



REEF-in-Brief

*The e-Newsletter of the
Reef Environmental Education Foundation*

January 2006

1. **Welcome** - Happy New Year from REEF! We hope that your 2006 has gotten off to a great start. This year, we are looking forward to another exciting chapter in REEF's growing history. As you probably know, REEF boasts the largest living fish population database in the world. 2006 will bring new challenges, projects and milestones for this premier marine conservation citizen science program.

REEF's Fish Survey Project database has just recently passed the 90,000 individual survey mark thanks to the hard work of thousands of members like you. This is a remarkable milestone and we are poised to reach another, as we expect to break 100,000 surveys later in 2006! Another tremendous milestone occurred recently with Bonaire reaching 10,000 surveys at that location alone - joining the Florida Keys as the only other location to have achieved that impressive level of fish population data and individual participation. Congratulations to our dedicated group of volunteers and REEF Field Stations in Bonaire that have made this tremendous mark possible!

REEF is once again primed for another fantastic year doing what we do best - delivering effective and engaging marine conservation science through active participation of our member/volunteers. Look out for the 15th anniversary of the Great Annual Fish Count, another great year of Field Surveys in '06, and a lot more! Best - Bryan Dias, REEF Director of Outreach and Education

2. **REEF's 2006 Field Survey Schedule** - "Great to dive with others who share my interests", "I can't believe how much I learned", "I enjoy my dives so much more now that I know what I am looking at" - these are typical comments from our members who have traveled with REEF on a Field Survey. This year's trip schedule is full of exciting destinations and is sure to have something for everyone. A few highlights from are:

Barkley Sound, BC - on the rugged Pacific side of Vancouver Island, this area is home to some of the best that cold water diving has to offer. This project includes seminars on both fish and invertebrates and will be based from the Rendezvous Dive Lodge (October 3-8).

Monterey Bay, CA - spectacular above and below the water, this annual REEF trip features diving with Cypress Charters to the dramatic pinnacles and reefs of the Carmel coast and other sites within the local National Marine Sanctuary. It's a perfect trip to for non-diving companions, and includes lodging options at the luxurious Monterey Plaza Hotel and a behind the scenes tour of the famous Monterey Bay Aquarium (May 2-7).

Long Island, Bahamas - this all-inclusive trip features great diving, lots of REEF

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Contribute Now

Please consider supporting REEF and the critical work we do by donating generously this holiday season.



REEF's [2006 Field Survey Schedule](#) offers a terrific opportunity to take a dive vacation that counts (fish!) Just like these happy folks on REEF's Discovery Trip to the Bahamas led by Paul

Fish ID, and a bit of relaxation at the Stella Maris Resort. Divers will visit the numerous nearby cays and Exuma Bank and enjoy the clear, warm waters of the Bahamas (June 10-17).

We hope you can join us on one of these or our other trips. Sign up now, spaces are limited. For more information, visit <http://www.reef.org/fieldsurv/index.htm>

our in the Bahamas, led by Paul Humann.

3. **REEF Field Station of the Month** - REEF is pleased to announce that the [Southern Cross Club of Little Cayman](#) is REEF's Field Station of the Month (FSOM.) Southern Cross Club (SCC) has been a long-time supporter of REEF hosting a lot of members and generating a lot of surveys. One of the great things they do each year is support our Grouper Moon Project by providing discounted lodging and free dive boat time. We couldn't carry out this critical project without them.

The Southern Cross Club not only supports REEF, but also works to educate and prevent against overfishing by working with the National Environmental Trust's Ocean Legacy Campaign. They run a top flight resort and were voted best Caribbean Dive Resort in 2001 and the 3rd Best Dive Resort Worldwide in 2002 by Scuba Diving Magazine.

"Southern Cross Club is proud to partner with REEF to protect our marine environment here on Little Cayman. REEF's commitment to marine conservation ensures a global voice that educates others to the wonders of Little Cayman's marine life and the need for continued research." Said Peter Hillenbrand of SCC.

If you are planning a trip to the least developed of the Caymans and the certainly beautiful Little Cayman, check out Southern Cross Club. Tell them that REEF sent you and they will be sure to show you a great time and make sure you fish counts are terrific!

