional and global scales. Visit our Facebook page for BRUV observations, and our website for project news.

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**Tobago coral bleaching outlook and response system - LF**

In the last issue of Ridge Village Ocean, we looked at the onset of El Nino and the outlook for coral bleaching in the Caribbean.

While the Equatorial Pacific region is currently experiencing significant thermal stress, the Caribbean has so far been more fortunate with models indicating low bleaching probability over the next few months. Nevertheless, continued vigilance is required as long as El Nino conditions persist.

So what can be done in the event of mass coral bleaching in Tobago? Following the bleaching event in 2010, collaborations between international and local institutions resulted in the development of a Coral Bleaching Response Plan for Tobago, including an early warning system and communication plan.
Citizen scientists, recreationists and other stakeholders are vital for reporting sightings of widespread coral bleaching. Once assessed, such an event could trigger the response plan in which an ongoing monitoring programme would be undertaken by scientists and volunteers. Reports can be made to the Institute of Marine Affairs in Trinidad and Tobago. NOAA’s Coral Reef Early Warning Systems stations provide real-time meteorological and water quality data measurements, uploaded and incorporated into an accessible global database. This augments the response plan by detecting potential stressful conditions that should be closely watched.

Unfortunately little can be done to prevent coral bleaching due to thermal stress. Best practice suggests that managing local stressors on coral reefs, such as overfishing and terrestrial run-off, can help build resilience and aid post-impact recovery in corals. ERIC and our team of community trainees will continue to monitor for bleaching incidence in Northeast Tobago under our Reef Check programme.

ERIC supports local organic garden - NC

As part of our commitment to supporting local sustainable tourism initiatives, we have worked with Lucille Whittaker in Charlotteville to develop a unique half day visit to the organic garden project she runs with Charlotteville children.

With spectacular views over Man o’ War Bay and delicious fruit and vegetables, the outing is perfectly suited for families seeking cultural exchange and the chance to support Lucille and the children in this exciting project.

Watch highlights from the garden on our Youtube channel.

Working with ERIC – Rupert McKenna

Rupert is one of our community trainees, as well as a member of the community based Speyside Eco Marine Park Rangers. A PADI Advanced Open Water Diver, Rupert achieved certification as a Reef Check EcoDiver with ERIC and has completed a number of surveys for our reef monitoring programme. He lives in Speyside.

ERIC: Why did you become involved [with ERIC] in the first place?
Rupert: “A common interest in the environment. I saw a sense of professionalism from ERIC and that [they] had the knowledge and capacity to assist SEMPR’s development and help the community.”

ERIC: What has been your experience so far?
Rupert: “I had a very good experience with Reef Check surveys. Being involved with ERIC was like a reintroduction to being involved in the marine environment.”

ERIC: What message would you give to people about their environment?
Rupert: “To protect and preserve it for future generations and ensure the enforcement of environmental laws.”

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