Visit Southern Cross Club at: <http://southerncrossclub.com/>



REEF's Field Station of the Month (FSOM) is the Southern Cross Club on Little Cayman. They are great supporters of REEF and play host to our Grouper Moon Project each year.

4. **Grouper Moon Project Rises Again** - Love is in the air, and not just because Valentine's Day is coming up. Winter full moons are a cue to Nassau grouper (and many other fish species) that it's time to get together and reproduce. This year marks the fifth year of REEF's Grouper Moon Project, a collaboration with the Cayman Islands Department of the Environment (CIDOE) to better understand and protect one of the last remaining mass spawning aggregations of Nassau grouper in the Caribbean.

The project includes visual documentation of the aggregation as well as acoustic tracking, a component that was introduced last year with support from NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program. A network of "listening" hydrophones was deployed around the island and fifty Nassau grouper were tagged with acoustic "pingers". Over the last year, REEF researcher Brice Semmens and CIDOE staff have been tracking the movements of these fish.

The 2006 field project is currently underway. A team of REEF volunteers just completed an assessment of the January aggregation (fish generally show up at the aggregation site around the full moon and stay for about 10 days). While no spawning was observed, an estimated 1,500 fish were documented as well as behavior and colorations. Forty-one of the 50 tagged fish were heard on the aggregation site. REEF staff and volunteers will be returning to Little Cayman for February's full moon when



"the big event" is expected.

REEF extends special thanks to the [Southern Cross Club](#) and the [Little Cayman Beach Resort](#) for their continued logistical support of the Grouper Moon Project.

To find out more about the Grouper Moon Project visit these websites:

<http://www.reef.org/data/groupermoon.html>

<http://students.washington.edu/semmens/groupermoon/>

5. **Joe's REEF Fish ID Survey Tip of the Month** - Q: When is a pencil more than a pencil? A: When you use a wet pencil to bubble in a scanform. Just a quick survey tip from the database gatekeeper. Often, we receive surveys filled out using wet survey pencils that were used during the dive. Doing so can turn your erasable penciling into an indelible marking on the scanform.

What occurs is that when you try to erase, enough graphite is left behind to score a fish sighting you meant to erase and didn't intend to include. This causes an error I'm unlikely to catch so please have a dry, non-survey pencil on hand to fill in scanforms. Keep up the great work everybody and don't forget about our online data entry for Tropical Western Atlantic (TWA) surveys where you don't even need a pencil! - Joe Cavanaugh, REEF Field Operations Coordinator

Want to use online data entry for TWA surveys? Go here:

<http://www.reef.org/dataentry/login.php>

For more survey tips, please see our REEF Fish ID Survey Tutorial in both English and Spanish!

REEF Fish Survey Project Tutorial (English) -

http://www.reef.org/education/REEF_tutorial_eng

Cursillo de Censo de Peces de REEF (Spanish) -

http://www.reef.org/education/REEF_tutorial_esp

6. **REEF Events** - Here are a couple great events to mark in your '06 calendar:

- **Deep Blue Lodge in Utila, Bay Islands, Honduras** - a REEF Field Station - is offering their annual Utila Whale Shark Research Project from March 25th to April 22nd, 2006. Be a part of one of the most exciting events in the Caribbean. See these gentle giants firsthand in the water and help to build our growing knowledge of them. To learn more, visit their websites at www.DeepBlueUtila.com and www.UtilaWhaleSharkResearch.com.
- **REEF will have a booth at Fort Lauderdale's premier dive and adventure sport show, Ocean Fest.** This event coincides with Earth Day and will take place over the weekend of April 21st-23rd. REEF staff, interns, and volunteers will be on hand to talk about what we do and we'll have various things available such as t-shirts and marine life guidebooks. We'll also be giving an introduction to REEF Fish Identification. For more information, a complete schedule of seminars, and everything else you need to know, please visit their website at <http://www.oceanfest.com>. We hope to see you there!

One of the 50 acoustically tagged Nassau grouper - part of REEF's Grouper Moon Project. Photo by: Scott Heppell.



"Are you using a dry pencil for your scanform?" REEF members Liz Foote and Donna Brown on a recent survey in Hawaii go over their surveys.



See You Next Month!

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